

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

T.S. Eliot

(Published originally in his book Prufrock and Other Observations, 1917)

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
[They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”]
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
[They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”]
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

.....

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

.....

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep... tired... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here’s no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

.....

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old... I grow old...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

“I am, you anxious one. Do you not hear me”

By Rainer Maria Rilke from the *Book of Hours*

I am, you anxious one. Do you not hear me
rush to claim you with each eager sense?
Now my feelings have found wings, and, circling,
whitely fly about your countenance.
Here my spirit in its dress of stillness
stands before you, — oh, do you not see?
In your glance does not my Maytime prayer
grow to ripeness as upon a tree?
Dreamer, it is I who am your dream.
But would you awake, I am your will,
and master of all splendor, and I grow
to a sphere, like stars poised high and still,
with time’s singular city stretched below.

“The sovereigns of the world are old”

By Rainer Maria Rilke from the *Book of Hours*

The sovereigns of the world are old
and they will have no heirs at all.
Death took their sons when they were small,
and their pale daughters soon resigned
to force frail crowns they could not hold.
The mob breaks these to bits of gold
that the world’s master, shrewd and bold,
melts in the fire to enginery
that sullenly serves his desires,
but fortune is not in his hire.
The ore is homesick. It is eager
to leave the coins and turning wheels
that offer it a life so meagre.
From coffers and from factories
it would flow back into the veins
of gaping mountains whence it came,
that close upon it once again.

“Now the hour bows down, it touches me, throbs”

By Rainer Maria Rilke from the *Book of Hours*

Now the hour bows down, it touches me, throbs
metallic, lucid and bold:
my senses are trembling. I feel my own power —
on the plastic day I lay hold.
Until I perceived it, no thing was complete,
but waited, hushed, unfulfilled.
My vision is ripe, to each glance like a bride

comes softly the thing that was willed.
There is nothing too small, but my tenderness paints
it large on a background of gold,
and I prize it, not knowing whose soul at the sight,
released, may unfold...

“I Am Much Too Alone in This World, Yet Not Alone”

By Rainer Maria Rilke

I am much too alone in this world, yet not alone
enough
to truly consecrate the hour.
I am much too small in this world, yet not small
enough
to be to you just object and thing,
dark and smart.
I want my free will and want it accompanying
the path which leads to action;
and want during times that beg questions,
where something is up,
to be among those in the know,
or else be alone.

I want to mirror your image to its fullest perfection,
never be blind or too old
to uphold your weighty wavering reflection.
I want to unfold.
Nowhere I wish to stay crooked, bent;
for there I would be dishonest, untrue.
I want my conscience to be
true before you;
want to describe myself like a picture I observed
for a long time, one close up,
like a new word I learned and embraced,
like the everyday jug,
like my mother's face,
like a ship that carried me along
through the deadliest storm.

O Little Root of a Dream

By Paul Celan

O little root of a dream
you hold me here
undermined by blood,
no longer visible to anyone,
property of death.

Curve a face
that there may be speech, of earth,
of ardor, of
things with eyes, even
here, where you read me blind,

even
here,
where you
refute me,
to the letter.

Part Four: Time and Eternity”
By Emily Dickinson (1830–86)
Collected in her Complete Poems (1924)

IV

SAFE in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning and untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the resurrection,
Rafter of satin, and roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine;
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear;
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence,—
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

Grand go the years in the crescent above them;
Worlds scoop their arcs, and firmaments row,
Diadems drop and Doges surrender,
Soundless as dots on a disk of snow.

Be Drunk

By Charles Baudelaire

You have to be always drunk. That's all there is to it—it's the only way. So as not to feel the horrible burden of time that breaks your back and bends you to the earth, you have to be continually drunk.

But on what? Wine, poetry or virtue, as you wish. But be drunk.

And if sometimes, on the steps of a palace or the green grass of a ditch, in the mournful solitude of your room, you wake again, drunkenness already diminishing or gone, ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, everything that is flying, everything that is groaning, everything that is rolling, everything that is singing, everything that is speaking . . . ask what time it is and wind, wave, star, bird, clock will answer you: "It is time to be drunk! So as not to be the martyred slaves of time, be drunk, be continually drunk! On wine, on poetry or on virtue as you wish."

the suicide kid

by Charles Bukowski

I went to the worst of bars
hoping to get
killed.
but all I could do was to
get drunk
again.
worse, the bar patrons even
ended up
liking me.
there I was trying to get
pushed over the dark
edge
and I ended up with
free drinks
while somewhere else
some poor
son-of-a-bitch was in a hospital
bed,
tubes sticking out all over
him
as he fought like hell
to live.
nobody would help me
die as
the drinks kept
coming,
as the next day
waited for me
with its steel clamps,
its stinking
anonymity,
its incogitant
attitude.
death doesn't always
come running
when you call
it,
not even if you
call it
from a shining
castle
or from an ocean liner
or from the best bar
on earth (or the
worst).
such impertinence
only makes the gods
hesitate and
delay.
ask me: I'm
72.

