

Thomas Edwards

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Thomas Edwards (1699–1757) was born in London, England and was a critic and sonnet writer. Both his father and grandfather worked in the legal profession, influencing Edwards to study law and pass the bar himself. However, due to troubles with his speech, Edwards was discouraged from practicing law and turned to literature instead. His Sonnet V “On a Family-Picture” reveals that he had four brothers and four sisters, all of whom had died while he was still alive.⁶⁴ Edwards himself died 3 January 1757, in Turrick, Ellesborough, where he had resided since 1739.

Edwards is widely known for his controversy with literary scholar and priest William Warburton. Edwards’s admiration for Shakespeare led to his first published work in 1744, which was an attack on Warburton’s edition of Shakespeare, titled *A Letter to the Author of a late Epistolary Dedication, Addressed to Mr. Warburton*. Edwards’s most notable literary work is the *Canons of Criticism*, addressing Warburton and continuing his attack on Warburton’s notes on Shakespeare’s works. Even though many of Edwards’s sonnets remained unpublished until the nineteenth century, his sonnets published in 1758 predate the works of other notable sonnet writers, establishing him as a true pioneer of the form in the eighteenth century. He was recognized by his peers as starting a new interest in sonnets as a poetic form.

Edwards’s Sonnet XI is an Italian sonnet in iambic pentameter and rhyme scheme, *abba abba cdcdcd*. The first eight lines, the octave, of the sonnet explore grief, and the last six lines, the sestet, explore the theme of consolation. Sonnet XI was published by London and printed by J. Hughes in 1758, appearing in *A Collection of Poem in Six Volumes by Several Hands, Volume II*.

Further Reading

Edwards, Thomas, et al. *The Canons of Criticism and Glossary: Being a Supplement to Mr.*

Warburton’s Edition of Shakespeare: Collected from the Notes in That Celebrated Work, and Proper to Be Bound up with It. C. Bathurst, 1750. *Internet Archive*.

Roberts, Bethan. “The Eighteenth-Century Sonnet.” *Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet: Form, Place, and Tradition in the Late Eighteenth Century*. Liverpool UP, 2019, pp. 14–26.

⁶⁴ Sonnets II and V are also available in this anthology.

Sonnet XI⁶⁵

Young, fair, and good! ah why should young and fair
 And good be huddled in untimely² grave?
 Must so sweet flow'r so brief a period have,
 Just bloom and charm, then fade and disappear?

Yet our's the loss, who ill alas can spare³
 The bright example, which thy virtues gave;
 The guerdon⁴ thine, whom gracious heav'n did save
 From longer trial in this vale of care.

Rest then, sweet saint,⁵ in peace and honour rest,
 While our true tears bedew⁶ thy maiden hearse,⁷
 Light lie the earth upon thy lovely breast;
 And let a grateful heart with grief oppress'd
 To thy dear mem'ry consecrate⁸ this verse,
 Though all too mean⁹ for who deserves the best.



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¹ *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands. Vol. II*, printed by J. Hughs, for R. and J. Dodsley, 1763, p.332. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

² *Untimely*: unseasonable or improper time.

³ *Spare*: “to leave (a person) unhurt or unharmed[...]; to refrain from inflicting injury or punishment (*OED*).”

⁴ *Guerdon*: a reward or recompense.

⁵ *Saint*: “one of the blessed dead in Heaven” (*OED*).

⁶ *Bedew*: moisten with drops of liquid.

⁷ *Maiden Hearse*: coffin or vehicle designated for transporting the deceased to burial, in this case a young unmarried woman.

⁸ *Consecrate*: to dedicate or declare something as holy or sacred.

⁹ *Mean*: Inferior in ability or lacking in quality of significance.