



The following poems come from *Poetry of the Law*, edited by David Kader and Michael Stanford, University of Iowa Press, 2010.

Sonnet 49  
by William Shakespeare  
(1564 – 1616)

Against that time (if ever that time come)  
When I shall see thee frowne on my defects,  
When as thy love hat cast his utmost summe,  
Cault to that audite by advis'd respects,  
Against that time when thou shalt strangely passé,  
And scarcely greete me with that sunne thine eye,  
When love converted from the thing it was  
Shall reasons finde of settled gravitie.  
Against that time do I insconce me here  
Within the knowledge of mine owne desart,  
And this my hand, against my selfe upreare,  
To guard the lawfull reasons of thy part,  
    To leave poore me, thou has the strength of lawes,  
    Since shy to love, I can alledge no cause.

Verbatim from Boileau  
by Alexander Pope  
(1688 – 1744)

Once (says an author; where, I need not say)  
Two trav'lers found an oyster in their way;  
Both fierce, both hungry; the dispute grew strong,  
While scale in hand Dame Justice past along.  
Before her each with clamour pleads the laws,  
Explain'd the matter, and would win the cause.  
Dame Justice, weighing long the doubtful right,  
Takes, opens, swallows it, before their sight.  
The cause of strife remov'd so rarely well,  
"There take" (says Justice) "take ye each a shell  
We thrive at Westminster on fools like you:  
'Twas a fat oyster - live in peace - Adieu."

*from Don Juan*  
by Lord Byron

(1788 – 1824)

The lawyer and the critic but behold

The baser sides of literature and life,

And nought remains unseen, but much untold,

By those who scour those double vales of strife.

While common men grow ignorantly old,

The lawyer's brief is like the surgeon's knife,

Dissecting the whole inside of a question,

And with it all the process of digestion.

A legal broom's a moral chimney-sweeper,

And that's the reason he himself's so dirty:

The endless soot bestows a tint far deeper

Than can be hid by altering his shirt; he

Retains the sable stains of the dark creeper,

At least some twenty-nine do out of thirty,

In all their habits: - Not so *you*, I own;

As Caesar wore his robe you wear your gown.

You Felons on Trial in Courts  
by Walt Whitman  
(1819 – 1892)

You felons on trial in courts,  
You convicts in prison-cells, you sentenced assassins chain'd  
and handcuff 'd with iron,  
Who am I too that I am not on trial or in prison?  
Me ruthless and devilish as any, that my wrists are not chain'd  
with iron, or my ankles with iron?

You prostitutes flaunting over the trottoirs or obscene in your rooms,  
Who am I that I should call you more obscene than myself?

O culpable! I acknowledge - I exposé!  
(O admirers, praise not me-compliment not me-you make me wince,  
I see what you do not-I know what you do not.)

Inside these breast-bones I lie smutch'd and choked,  
Beneath this face that appears so impassive hell's tides continually run,  
Lusts and wickedness are acceptable to me,  
I walk with delinquents with passionate love,  
I feel I am of them – I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself,  
And henceforth I will not deny them-for how can I deny myself?

I Had Some Things That I Called Mine  
by Emily Dickinson  
(1830 – 1886)

I had some things that I called mine,  
And God, that He called His,  
Till recently a rival claim  
Disturbed these amities.

The property, my garden  
Which having sown with care,  
He claims the pretty acre  
And sends a bailiff there.

The station of the parties  
Forbids publicity,  
But Justice is sublimer  
Than arms or pedigree.

I'll institute an action,  
I'll vindicate the law!  
Jove, choose your counsel,  
I'll retain Shaw.\*

\*A day laborer