

Armchair Art Tours: Dutch Golden Age | April 9 at 2 p.m. Eastern

Jan van Eyck (1390–1441)
Willem Kalf (1619–1693)
Pieter Claesz (1597–1660)
Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669)
Judith Leyster (1609–1660)
Carel Fabritius (1622-1654)
Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675)
Edmund Charles Tarbell (1862–1928)
Joseph DeCamp (1858–1923)

Book recommendations

Ernst van de Wetering. *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work*. Amsterdam University Press, 1997
Arthur K. Wheelock. *Vermeer and the Art of Painting*. Yale, 1995
Anita Albus. *The Art of Arts: Rediscovering Painting*. University of California Press, 2001
Dominic Smith, *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*, Picador, 2017

Online resources

[Young Rembrandt](#) (current exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

[Van Eyck. An Optical Revolution: The largest Jan van Eyck exhibition ever](#) (current exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent)

[Women Artists of the Dutch Golden Age](#) (recent exhibition at National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, DC)

[Slavery](#) (exhibition planned at the Rijksmuseum for spring 2021, addressing the colonial economies that in part made the wealth of the Golden Age possible)

[A Dutch Golden Age? That's Only Half the Story](#) (article in the New York Times)

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
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 death-bed, whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more
strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

This sonnet explores the young man's perception of the poet's decrepitude through a series of images of decay, concluding that this strengthens, or should strengthen, his love.

- 2 **yellow . . . few** The reversal of the steadily diminishing order – the reader expects 'or few, or none' – ensures that we focus on several states of the process of seasonal decay, which includes both the leafless trees of mid-winter and the partly stripped trees of mid-autumn, rather than simply on the period when the stripping of vegetation is complete. Since Shakespeare was bald, a visual analogy may be implied between an almost-leafless tree and the almost-hairless head, a process which may in a specific as well as a general sense be viewed *in me*.
- 3 **shake against** shiver in anticipation of (cf. the temporal use of *Against* in 63.1); shiver in response to
- 4 ***Bare ruined choirs** Primarily, the tree branches are imagined as those 'Quires and places where they sing' (*BCP*, Morning and Evening Prayer) which in summer were the haunts of songbirds; however, the phrase *Bare ruined choirs* also inevitably evokes visual recollections of chancels of abbeys left desolate by Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. Q's 'rn'wd' is one of several errors of reversal made by Compositor B in sigs E1^v – E4^v; cf. 'end' for *due* in 69.3; cf. also 'with' for *with*, 23.14, also the work of Compositor B, and 'stainteh' for *staineth*, 33.14, this time Compositor A. Here this is also a minim error, the MS having presumably read 'ruin'd' or 'rvin'd'.
- 5 **twilight** Shakespeare's only use of the word, whose relative unfamiliarity may be indicated by Q'd hyphenation
such day such a day; or such daylight, in the form of afterglow
- 8 **Death's second sleep** Sleep, rather than night, is commonly called 'the elder brother of death' (cf. Sidney, *OA*, 88, and Tilley, S526); but the metonymic transfer to night is easily made.
Seals . . . rest suggests both 'closes everything up in repose, as in a coffin which is "sealed"'; and 'closes all eyes', as in 'seel' – sew up the eyes of a falcon. The word *rest* hints at death as an end which is as much desired as feared.
- 10 **his youth** Since Elizabethan English lacked the genitive 'its', *his* should not automatically be constructed as personalizing *fire*; however, followed by *deathbed*, it does naturally suggest the dying embers of a human life.
- 12 'Eaten up by that which it ate up', cf. *tempus edax rerum, tuque, invidiosa vetustas*, Ovid, *Met.*, 15.234-6, a phrase which immediately follows an image of Helen looking at her wrinkled face in the mirror. The larger subject of *that* is presumably time, as in Ovid; the human body was brought to maturity (*nourished*) by the same temporal process which destroys it.
- 13 **which . . . strong** tonally ambivalent: = either declarative of the existing strength of the youth's love, or carrying a note of hope: 'which (will) make your love more strong'; or simply descriptive, 'yours must be a very strong love, to be capable of being bestowed on a transient object'
- 14 **To . . . well** to love that (love-object) fully, heartily; conceivably there is a play on 'Will', i.e. 'to love that man called William'.
leave picks up *leaves* from 1. 2, reapplying it as a verb, = 'be separated from'

Sonnet 74

But be contented when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.

When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee:
The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me:

So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead;
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be remembered.

The worth of that is that which it contains,
And that is this, and this with thee remains.

Revoking his appeal to the youth in 71 to forget the author of these sonnets, the poet implores him to retain the *better part* of him, which will survive in his verse after death.

- 1 **be contented** stress should fall strongly on *be*, since the implication is: 'despite what I said in my preceding sonnet about loving my ageing body, remain untroubled'.
- that fell arrest** the arrival of death, seen as an officer coming to apprehend a criminal; *fell* = fierce, terrible, as in 'one fell swoop', *Mac* 4.3.219.
- 2 **Without all bail** without any possibility of release from prison
- 3 **in . . . interest** some right of possession or continued residence in the line of verse which you read: for *interest* cf. 'where life hath no more interest but to breathe', *AYL* 5.1.8. Though *line* might also suggest the thread of human life spun by the Fates, or the *line* of offspring, neither seems applicable here.
- 5 **reviewest** survey, or resurvey
review see once more
- 6 **very part** true portion: cf. 'thou art all the better part of me', 39.2.
- 7 **The earth . . . earth** 'We there fore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust', The Order for the Burial of the Dead, *BCP*, 310.
- 9-11 The three metaphorical phrases *the dregs*, *The prey*, and *The coward conquest* all describe *my body being dead*.
- 9 **the . . . life** literalizes *spirit* in the previous line, treating death as a process of distillation in which the physical body is left behind as *dregs*
- 11 A much discussed line: momentarily it may seem that the poet anticipates self-slaughter, but it is more likely that the *wretch* whose sharp implement has taken possession of the speaker's body is personified death, seen in 11. 1-2 as a relentless officer carrying the dead man to judgement, and now as a ruthless assassin. However, the tone is confusing, both because it is not clear whether coward applies chiefly to the terror of the dying man or to the 'cowardly' attack made on him, and because elsewhere Shakespeare often uses *wretch* in terms of pity or tenderness; cf., e.g., *VA* 680, *Oth* 3.3.90, *KL* 3.4.28.
- 12 **remembered** remembered: = (a) recollected; (b) brought back to life, with the bodily 'members' put together again
- 13-14 The distinction between *that* (body due to be destroyed by death) and *this* (poem that you are reading) is developed from 11. 1 and 5, and here, because of the threefold repetition of *that* and twofold repetition of *this*, produces an effect of quickfire quibbling, with *this* ultimately cracked open to reveal its underlying relationship with *thee*.

The Prodigal Son Luke 15:11-32 (KJV)

¹¹ And he said, A certain man had two sons:

¹² And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

¹³ And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

¹⁴ And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

¹⁵ And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

¹⁶ And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

¹⁷ And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

¹⁹ And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

²⁰ And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

²¹ And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

²² But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

²³ And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

²⁵ Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

²⁶ And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

²⁷ And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

²⁸ And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

²⁹ And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

³⁰ But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

³¹ And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

³² It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

[King James Version](#) (KJV)

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