

Text and Tone, Deconstructed

Harlem

Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Bewilderment (titled "Prayer" by L. H.)

I ask you this:
Which way to go?
I ask you this:
Which sin to bear?
Which crown to put
Upon my hair?
I do not know,
Lord God,
I do not know.

Song to the Dark Virgin

I.
Would
That I were a jewel,
A shattered jewel,
That all my shining brilliants
Might fall at thy feet,
Thou dark one.

II.
Would
That I were a garment,
A shimmering, silken garment,
That all my folds
Might wrap about thy body,
Absorb thy body,
Hold and hide thy body,
Thou dark one.

III.
Would
That I were a flame,
But one sharp, leaping flame
To annihilate thy body,
Thou dark one.

Dreams (as spoken by L. H.)

Bring me all of your dreams, you dreamers. Bring me all of your heart melodies that I may wrap them in a blue cloud-cloth away from the two rough fingers of the world. And that is what poetry may do, wrap up your dreams, protect and preserve them and hold them until maybe they come true.

I look at the world

I look at the world
From awakening eyes in a black face—
And this is what I see:
This fenced-off narrow space
Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls
Through dark eyes in a dark face—
And this is what I know:
That all these walls oppression builds
Will have to go!

I look at my own body
With eyes no longer blind—
And I see that my own hands can make
The world that's in my mind.
Then let us hurry, comrades,
The road to find.

Who but the Lord?

I looked and I saw
That man they call the Law.
He was coming
Down the street at me!
I had visions in my head
Of being laid out cold and dead,
Or else murdered
By the third degree.

Hold Fast to Dreams (titled "Dreams" by L. H.)

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

We have Tomorrow (titled "Youth" by L. H.)

We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame

Yesterday
a night-gone thing,
A sun-down name.

And dawn to-day
Broad arch above the road we came.

I said, O, Lord, if you can,
Save me from that man!
Don't let him make a pulp out of me!
But the Lord he was not quick.
The Law raised up his stick
And beat the living hell
Out of me!

Now, I do not understand
Why God don't protect a man
From police brutality.
Being poor and black,
I've no weapon to strike back
So who but the Lord
Can protect me?

We'll see.

Feet o' Jesus

At the feet o' Jesus,
Sorrow like a sea.
Lordy, let yo' mercy
Come driftin' down on me.

At the feet o' Jesus
At yo' feet I stand.
O, ma little Jesus,
Please reach out yo' hand.

إِلَى أُمِّي

أَحَنُّ إِلَى خَبْزِ أُمِّي
وَقَهْوَةِ أُمِّي
وَلَمْسَةِ أُمِّي ..
وَتَكْبُرُ فِيَّ الطَّفُولَةَ
يَوْمًا عَلَى صَدْرِ يَوْمٍ
وَأَعشَقُ عَمْرِي لِأَنِّي
إِذَا مِتُّ،
أَجَلُّ مِنْ دَمْعِ أُمِّي !

خَذِينِي، إِذَا عَدْتِ يَوْمًا
وَشَاخًا لِهَدْبِكَ
وَعَطِي عِظَامِي بِعَشْبٍ
تَعَمَّدَ مِنْ طَهْرِ كَعْبِكَ
وَشَدِّي وَثَاقِي ..

To my Mother

Mahmoud Darwish
translated by A. Z. Forman

Dearly I yearn for my mother's bread,
My mother's coffee,
Mother's brushing touch.
Childhood is raised in me,
Day upon day in me.
And I so cherish life
Because if I died
My mother's tears would shame me.

Set me, if I return one day,
As a shawl on your eyelashes, let your hand
Spread grass out over my bones,
Christened by your immaculate footsteps
As on holy land.

بخصلة شعر ..
بخط يلوح في ذيل ثوبك ..
عساني أصير إلهًا
إلهًا أصير:
إذا ما لمستُ قرارة قلبك !

Fasten us with a lock of hair,
With thread strung from the back of your dress.
I could grow into godhood
Commend my spirit into godhood
If I but touch your heart's deep breadth.