The Raven

By Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door-
Only this, and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;- vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow- sorrow for the lost Lenore-
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore-
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me- filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating,
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door-
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;-
This it is, and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you"- here I opened wide the door;-
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortals ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore!"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"-
Merely this, and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice:
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore-
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;-
'Tis the wind and nothing more."

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door-
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door-
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore.

“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the Nightly shore-
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning- little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blest with seeing bird above his chamber door-
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as “Nevermore.”

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered- not a feather then he fluttered-
Till I scarcely more than muttered, “other friends have flown before-
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.”
Then the bird said, “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore-
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of ‘Never- nevermore’.”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;
Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore-
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o’er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamplight gloating o’er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then methought the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee- by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite- respite and nepenthe, from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!- prophet still, if bird or devil!-
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-
On this home by horror haunted- tell me truly, I implore-
Is there- is there balm in Gilead?- tell me- tell me, I implore!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil- prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us- by that God we both adore-
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore-
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend,” I shrieked, upstarting-
“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken!- quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,
And the lamplight o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted- nevermore!

Kaddish, Part I

By Allen Ginsberg

For Naomi Ginsberg, 1894-1956

Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes, while I walk on
the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village.
downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up all night, talking,
talking, reading the Kaddish aloud, listening to Ray Charles blues
shout blind on the phonograph
the rhythm the rhythm—and your memory in my head three years after—
And read Adonais' last triumphant stanzas aloud—wept, realizing
how we suffer—
And how Death is that remedy all singers dream of, sing, remember,
prophesy as in the Hebrew Anthem, or the Buddhist Book of An-
swers—and my own imagination of a withered leaf—at dawn—
Dreaming back thru life, Your time—and mine accelerating toward Apocalypse,
the final moment—the flower burning in the Day—and what comes after,
looking back on the mind itself that saw an American city
a flash away, and the great dream of Me or China, or you and a phantom
Russia, or a crumpled bed that never existed—
like a poem in the dark—escaped back to Oblivion—
No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the Beings in the Dream,
trapped in its disappearance,
sighing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces of phantom, worship-
ping each other,
worshipping the God included in it all—longing or inevitability?—while it
lasts, a Vision—anything more?
It leaps about me, as I go out and walk the street, look back over my shoulder,
Seventh Avenue, the battlements of window office buildings shoul-
dering each other high, under a cloud, tall as the sky an instant—and
the sky above—an old blue place.
or down the Avenue to the south, to—as I walk toward the Lower East Side
—where you walked 50 years ago, little girl—from Russia, eating the
first poisonous tomatoes of America frightened on the dock
then struggling in the crowds of Orchard Street toward what?—toward Newark—
toward candy store, first home-made sodas of the century, hand-churned ice
cream in backroom on musty brownfloor boards—
Toward education marriage nervous breakdown, operation, teaching school,
and learning to be mad, in a dream—what is this life?
Toward the Key in the window—and the great Key lays its head of light
on top of Manhattan, and over the floor, and lays down on the
sidewalk—in a single vast beam, moving, as I walk down First toward
the Yiddish Theater—and the place of poverty
you knew, and I know, but without caring now—Strange to have moved
thru Paterson, and the West, and Europe and here again,
with the cries of Spaniards now in the doorstops doors and dark boys on
the street, fire escapes old as you
—Tho you're not old now, that's left here with me—
Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe—and I guess that dies with
us—enough to cancel all that comes—What came is gone forever
every time—
That's good! That leaves it open for no regret—no fear radiators, lacklove,
torture even toothache in the end—
Though while it comes it is a lion that eats the soul—and the lamb, the soul,

in us, alas, offering itself in sacrifice to change's fierce hunger—hair
 and teeth—and the roar of bonepain, skull bare, break rib, rot-skin,
 braintricked Implacability.

