Poems to be read before Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis

Per·sep·o·lis (pər-sep ə-līs)

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 Jamishid 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 Jamishid 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

someone better,

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 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.

dreaming out loud

they say
this
history
is forever
repeating
itself
if we hold
perfectly
still

"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 Héloise, 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,

upon that road. Whether all is really lost or not depends entirely on

whether or not I am lost.

nor the most important one

nor the first,

to have set out

7. Oppression by Langston Hughes

Now dreams Are not available To the dreamers. Nor songs

In some lands Dark night And cold steel

To the singers.

Prevail

Its jail.

But the dream Will come back, And the song Break

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...

Some Revisited Poems & a Text

"Musée des Beaux Arts" by W.H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently,
passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to
happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its

Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and
the torturer's horse

Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry, But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone

As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green

Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen

Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky, Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on. W.H. Auden



From "The Seafarer" an ancient Anglo-Saxon poem

The days have departed, all the presumption of earthly rule—there are no longer the kings or kaisers or the gold-givers such as there were, when they performed the greatest glories among them and dwelt in the most sovereign reputation.

Crumbled are all these glories, their joys have departed. The weaker abide and keep hold of the world...

"Childhood" by Rainer Maria Rilke

It would be good to give much thought, before you try to find words for something so lost, for those long childhood afternoons you knew that vanished so completely -and why?

We're still reminded-: sometimes by a rain, but we can no longer say what it means; life was never again so filled with meeting, with reunion and with passing on

as back then, when nothing happened to us except what happens to things and creatures: we lived their world as something human, and became filled to the brim with figures.

And became as lonely as a sheperd and as overburdened by vast distances, and summoned and stirred as from far away, and slowly, like a long new thread, introduced into that picture-sequence where now having to go on bewilders us.

From the last page of The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an æsthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there, brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic_future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.