ضعيني، إذا ما رجعتُ
وقودًا بتنور نارك ..
و حبل غسيل على سطح دارك
لأنني فقدتُ الوقوفَ
بدون صلاة نهارك
هرمتُ، فردي نجوم الطفولة
حتى أشارك
صغار العصافير
درب الرجوع ..
لعش إنتظارك !

Set me, if ever I return,
In your oven as fuel to help you cook,
On your roof as a clothesline stretched in your hands.
Weak without your daily prayers,
I can no longer stand.
I am old
Give me back the stars of childhood
That I may chart the homeward quest
Back with the migrant birds,
Back to your awaiting nest.

ԵՍ ԱՂՋԻԿ ԵՄ

Ես աղքիկ եմ, հեր չունիմ.
Վայ, լե, լե, լե, լե, լե, լե,
* Լե, լե, լե, լե, լե.
Մի սրբոտացավ տեր չունիմ,
Վայ, լո, լո, լո, լո, լո, լո,
 Լո, լո, լո.
Հորից, մորից պրկեված՝
Վայ, լե, լե, լե, լե, լե, լե,
 Լե, լե, լե, լե, լե.
Աշխատող աղբար չունիմ:
Վայ, լո, լո, լո, լո, լո, լո,
 Լո, լո, լո:

I am a Girl
translated by George Hamamjian

I am a girl, I have no father,
“Vai, le, le, le....”
I have no master to rule over my heart,
“Vai, lo, lo, lo....”
Again, again, abandoned.
“Vai, le, le, le....”
Deprived of father and mother,
“Vai, lo, lo, lo....”

Ղարիբ հավըը բուն չունի,
Որբ աղջիկը տուն չունի,
Ինձ նրման սեվարախոր
Աշխարհըմբս ի՛նչ ունի:

Ծագեց արևը սարևն,
Կանչեց կարավր բարևն,
Սիրածս է՛ս ինձ արվեր,
Լավանա սրբտիս լարեմ:

I don't have a working brother,
The chicken doesn't have a nest.
Orphan girl doesn't have a home,
Ill-fortuned girl like me, what does she have in the world?

The sun rose from the mountain,
It called the partridge from the stone.
Give me my lover
To heal my heart.

وصف الغيوم

«لوصف الغيوم،
علي أن أسرع كثيراً
فبعد هنيهة لن تكون ما هي
عليه، ستصير أخرى»
شيمبورسكا

وَصَفُ الغيوم مَهَارَةً لم أوتَهَا ...
أَمْشِي على جَبَلٍ وَأَنْظُرُ من عَلٍ
نحو الغيوم، وقد تَدَلَّتْ من مَدَارِ اللّازُورْدِ
خَفِيفَةً وَشَفِيفَةً،
كالقطن تحلجه الرياحُ،
كفكرة بيضاء عن معنى الوجود.
لعلَّ آلهةً تَنْقُحُ قِصَّةَ التكوِينِ
«لا شكلاً نهائياً لهذا الكون...
لا تاريخاً للأشكال...»
أَنْظُرُ من عَلٍ، وأرى انبثاقَ الشكلِ
من عَيْثِيَّةِ اللّاشكْلِ:
ريشُ الطير يَنْبُتُ في قُرُونِ الأيْلِ البِيضاءِ،
وَجْهُ الكائنِ البَشْرِيِّ يَطْلُعُ من
جناحِ الطائرِ المائِيّ ...
تَرْسُمُنَا الغيومُ على وَتِيرَتِهَا
وتختلطُ الوجوهُ مع الرؤى

Describing Clouds translated by Fady Joudah

I'd have to be really quick
to describe clouds,
because in a second
they become another

Szyborska

Describing clouds is a talent I wasn't given...
I am walking on a mountain and looking from a height
toward the clouds, as they hang from the lapis orbit
light and diaphanous,
like cotton ginned by wind,
like a white idea about the meaning of existence.
Perhaps some gods would refine the story of creation:
"No final shape for this universe...
no history of shapes..."
I am looking from a height, and I see the bursting of
shape
out of the frivolity of no-shape:
the bird feathers sprout in the white stag horns,
the human face appears
out of a marine bird's wing...
The clouds sketch us in their manner
and the faces get mixed up with the vision.

