

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

1609

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed.
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st°
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

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possess 10

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Describe the shift in tone and subject matter that begins in line 9.
2. Why is the speaker's loved one more lovely than a summer's day? What qualities does he admire in the loved one?
3. What does the couplet say about the relation between art and love?
4. Which syllables are stressed in the final line? How do these syllables relate to the line's meaning?

Sonnets have been the vehicles for all kinds of subjects, including love, death, politics, and cosmic questions. Although most sonnets tend to treat their subjects seriously, this fixed form does not mean a fixed expression; humor is also possible in it. Compare this next Shakespearean sonnet with "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" They are, finally, both love poems, but their tones are markedly different.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun

1609

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
 I have seen roses damasked red and white,
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
 And in some perfumes is there more delight
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

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Millay/I will put Chaos into fourteen lines

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
 I grant I never saw a goddess go:
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
 And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
 As any she,° belied with false compare.

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lady

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What does "mistress" mean in this sonnet? Write a description of this particular mistress based on the images used in the sonnet.
2. What sort of person is the speaker? Does he truly love the woman he describes?
3. In what sense are this sonnet and "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" about poetry as well as love?

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY (1892–1950)

*I will put Chaos into
fourteen lines*

1954

I will put Chaos into fourteen lines
 And keep him there; and let him thence escape
 If he be lucky; let him twist, and ape
 Flood, fire, and demon — his adroit designs
 Will strain to nothing in the strict confines
 Of this sweet Order, where, in pious rape,
 I hold his essence and amorphous shape,
 Till he with Order mingles and combines.
 Past are the hours, the years, of our duress,
 His arrogance, our awful servitude:
 I have him. He is nothing more nor less
 Than something simple not yet understood;
 I shall not even force him to confess;
 Or answer. I will only make him good.



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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Does the poem contain "Chaos"? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. What properties of a sonnet does this poem possess?
3. What do you think is meant by the phrase "pious rape" in line 6?
4. What is the effect of the personification in the poem?

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Compare the theme of this poem with that of Robert Frost's "Design" (p. 386).

A THEMATIC CASE STUDY
Love and Longing



National Portrait Gallery,
London.

For a man to become a poet . . .
he must be in love or miserable.

—GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON

Behind all of the elements that make up a poem, and even behind its cultural contexts and critical reception, lies its theme. Its idea and the point around which the entire poem revolves, the theme is ultimately what we respond to — or fail to respond to: All of the other elements, in fact, are typically there to contribute to the theme, whether or not that theme is explicitly stated. Reading thematically means extending what you have learned about the analysis of individual elements at work in the poem to make connections between the text and the world we inhabit.

This chapter, organized into a case study on love poems, focuses on a single theme as it reappears throughout various parts of poetic history. These poems have much to say about human experience — experience that is contradictory, confusing, complicated, and fascinating. You'll find diverse perspectives from different historical, cultural, generational, or political moments. You'll also discover writers who aim to entertain, to describe, to convince, and to complain. After reading these poems in the context of one another, you're

Research the
poets in this chapter at
[bedfordstmartins.com/
rewritinglit](http://bedfordstmartins.com/rewritinglit).

likely to come away with a richer understanding of how the themes of love play out in your own life.

Poems about love have probably enchanted and intrigued their hearers since people began making poetry. Like poetry itself, love is, after all, about intensity, acute impressions, and powerful responsibilities. The emotional dimensions of love do not lend themselves to analytic expository essays. Although such writing can be satisfying intellectually, it is most inadequate for evoking and capturing the thick excitement and swooning reveries that love engenders. The poems in this section include spiritual as well as physical explorations of love that range over five centuries. As you'll see, poetic responses to love by men and women can be quite similar as well as different from one another, just as poems from different periods can reflect a variety of values and attitudes toward love. It is indeed an engaging theme — but as you read, don't forget to pay attention to the formal elements of each of these selections and how they work together to create the poem's particular points about love. Also, remember to read not only for the presence of love; many other themes can be found in these works, and many other connections can be made to the literature elsewhere in this anthology.

The oldest love poem in this case study, Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," opens with the line, "Come live with me and be my love." This famous pastoral lyric set a tone for love poetry that has been replicated since its publication. Before concluding with "Then live with me and be my love," Marlowe embraces the kinds of generous pleasure that readers have traditionally and happily received for centuries. The feelings, if not the particular images, are likely to be quite familiar to you.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE (1564–1593)

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

1599?

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasure prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle^o
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

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dress or skirt

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How persuasive do you find the shepherd's arguments to his potential lover?
2. What do you think might be the equivalent of the shepherd's arguments in the twenty-first century? What kinds of appeals and images of love would be made by a contemporary lover?
3. Try writing a response to the shepherd from the female's point of view using Marlowe's rhythms, rhyme scheme, and quatrains.