Ai! ai! we do worse! We are in a fix! And you're out, Death let you out,
 Death had the Mercy, you're done with your century, done with
 God, done with the path thru it—Done with yourself at last—Pure
 —Back to the Babe dark before your Father, before us all—before the
 world—

There, rest. No more suffering for you. I know where you've gone, it's good.
 No more flowers in the summer fields of New York, no joy now, no more
 fear of Louis,
 and no more of his sweetness and glasses, his high school decades, debts,
 loves, frightened telephone calls, conception beds, relatives, hands—
 No more of sister Elanor,—she gone before you—we kept it secret you
 killed her—or she killed herself to bear with you—an arthritic heart
 —But Death's killed you both—No matter—

Nor your memory of your mother, 1915 tears in silent movies weeks and
 weeks—forgetting, agrieve watching Marie Dressler address human-
 ity, Chaplin dance in youth,
 or Boris Godunov, Chaliapin's at the Met, halling his voice of a weeping Czar
 —by standing room with Elanor & Max—watching also the Capital
 ists take seats in Orchestra, white furs, diamonds,
 with the YPSL's hitch-hiking thru Pennsylvania, in black baggy gym skirts
 pants, photograph of 4 girls holding each other round the waste, and
 laughing eye, too coy, virginal solitude of 1920
 all girls grown old, or dead now, and that long hair in the grave—lucky to
 have husbands later—

You made it—I came too—Eugene my brother before (still grieving now and
 will gream on to his last stiff hand, as he goes thru his cancer—or kill
 —later perhaps—soon he will think—)

And it's the last moment I remember, which I see them all, thru myself, now
 —tho not you

I didn't foresee what you felt—what more hideous gape of bad mouth came
 first—to you—and were you prepared?

To go where? In that Dark—that—in that God? a radiance? A Lord in the
 Void? Like an eye in the black cloud in a dream? Adonoi at last, with
 you?

Beyond my remembrance! Incapable to guess! Not merely the yellow skull
 in the grave, or a box of worm dust, and a stained ribbon—Deaths-
 head with Halo? can you believe it?

Is it only the sun that shines once for the mind, only the flash of existence,
 than none ever was?

Nothing beyond what we have—what you had—that so pitiful—yet Triumph,
 to have been here, and changed, like a tree, broken, or flower—fed to the
 ground—but made, with its petals, colored, thinking Great Universe,
 shaken, cut in the head, leaf stript, hid in an egg crate hospital, cloth
 wrapped, sore—freaked in the moon brain, Naughtless.

No flower like that flower, which knew itself in the garden, and fought the knife—lost
 Cut down by an idiot Snowman's icy—even in the Spring—strange ghost
 thought some—Death—Sharp icicle in his hand—crowned with old
 roses—a dog for his eyes—cock of a sweatshop—heart of electric
 irons.

All the accumulations of life, that wear us out—clocks, bodies, consciousness,
 shoes, breasts—begotten sons—your Communism—'Paranoia' into hospitals.

You once kicked Elanor in the leg, she died of heart failure later. You of stroke. Asleep? within a year, the two of you, sisters in death. Is Eleanor happy? Max grieves alive in an office on Lower Broadway, lone large mustache over midnight Accountings, not sure. His life passes—as he sees—and what does he doubt now? Still dream of making money, or that might have made money, hired nurse, had children, found even your Immortality, Naomi?
I'll see him soon. Now I've got to cut through to talk to you as I didn't when you had a mouth.
Forever. And we're bound for that, Forever like Emily Dickinson's horses—headed to the End.
They know the way—These Steeds—run faster than we think—it's our own life they cross—and take with them.

Magnificent, mourned no more, marred of heart, mind behind, married dreamed, mortal changed—Ass and face done with murder.

In the world, given, flower maddened, made no Utopia, shut under pine, almed in Earth, blamed in Lone, Jehovah, accept.

Nameless, One Faced, Forever beyond me, beginningless, endless, Father in death. Tho I am not there for this Prophecy, I am unmarried, I'm hymnless, I'm Heavenless, headless in blisshood I would still adore Thee, Heaven, after Death, only One blessed in Nothingness, not light or darkness, Dayless Eternity—

Take this, this Psalm, from me, burst from my hand in a day, some of my Time, now given to Nothing—to praise Thee—But Death

This is the end, the redemption from Wilderness, way for the Wonderer, House sought for All, black handkerchief washed clean by weeping—page beyond Psalm—Last change of mine and Naomi—to God's perfect Darkness—Death, stay thy phantoms!

II

Over and over—refrain—of the Hospitals—still haven't written your history—leave it abstract—a few images
run thru the mind—like the saxophone chorus of houses and years—remembrance of electrical shocks.