لم يكتمل شيء ولا أحد، فبعد هنيهة
 ستصيرُ صورتك الجديدةُ صورةَ النمرِ
 الجريحِ بصولجانِ الريحِ ...
 رسّامون مجهولون ما زالوا أمامك
 يلعبون، ويرسمون المطلقَ الأبديَّ،
 أبيض، كالغيوم على جدارِ الكونِ ...
 والشعراءُ يبنون المنازلَ بالغيومِ
 ويذهبون...

لكلِّ حسِّ صورةٌ،
 ولكلِّ وقتٍ غيمةٌ،
 لكن أعمارَ الغيومِ قصيرةٌ في الريحِ،
 كالأبدِ المؤقتِ في القصائدِ،
 لا يزول ولا يدوم ...

من حُسنِ حظِّي أنني أمشي على جَبَلٍ
 وأنظر من علٍ
 نحو الغيومِ...

Nothing is complete nor anyone, because in a moment
 your new image will become the image of the tiger
 wounded by the wind's scepter...

Unknown painters are still in front of you
 playing, and drawing the absolute eternal,
 white, like clouds on the wall of the universe...

And the poets build homes with clouds
 then move on...

For each sense there is an image,
 and for each time there is a cloud,
 but clouds have short lives in the wind,
 like the temporary eternal in poems,
 which neither vanishes nor lasts...

It's my good fortune that I am walking on a mountain
 looking from a height
 toward the clouds...

ՏՈՒՆ ԱՐԻ

Ամպել ա, ծյուն չի գալի,
 Մթնել ա, տուն չի գալի.—
 Հեռու ճանապարհի ես,
 Աչքերիս քուն չի գալի:
 Կանչում եմ, կանչում եմ, յար, արի, յար,
 Մութն ընկավ, տուն արի, այն անսիրտ յար:

Ես գիշեր կանցնի դժվար,
 Կերթա բարակ ու երկար.
 Իմըս որ ախ ու վախով,
 Բռնըդ ֆնչպես կանցնի, յար:

Չորերն ի վեր հանդեր ա,
 Ջուրը տունըս քանդեր ա,
 Շուտ արա, ետ դարձիր, եկ.—
 Սիրածըդ տանն անտեր ա:

Come Home

It's cloudy, but it's not snowing.
 It's dark, but she's not coming home.
 You're far away, and I can't sleep.
 I'm calling, I'm calling, come my love.
 It's dark outside, come home you heartless lover.

This night will be difficult, it will be stretched thin and
 long.
 Mine with anguish and fear.
 How will yours be, my love?

The canyons, and high mountain ridges.
 The water has destroyed my home.
 Hurry, return.
 Your lover is lonesome.

سيجيء يوم آخر

سيجيء يوم آخر، يوم نسائي
شفيف الاستعارة، كامل التكوين،
ماسي زقافي الزيارة، مشمس،
سلس، خفيف الظل. لا أحد يحس
برغبة في الانتحار أو الرحيل. فكل
شيء، خارج الماضي، طبيعي حقيقي،
رديف صفاته الأولى. كأن الوقت
يرقد في إجازته... «أطيلي وقت زينتك
الجميل. تشمسي في شمس نهديك الحريريين،
وانتظري البشارة ريثما تأتي. وفي ما
بعد نكبر. عندنا وقت إضافي
لنكبر بعد هذا اليوم...»/
سوف يجيء يوم آخر، يوم نسائي
غنائي الإشارة، لازوردي التحية
والعبارة. كل شيء أنثوي خارج
الماضي. يسيل الماء من ضرع الحجارة.
لا غبار، ولا جفاف، ولا خسارة.
والحمام ينام بعد الظهر في دبابه
مهجورة إن لم يجد عشاً صغيراً
في سرير العاشقين ...

