Which by-and-by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

YOUR TURN

1. In the first quatrain (the first four lines) to what "time of year" does Shakespeare compare himself? In the second quatrain (lines 5–8) to what does he compare himself? In the third? If the sequence of the three quatrains were reversed, what would be gained or lost?
2. In line 8, what is "Death's second self"? What implications do you perceive in "seals up all in rest," as opposed, for instance, to "brings most welcome rest"?
3. In line 13, exactly what is "This"?
4. In line 14, suppose in place of "To love that well which thou must leave ere long," Shakespeare had written "To love me well whom thou must leave ere long." What, if anything, would have been gained or lost?
5. What is your personal response to this sonnet? Do you feel that its lessons apply to you? Please explain.
6. Did you find this sonnet hard to understand when you read it for the first time? After you reread and studied it, did it become more difficult, or less so? Do you like to read difficult poems?

Sonnet 146

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,
My sinful earth° these rebel pow'rs that thee array,
Why doest thou pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost,° having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine° in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more.
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And death once dead, there's no more dying then.

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2 My sinful earth see the comment beneath the facsimile on page 677. **5 cost** expense. **11 Buy terms divine** buy ages of immortality.

POore ſoule the center of my ſinfull earth,
My ſinfull earth theſe rebbell powres that thee array
Why doſt thou pine within and ſuffer dearth?
Painting thy outward walls ſo coſtlie gay?
Why ſo large coſt hauing ſo ſhort a leaſe,
Doſt thou vpon thy fading manſion ſpend?
Shall wormes inheritors of this exceſſe,
Eate vp thy charge? is this thy bodies end?
Then ſoule liue thou vpon thy ſeruants loſſe,
And let that pine to aggrauat thy ſtore;
Buy tearmes diuine in ſelling houres of droſſe:
Within be fed, without be rich no more,
So ſhalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
And death once dead, ther's no more dying then.

Sonnet 146 as it appears in the first publication of Shakespeare's sonnets, 1609. Notice that the first line ends with the words "my sinful earth," and the second line begins with the same words. Virtually all readers agree that the printer mistakenly repeated the words. First of all, the line makes almost no sense; secondly, it has 12 syllables ("powres" is monosyllabic) where 10 syllables are normal. Among attractive suggested emendations—usually two syllables instead of the four of "My sinful earth"—are those that pick up imagery of conflict explicit in "rebbell powres," such as "Prey to," "Thrall to," "Foiled by," and "Vexed by," and emendations that pick up imagery of hunger explicit in "Eate" and "fed," such as "Feeding" and "Starved by." But there are plenty of other candidates, such as "Fooled by," "Rebuke these," and "Leagued with."

YOUR TURN

1. As we indicate in our comment on the facsimile of this poem, the first three words of the second line probably should be replaced with other words. What words would you suggest? (We give some of the most widely accepted suggestions, but feel free to offer your own.)
2. In what tone of voice would you speak the first line? The last line? Trace the speaker's shifts in emotion throughout the poem.
3. What is your personal response to this poem? Do you feel that its lessons apply to you? Do you find this sonnet more meaningful, or less meaningful, to you than Sonnet 73 (page 675)? Please explain.
4. Did you find this poem hard to understand when you read it for the first time? After you reread and studied it, did the poem become more difficult, or less so? Is this sonnet more difficult than Sonnet 73? What is the difference between a poem that is challenging, a poem that is difficult, and a poem that is obscure?

JOHN MILTON

John Milton (1608–1674) was born into a well-to-do family in London, where from childhood he was a student of languages, mastering at an early age Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and a number of modern languages. Instead of becoming a minister in the Anglican Church, he resolved to become a poet and spent five years at his family's country home, reading. His attacks against the monarchy secured him a position in Oliver Cromwell's Puritan government as Latin secretary for foreign affairs. He became totally blind, but he continued his work through secretaries, one of whom was Andrew Marvell, author of "To His Coy Mistress" (page 652). With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Milton was for a time confined but was later pardoned in the general amnesty. Until his death he continued to work on many subjects, including his greatest poem, the epic Paradise Lost.

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent [1655]

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide°
Lodged with me useless,° though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"
I fondly° ask; but Patience to prevent°
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

3 There is a pun in *talent*, relating Milton's literary talent to Christ's Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25.14 ff.), in which a servant is rebuked for not putting his talent (a unit of money) to use. **4 useless** a pun on *use*, i.e., usury, interest. **8 fondly** foolishly. **prevent** forestall.

YOUR TURN

1. This sonnet is sometimes called "On His Blindness," though Milton never gave it a title. Do you think this title gets toward the heart of the poem? Explain. If you were to give it a title, what would the title be?
2. Read the parable in Matthew 25.14–30, and then consider how close the parable is to Milton's life as Milton describes it in this poem.
3. Where is the turn? What characteristics are attributed to God after the turn?
4. Compare the tone of the first and the last sentences. How does the length of each of these sentences contribute to the tone?
5. Could you imagine someone saying, "This poem changed my life"? What kind of change in a person's life might this sonnet produce?

6. What is your own experience of blindness? Have you ever lost your eyesight? For a long or a short period? Do you know a blind person? What is the nature of your interaction with him or her?

X. J. KENNEDY

X. J. Kennedy was born in New Jersey in 1929. He has taught at Tufts University and is the author of many books of poems, books for children, and college textbooks.

Kennedy alludes (line 4) to Milton's Paradise Lost, *VII, 205–207: "Heaven opened wide / Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound / On golden hinges moving. . . ." For an account of the slaughter of the innocents (line 5), see Matthew 2.16. The Venerable Bede (675–735), in line 6, was an English theologian and historian.*

Nothing in Heaven Functions as It Ought [1965]

Nothing in Heaven functions as it ought:
Peter's bifocals, blindly sat on, crack;
His gates lurch wide with the cackle of a cock,
Not turn with a hush of gold as Milton had thought;
Gangs of the slaughtered innocents keep huffing
The nimbus off the Venerable Bede
Like that of an old dandelion gone to seed;
And the beatific choir keep breaking up, coughing.

But Hell, sleek Hell hath no freewheeling part:
None takes his own sweet time, none quickens pace.
Ask anyone, How come you here, poor heart?—
And he will slot a quarter through his face,
You'll hear an instant click, a tear will start
Imprinted with an abstract of his case.

YOUR TURN

In the octave Kennedy uses off-rhymes *(crack, cock; huffing, coughing)*, but in the sestet all the rhymes are exact. How do the rhymes help to convey the meaning? (Notice, too, that lines, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 all have more than the usual ten syllables. Again, why?)

BILLY COLLINS

For a bibliograpical note, see page 589.

The following sonnet uses the Petrarchan form of an octave and a sestet (see page 674). Petrarch is additionally present in the poem by the allusion in line 3 to "a little ship on love's storm-tossed seas," because Petrarch compared the hapless lover, denied the favor of his mistress, to a ship in a storm: The lover cannot guide his ship because the North Star is hidden (Petrarch's beloved Laura averts her eyes), and the sails of the ship are agitated by the lover's pitiful sighs. As you will see, Petrarch and Laura explicitly enter the poem in the last three lines.