By long nites as a child in Paterson apartment, watching over your nervousness—you were fat—your next move—

By that afternoon I stayed home from school to take care of you—once and for all—when I vowed forever that once man disagreed with my opinion of the cosmos, I was lost—

By my later burden—vow to illuminate mankind—this is release of particulars—(mad as you)—(sanity a trick of agreement)—

But you stared out the window on the Broadway Church corner, and spied a mystical assassin from Newark,

So phoned the Doctor—'OK go way for a rest'—so I put on my coat and walked you downstreet—On the way a grammarschool boy screamed, unaccountably—'Where you goin Lady to Death?' I shuddered—

and you covered your nose with motheaten fur collar, gas mask against poison sneaked into downtown atmosphere, sprayed by Grandma—

And was the driver of the cheesebox Public Service bus a member of the gang? You shuddered at his face, I could hardly get you on—to New York, very Times Square, to grab another Greyhound—

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be

by John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

To the Oracle at Delphi

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Read at Delphi, Greece, on March 21, 2001, UNESCO World Poetry Day

Great Oracle, why are you staring at me,
do I baffle you, do I make you despair?
I, Americus, the American,
wrought from the dark in my mother long ago,
from the dark of ancient Europa--
Why are you staring at me now
in the dusk of our civilization--
Why are you staring at me
as if I were America itself
the new Empire
vaster than any in ancient days
with its electronic highways
carrying its corporate monoculture
around the world
And English the Latin of our days--

Great Oracle, sleeping through the centuries,
Awaken now at last
And tell us how to save us from ourselves
and how to survive our own rulers
who would make a plutocracy of our democracy
in the Great Divide
between the rich and the poor
in whom Walt Whitman heard America singing

O long-silent Sybil,
you of the winged dreams,
Speak out from your temple of light
as the serious constellations
with Greek names
still stare down on us
as a lighthouse moves its megaphone
over the sea
Speak out and shine upon us
the sea-light of Greece
the diamond light of Greece

Far-seeing Sybil, forever hidden,
Come out of your cave at last
And speak to us in the poet's voice
the voice of the fourth person singular
the voice of the inscrutable future
the voice of the people mixed
with a wild soft laughter--
And give us new dreams to dream,
Give us new myths to live by!

A Song of Despair

By Pablo Neruda

The memory of you emerges from the night around me.
The river mingles its stubborn lament with the sea.

Deserted like the dwarves at dawn.
It is the hour of departure, oh deserted one!

Cold flower heads are raining over my heart.
Oh pit of debris, fierce cave of the shipwrecked.

In you the wars and the flights accumulated.
From you the wings of the song birds rose.

You swallowed everything, like distance.
Like the sea, like time. In you everything sank!

It was the happy hour of assault and the kiss.
The hour of the spell that blazed like a lighthouse.

Pilot's dread, fury of blind driver,
turbulent drunkenness of love, in you everything sank!

In the childhood of mist my soul, winged and wounded.
Lost discoverer, in you everything sank!

You girdled sorrow, you clung to desire,
sadness stunned you, in you everything sank!

I made the wall of shadow draw back,
beyond desire and act, I walked on.

Oh flesh, my own flesh, woman whom I loved and lost,
I summon you in the moist hour, I raise my song to you.

Like a jar you housed infinite tenderness.
and the infinite oblivion shattered you like a jar.

There was the black solitude of the islands,
and there, woman of love, your arms took me in.

There was thirst and hunger, and you were the fruit.
There were grief and ruins, and you were the miracle.

Ah woman, I do not know how you could contain me
in the earth of your soul, in the cross of your arms!

How terrible and brief my desire was to you!
How difficult and drunken, how tensed and avid.

Cemetery of kisses, there is still fire in your tombs,
still the fruited boughs burn, pecked at by birds.

Oh the bitten mouth, oh the kissed limbs,
oh the hungering teeth, oh the entwined bodies.

Oh the mad coupling of hope and force
in which we merged and despaired.

And the tenderness, light as water and as flour.
And the word scarcely begun on the lips.

This was my destiny and in it was my voyage of my longing,
and in it my longing fell, in you everything sank!

Oh pit of debris, everything fell into you,
what sorrow did you not express, in what sorrow are you not drowned!

From billow to billow you still called and sang.
Standing like a sailor in the prow of a vessel.

You still flowered in songs, you still broke the currents.
Oh pit of debris, open and bitter well.

Pale blind diver, luckless slinger,
lost discoverer, in you everything sank!

It is the hour of departure, the hard cold hour
which the night fastens to all the timetables.

The rustling belt of the sea girdles the shore.
Cold stars heave up, black birds migrate.

Deserted like the wharves at dawn.
Only tremulous shadow twists in my hands.

Oh farther than everything. Oh farther than everything.

It is the hour of departure. Oh abandoned one!

Two Untitled Poems

By Rumi

I

We are the mirror
as well as the face in it.
We are tasting the taste
this minute
of eternity.
We are the pain
and what cures the pain
we are the sweet cold water
and the jar that pours.

II

Today, I recognized that the jewel-like beauty
is the presence,
our
loving
confusion
the glow in which
watery clay gets
brighter than fire,
the one we call the friend.

I begged, "is there a way into you, a ladder?"
"Your head is the ladder,
bring it down under your feet."

The Mind, this globe of awareness, is a starry universe that when you push off with
your foot,
a thousand new roads
become clear,
as you yourself do
at dawn, sailing
through
the light.