

Poems to be read before Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis

Per-sep-o-lis (pə-r-sɛp'ə-lɪs)

An ancient city of Persia northeast of modern Shiraz in southwest Iran. It was the ceremonial capital of Darius I and his successors. Its ruins include the palaces of Darius and Xerxes and a citadel that contained the treasury looted by Alexander the Great.

1. Persepolis – Takhte Jamshid by Seyamak Ghambari

Memory of ancient times, stored in pillars of stone,
Magnificent, majestic and yet elegant Throne,
Reminder of Persian Empire once before,
The greatest kings world had ever known,
Ruled their kingdom with their much wisdom.

Persepolis, Takhte Jamshid is known to you and me,
Ordered by Daruis, the greatest king of kings,
Three years in planning and eighty years to build,
Nothing like it ever to be seen.

Kings from near and far,
Many offerings they brought,
Through the Hall of Hundred Columns they marched,
Gifts of precious jewels, Water and Earth they brought,
By the kings feet they laid them down.

Palace of such magnificent and beauty,
Columns so tall, hurts you back to see its top,
Inscriptions delicately carved on walls,
Many stories to tell you of the ancient times.

Wide staircase and The Gate of All Nations,
Welcomed all visitors, came to see The Shah,
What magnificent view that must have been?
To see the King of Kings on his throne of the time.

But now with great sadness and shame,
This majestic building left in ruins,
Desert sand claimed some parts,
Western thieves taken other parts,
Our own can't see their duty,
To keep our ancient memory safely.

There is not much left of such glory,
Hurts to see, it's lost daily,
It is our duty to preserve,
And pass on to the next,
The next generations must see,
The glories, our fathers have achieved.

Please help to restore our past,
Make the nation proud of what we have,
Open "The Gates to All Nations" once more,
Let them come, see and enjoy,
Our ancient heritage of the past.

2. The Beginning by Ahmad Shamlu

Untimely
in a land unknown
at a time yet not arrived.
Thus, I was born
within the forest of beast and rock.

My heart
in void
started beating.
I abandoned the cradle of reiteration

in a land with no bird, no spring.
My first journey was a return
from the hope-abrading vistas of thorn and sand,
without having gone far
on the inexperienced feet of the fledgeling that was I.

My first journey
was a return.

The vast distance
taught no hope.
Trembling,

I stood on the feet of the novice that was I
facing the horizon ablaze.

I realized that there was no tidings
for in between stood a mirage.
The vast distance taught no hope.
I learnt that there was no tidings:
This boundless

was a prison so huge

that the soul
hid in tears
from shame of impotence.

**from The Shahnima of Firdausi DONE INTO ENGLISH
BY ARTHUR GEORGE WARNER, M.A.**

"The homes that are the dwellings of to-day
Will sink 'neath shower and sunshine to decay,
But storm and rain shall never mar what I
Have built the palace of my poetry."

And also from that same work:

"Damn this world, damn this time, damn this fate"

Someone Who Is Not Like Anyone by Forugh Farrokhzad

Part I

I've had a dream that someone is coming.
 I've dreamt of a red star,
 and my eyes lids keep twitching
 and my shoes keep snapping to attention
 and may I go blind
 if I'm lying.
 I've dreamt of that red star
 when I wasn't asleep.
 Someone is coming,
 someone is coming
 someone better,

 someone who is like no one,
 not like Father,
 not like Ensi,
 not like Yahya
 not like Mother,
 and is like the person who he ought to be.
 and his height is greater than the trees
 around the overseer's house,
 and his face is brighter
 than the face of the mahdi,
 and he's not even afraid
 Of Sayyed Javad's brother
 who has gone
 and put on a policeman's uniform.
 and he's not even afraid of Sayyed Javad himself
 who owns all the rooms of our house.
 and his name just like Mother
 says it at the beginning
 and at the end of prayers
 is either 'judge of judges'
 or 'need of needs'.
 And with his eyes closed
 he can recite
 all the hard words
 in the third grade book,
 and he can even take away a thousand
 from twenty million without coming up short.
 and he can buy on credit
 however much he needs
 from Sayyed Javad's store.
 And he can do something

so that the neon Allah sign
 which was as green as dawn
 will shine again
 in the sky above the Meftahiyan Mosque.
 O.
 how good bright light is,
 how good bright light is,
 and I want so much
 for Yahya
 to have a cart
 and a small lantern,
 and I want so much
 to sit on Yahya's cart
 in the middle of the melons
 and ride around Mohammadiyeh Square.
 O.
 how great it is to ride around the square,
 how great it is to sleep on the roof,
 how great going to Melli Park is,
 how good going to test of Pepsi is
 how wonderful Fardin's movies are,
 and how I like all good things.
 and I want so much
 to pull Sayyed Javad's daughter's hair.

Part II

why am I so small
 that I can get lost on the streets?
 why doesn't my father
 who isn't this small
 and who doesn't get lost on the streets
 do something so that the person
 who has appeared in my dreams
 will speed up his arrival?
 And the people in the slaughter-house
 neighborhood
 where even the earth in their gardens
 is bloody
 and even the water in their courtyard pools
 is bloody
 and even their shoe soles are bloody,
 why don't they do something?
 how lazy the winter sunshine is.

I've swept the stairs to the roof
 and I've washed the windows too.
 How come Father has to the dream
 Only in his sleep?
 I've swept the stairs to the roof
 and I've washed the windows too.