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Read Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (p. 639). How does the nymph's response compare with your imagined reply?

While Marlowe's shepherd focuses his energies on convincing his potential love to join him (in the delights associated with love), the speaker in the following sonnet by William Shakespeare demonstrates his love for poetry as well and focuses on the beauty of the object of the poem. In doing so, he introduces a theme that has become a perennial challenge to love—the corrosive, destructive nature of what Shakespeare shockingly calls "sluttish time." His resolution of this issue is intriguing: see if you agree with it.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,

1609

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And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his^o swords nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

possessive of Mars

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What do you think is the central point of this poem? Explain whether you agree or disagree with its theme.
2. How does "sluttish time" (line 4) represent the poem's major conflict?
3. Consider whether this poem is more about the poet's loved one or the poet's love of his own poetry.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SELECTIONS

1. Compare the theme of this poem with that of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" (p. 80), paying particular attention to the speaker's beliefs about how time affects love.
2. Discuss whether you find this love poem more or less appealing than Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." As you make this comparison, explain what the criteria for an appealing love poem should be.

As Shakespeare's speaker presents a love that will withstand the destruction of time, Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband" evokes a marital love that confirms a connection that transcends space and matter as well as time. Although Bradstreet wrote more than three centuries ago, such devotion remains undated for many (but, of course, not all) readers of love poetry. She begins, naturally enough, with the pleasure and paradox of how two people can be one.

ANNE BRADSTREET (c. 1612–1672)

To My Dear and Loving Husband

1678

If ever two were one, then surely we,
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.

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My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
 Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.
 Thy love is such I can no way repay,
 The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
 Then while we live, in love let's so persevere
 That when we live no more, we may live ever.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Describe the poem's tone. Is it what you'd expect from a seventeenth-century Puritan? Why or why not?
2. Explain whether Bradstreet's devotion is directed more toward her husband here on earth or toward the eternal rewards of heaven.
3. What is the paradox of the final line? How is it resolved?

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. How does the theme of this poem compare with that of Bradstreet's "Before the Birth of One of Her Children" (p. 617)? Explain why you find the poems consistent or contradictory.

The remaining poems in this case study are modern and contemporary pieces that both maintain and revise the perspectives on love provided by Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Bradstreet. As you read them, consider what each adds to your understanding of the others and of love in general.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806–1861)

How Do I Love Thee? *Let Me Count the Ways*

1850

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach; when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of being and ideal grace.
 I love thee to the level of every day's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
 I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** This poem has remained extraordinarily popular for more than 150 years. Why do you think it has been so often included in collections of love poems? What is its appeal? Does it speak to a contemporary reader? To you?
2. Comment on the effect of the diction. What kind of tone does it create?
3. Would you characterize this poem as having a religious theme—or is love a substitute for religion?

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Compare and contrast the images, tone, and theme of this poem with those of Christina Rossetti's "Promises Like Pie-Crust" (p. 641). Explain why you find one poem more promising than the other.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY (1892–1950)

Recuerdo^o

1922

We were very tired, we were very merry—
 We had gone back and forth all night on the
 ferry.

It was bare and bright, and smelled like a
 stable—

But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a
 table,

We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
 And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn
 came soon.

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We were very tired, we were very merry—
 We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
 And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
 From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
 And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
 And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

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We were very tired, we were very merry,
 We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
 We hailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,
 And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
 And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears,
 And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

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Recuerdo: I remember (Spanish).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** This poem was a very popular representation of New York City bohemian life in Greenwich Village during the 1920s. What do you think made "Recuerdo" so appealing then?

JOAN MURRAY (b. 1945)

Play-by-Play

1997

Yaddo°

Would it surprise the young men
 playing softball on the hill to hear the women
 on the terrace admiring their bodies:
 the slim waist of the pitcher, the strength
 of the runner's legs, the torso of the catcher
 rising off his knees to toss the ball back to the mound?
 Would it embarrass them
 to hear two women, sitting together after dinner,
 praising even their futile motions:
 the flex of a batter's hips
 before his missed swing, the wide-spread stride
 of a man picked off his base, the intensity
 on the new man's face
 as he waits on deck and fans the air?

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Would it annoy them, the way some women
 take offense when men caress them with their eyes?
 And why should it surprise me that these women,
 well past sixty, haven't put aside desire
 but sit at ease and in pleasure,
 watching the young men move above the rose garden
 where the marble Naiads
 pose and yawn in their fountain?
 Who better than these women, with their sweaters
 draped across their shoulders, their perspectives
 honed from years of lovers, to recognize
 the beauty that would otherwise
 go unnoticed on this hill?
 And will it compromise their pleasure
 if I sit down at their table to listen
 to the play-by-play and see it through their eyes?