Another Day Will Come

Another day will come, a womanly day
diaphanous in metaphor, complete in being,
diamond and processional in visitation, sunny,
flexible, with a light shadow. No one will feel
a desire for suicide or for leaving. All
things, outside the past, natural and real,
will be synonyms of their early traits. As if time
is slumbering on vacation... "Extend your lovely
beauty-time. Sunbathe in the sun of your silken
breasts,
and wait until good omen arrives. Later
we will grow older. We have enough time
to grow older after this day..."/
Another day will come, a womanly day
songlike in gesture, lapis in greeting
and in phrase. All things will be feminine outside
the past. Water will flow from rock's bosom.
No dust, no drought, no defeat.
And a dove will sleep in the afternoon in an abandoned
combat tank if it doesn't find a small nest
in the lovers' bed...

Ջուր կուգա վերին սարեն

Ջուր կուգա վերին սարեն,
Սարն ոլորելեն.
Կրթափի մարմար քարեն,
Կաթ-կաթ ծորելեն:

Water Comes from the Mountaintop

Water comes from the mountain top,
Twisting down the mountain.
It flows down upon marble stones,
Drip, drip, dripping.

The Fugitives

Percy Bysshe Shelley

The waters are flashing,
The white hail is dashing,
The lightnings are glancing,
The hoar-spray is dancing—
Away!
The whirlwind is rolling,
The thunder is tolling,
The forest is swinging,
The minster bells ringing—
Come away!
The Earth is like Ocean,
Wreck-strewn and in motion:
Bird, beast, man and worm
Have crept out of the storm—
Come away!

'Our boat has one sail
And the helmsman is pale;—
A bold pilot I trow,
Who should follow us now,'—
Shouted he—
And she cried: 'Ply the oar!
Put off gaily from shore!'—
As she spoke, bolts of death
Mixed with hail, specked their path
O'er the sea.
And from isle, tower and rock,
The blue beacon-cloud broke,
And though dumb in the blast,
The red cannon flashed fast
From the lee.

And 'Fear'st thou?' and 'Fear'st thou?'
And 'Seest thou?' and 'Hear'st thou?'
And 'Drive we not free
O'er the terrible sea,
I and thou?'
One boat-cloak did cover
The loved and the lover—
Their blood beats one measure,
They murmur proud pleasure
Soft and low;—
While around the lashed Ocean,

Like mountains in motion,
Is withdrawn and uplifted,
Sunk, shattered and shifted
To and fro.

In the court of the fortress
Beside the pale portress,
Like a bloodhound well beaten
The bridegroom stands, eaten
By shame;
On the topmost watch-turret,
As a death-boding spirit
Stands the gray tyrant father,
To his voice the mad weather
Seems tame;
And with curses as wild
As e'er clung to child,
He devotes to the blast,
The best, loveliest and last
Of his name!

Ode to a Nightingale

John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness,—
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
 In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singing of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
 Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,

With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,

Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

The Banks O' Doon

Robert Burns

Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?
How can ye chaunt, ye little birds,
And I'm sae weary fu' o' care?

Ye'll break my heart, ye warbling bird,
That warbles on the flowry thorn,
Ye mind me o' departed joys.
Departed never to return.

Oft hae I rov'd by bonnie Doon,
By morning and by evening shine
To hear the birds sing o' their loves
As fondly I sang o' mine.

Wi' lightsome heart I stretch'd my hand
And pu'd a rosebud from the tree.
But my fause lover stole the rose,
And ah, she left the thorn wi' me.

Romance

Claude McKay

To clasp you now and feel your head close-pressed,
Scented and warm against my beating breast;

To whisper soft and quivering your name,
And drink the passion burning in your frame;

To lie at full length, taut, with cheek to cheek,
And tease your mouth with kisses till you speak

Love words, mad words, dream words, sweet senseless words,
Melodious like notes of mating birds;

To hear you ask if I shall love always,
And myself answer: Till the end of days;

To feel your easeful sigh of happiness
When on your trembling lips I murmur: Yes;

It is so sweet. We know it is not true.
What matters it? The night must shed her dew.

We know it is not true, but it is sweet—
The poem with this music is complete.