Someone is coming,
 someone is coming,
 someone who in his heart is with us,
 in his breathing is with us,
 in his voice is with us,

someone whose coming
 can't be stopped
 and handcuffed and thrown in jail,
 someone who's been born
 under Yahya's old clothes,
 and day by day
 grows bigger and bigger,
 someone from the rain,
 from the sound of rain splashing,
 from among the whispering petunias.
 someone is coming from the sky
 at Tupkhaneh Square
 on the night of the fireworks
 to spread out the table cloth
 and divide up the bread
 and pass out the Pepsi
 and divide up Melli Park
 and pass out the whooping cough syrup
 and pass out the slips on registration day
 and give everybody hospital
 waiting room numbers
 and distribute the rubber boots
 and pass out Fardin movie tickets
 and give away Sayyed Javad's
 daughter's dresses
 and give away whatever doesn't sell
 and even give us our share.
 I've had a dream.



"There is so little to remember of anyone - an anecdote, a conversation at a table. But every memory is turned over and over again, every word, however chance, written in the heart in the hope that memory will fulfill itself, and become flesh, and that the wanderers will find a way home, and the perished, whose lack we always feel, will step through the door finally and stroke our hair with dreaming habitual fondness not having meant to keep us waiting long."
 — Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

3. The Ballad of the Dead Ladies

by: François Villon (1431-1489)

TELL me now in what hidden way is
 Lady Flora the lovely Roman?
 Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thais,
 Neither of them the fairer woman?
 Where is Echo, beheld of no man,
 Only heard on river and mere,--
 She whose beauty was more than human? . . .
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

Where's Héloïse, the learned nun,
 For whose sake Abeillard, I ween,
 Lost manhood and put priesthood on?
 (From Love he won such dule and teen!)
 And where, I pray you, is the Queen
 Who willed that Buridan should steer
 Sewed in a sack's mouth down the Seine? . . .
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

White Queen Blanche, like a queen of lilies,
 With a voice like any mermaiden,--
 Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice,
 And Ermengarde the lady of Maine,--
 And that good Joan whom Englishmen
 At Rouen doomed and burned her there,--
 Mother of God, where are they then? . . .
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
 Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
 Save with this much for an overword,--
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

*Childhood," said
 English poet John
 Betjeman, "is
 measured out by
 sounds and smells
 and sights, before
 the dark hour of
 reason grows."*

4. The World and the Child – by James Merrill

Letting his wisdom be the whole of love,
 The father tiptoes out, backwards. A gleam
 Falls on the child awake and wearied of,

Then, as the door clicks shut, is snuffed. The glove-
 Gray afterglow appalls him. It would seem
 That letting wisdom be the whole of love

Were pastime even for the bitter grove
 Outside, whose owl's white hoot of disesteem
 Falls on the child awake and wearied of.

He lies awake in pain, he does not move,
 He will not scream. Any who heard him scream
 Would let their wisdom be the whole of love.

People have filled the room he lies above.
 Their talk, mild variation, chilling theme,
 Falls on the child. Awake and wearied of

Mere pain, mere wisdom also, he would have
 All the world waking from its winter dream,
 Letting its wisdom be. The whole of love
 Falls on the child awake and wearied of.

5. THE PICTURE OF A BRIGHT WINDOW by Meymanat Mirsadeghi

I went to the window and said:
 "Oh! What glorious sunshine!
 What a bright day!
 What rich blossoming happiness
 Is present in everything!"

I said to myself:
 "I will grow with plants,
 I will sing with birds,
 I will flow with waters."
 I said to myself:
 "I will drink the day,
 - This gold-rimmed goblet
 brimful with sunshine -
 In one draught!"

I stayed by the window,
 I stayed,
 And then my small room
 began to fill with melancholy,
 - Heavy black smoke -
 And my desire to grow,
 to sing, / to flow
 Was the picture of a bright window
 In this closed space,
 Inside these four walls.

The leaden sky of the dusk
 With its melancholy, mourning rain
 Was softly crying.

6. It is I Who Must Begin by Vaclav Havel

It is I who must begin.
 Once I begin, once I try --
 here and now,
 right where I am,
 not excusing myself
 by saying things
 would be easier elsewhere,
 without grand speeches and
 ostentatious gestures,
 but all the more persistently
 -- to live in harmony
 with the "voice of Being," as I
 understand it within myself
 -- as soon as I begin that,
 I suddenly discover,
 to my surprise, that
 I am neither the only one,
 nor the first,
 nor the most important one
 to have set out
 upon that road.

Whether all is really lost
 or not depends entirely on
 whether or not I am lost.

7. Oppression by Langston Hughes

Now dreams
 Are not available
 To the dreamers,
 Nor songs
 To the singers.

In some lands
 Dark night
 And cold steel
 Prevail
 But the dream
 Will come back,
 And the song
 Break
 Its jail.

8. Leaving Home by Ananda Gopan

This is not a dream,
 Because in my dreams,
 there is always comfort...
 but here i am struggling...

I am leaving my home
 with all my books and
 with all i have..
 we are shifting to
 another place,
 new and unfamiliar...

i try to contain my sorrow
 as i leave my home.
 I try to still my heart
 as i-
 slip from my room with all i had there
 moving slowly,
 out of my home,
 i cross through
 many of the funny memories
 i had there

It is the middle of the night
 and-
 I hear every sound
 inside me,
 outside me..

i entered the cab and
 it drove through the calm night,
 under the stars
 with the earth trembling beneath,
 calling me back
 The tress one against other
 calling me back...

when my home had gone
 out of my sight,
 i slipped under my moms hands
 letting the cab
 carry me
 away from my heart,
 away from my home..
 I am
 leaving
 my home...

