Scorn not the Sonnet¹

William Wordsworth
written 1827; published 1827

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honors; with this key
Shakespear unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch’s wound;

5  A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camoëns soothed an exile’s grief;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned

10  His Visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faëryland
To struggle through dark ways; and, when, a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet; when he blew
Soul-animating strains – alas, too few!

Works Cited


¹In this record of his abiding devotion to the form and its tradition, Wordsworth combats the tendency to regard sonnet-writing as a less mature endeavor than epic poetry or tragic drama; in Wordsworth’s day, many women poets were writing sonnets, with the effect of making sonnet-writing seem a “feminine” poetry, as opposed to “masculine” epic. He cites a range of major Renaissance poets who composed sonnets and sonnet sequences.