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Would it distract the young men if they realized
 that three women laughing softly on the terrace
 above closed books and half-filled wineglasses
 are moving beside them on the field?
 Would they want to know how they've been
 held to the light till some motion or expression
 showed the unsuspected loveliness
 in a common shape or face?
 Wouldn't they have liked to see how they looked
 down there, as they stood for a moment at the plate,

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Yaddo: An artist's colony in Saratoga Springs, New York.

bathed in the light of perfect expectation,
 before their shadows lengthened, before they
 walked together up the darkened hill,
 so beautiful they would not have
 recognized themselves?

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How would you answer the series of nine questions posed by the speaker?
2. What do you think the young men would have to say to the older women gazing at them?
3. Explain how the "marble Naiads" (line 21) help to set the tone.
4. Discuss the significance of the title.

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

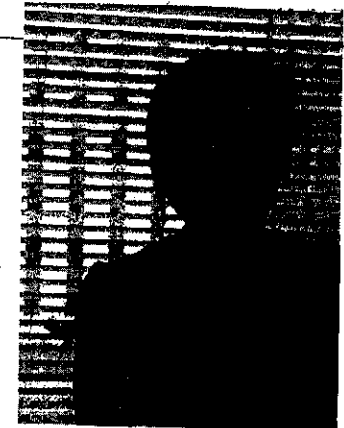
1. Write an essay on the nature of desire in this poem and in Molly Peacock's "Desire" (p. 251).

BILLIE BOLTON (b. 1950)

Memorandum

2004

TO: My Boyfriend from Hell
FR: Me
RE: Shit I Never Want to Hear Another Word
 About as Long as I Live



Photograph courtesy of Ashley G. Stollar.

1. **Your Addled Thoughts.** Anything about your ongoing interest in Lucy Liu's legs, Shania Twain's bellybutton, or Reese Witherspoon's whatever; your must-see TV dramas, your fantasy baseball addiction, or your addictions period. Anything about going anywhere with you at any time including, but not limited to: Sam's Club, Big Lots, Waffle House, church fish fries, local snake round-ups or Amvet turkey shoots, unless you promise to be the turkey.
2. **Your Wireless Connection.** Anything about your stage-four cell phone habit; the dames who have your cell phone number and why; who's on your speed-dial list or who left a voice mail message; anything about cell phone rebates, late fees, roaming charges, contracts or dropping your cell phone in the john by accident, even if you flush it and walk away.
3. **Your Adolescent Only Child.** Anything about his bed-wetting or fire-setting habits; his gang affiliation, court dates or swastika tattoo; anything

about his tantrums, seizures or deep psychological need for video games and fruit roll-ups; anything about his pathological grudge against mankind or his particular beef against me.

4. Your Significant Others (female). Anything about the redneck redhead you banged in high school, the long-haired potheads you balled in your hippie days, the white trash airhead you married or the blue-haired battle-ax who pats you on the rump and pays for your dinner. Anything about your devotion to your long-suffering mother, your loopy sisters, or even the Blessed Virgin.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What makes this a poem rather than simply a memo?
2. How does the speaker's diction and choice of details reveal her own personality?
3. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Using Bolton's style, tone, and form as inspiration, write a reply from the boyfriend's point of view.

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Compare the use of descriptive detail to create tone in "Memorandum" and in Michelle Boisseau's "Self-Pity's Closet" (p. 587)

MICHAEL RYAN (b. 1946)

Bunny

2004

In the scarred desk behind me
in history class,
she lulled her nyloned knee
against my ass,
its message pressing home
as dully we went
from the interminable Fall of Rome
to the Council of Trent
and through the even duller
steel town afternoons,
locked in a collar
of dim green rooms,
old nuns, and ever new
bewilderment
1962.
Like the hood ornament
on some chopped down hot rod
of the apocalypse,
above the blackboard stood
the crucifix

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flanked on either slope
of its tiny Calvary
by color headshots of the Pope
and John F. Kennedy—

an arrangement meant to convey
not thievery being done
but God's work every day
by The Two Johns

drawing us like dynamos
through them to heaven
while we shook in our rows
as if on toboggans.

So what if we had known
what JFK was doing
in Laos and Vietnam,
and who he was screwing

(including the teenage mistress
of the head of the Mafia,
delivered to the White House
like a midnight pizza)?

The greater world to me,
present and past,
was the space between Bunny's knee
and my ass,

and I needed it collapsed
as soon as class began.
So what that I thought she had
the brains of a pecan,

mascara so black and thick
she must have smeared it on
with a popsicle stick,
and a nickname incredibly dumb?

Each day when she had helped me
annihilate an hour,
and we were going away,
I'd stare at her,

and she'd stare back and wink
I know you live off it:
one flashlight blink
at the bottom of a pit.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How does the speaker's diction reveal his sensibilities? How would you describe him?

2:

3c

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