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Shakespeare's rotten weeds, Shakespeare's deep trenches

by William Logan

On Shakespeare's sonnets.

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
Will be a tottered weed of small worth held.
Then being asked where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say within thine own deep-sunken eyes
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use
If thou couldst answer, "This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count and make my old excuse,"
Proving his beauty by succession thine.
This were to be new made when thou art old
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.
(Sonnet 2, 1609 Quarto)

About the early history of the sonnets, we know almost nothing. The first reference comes in 1598, when Shakespeare already had a reputation on...

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William Logan's latest collection of criticism, *Broken Ground: Poetry and the Demon of History*, was published in spring 2021 by Columbia University Press.

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