



Sweet Poetry

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

5-7 pm

Klarman Hall Atrium



Any Poem, Any Language!

The Cornell University Language Resource Center (LRC) is pleased to hold the 2024 annual Sweet Poetry event! This spring, we invited students across campus to recite/sign their favorite poems written in various languages. Students generously devoted their time to selecting a piece and practicing their performance. Celebrate National Poetry Month this April by experiencing this year's selection of poems performed in languages spoken and signed around the world! Each poem in this program features the written text in the original language as well as an approximate English translation. We have also provided information about the poet, poem background, and reader/signer. Please feel free to reference these pages as you enjoy this unique poetry reading experience while savoring delicious desserts!



Appreciating the Intersection Between Poetry and Language

“Each language has a different cadence and they all rhyme in different ways. So, you end up being able to express your emotions differently in each one! What a fabulous occurrence this is, no? That we can, by checking out different languages, learn something more about our own feelings!” – Jonathan Richman, *American musician*

“Poetry has never been the language of barriers; it’s always been the language of bridges.” – Amanda Gorman, *American poet and activist*

“A different language is a different vision of life.” – Federico Fellini, *Italian filmmaker*

“Speak a new language so that the world will be a new world.” – Rumi, *Persian poet*

“I don’t think of writing my poems for China or for the world. I mainly think of a small audience of friends and people I know. I am writing for that small group.” – Bei Dao, *Chinese-American writer*

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.” – Nelson Mandela, *first President of South Africa*

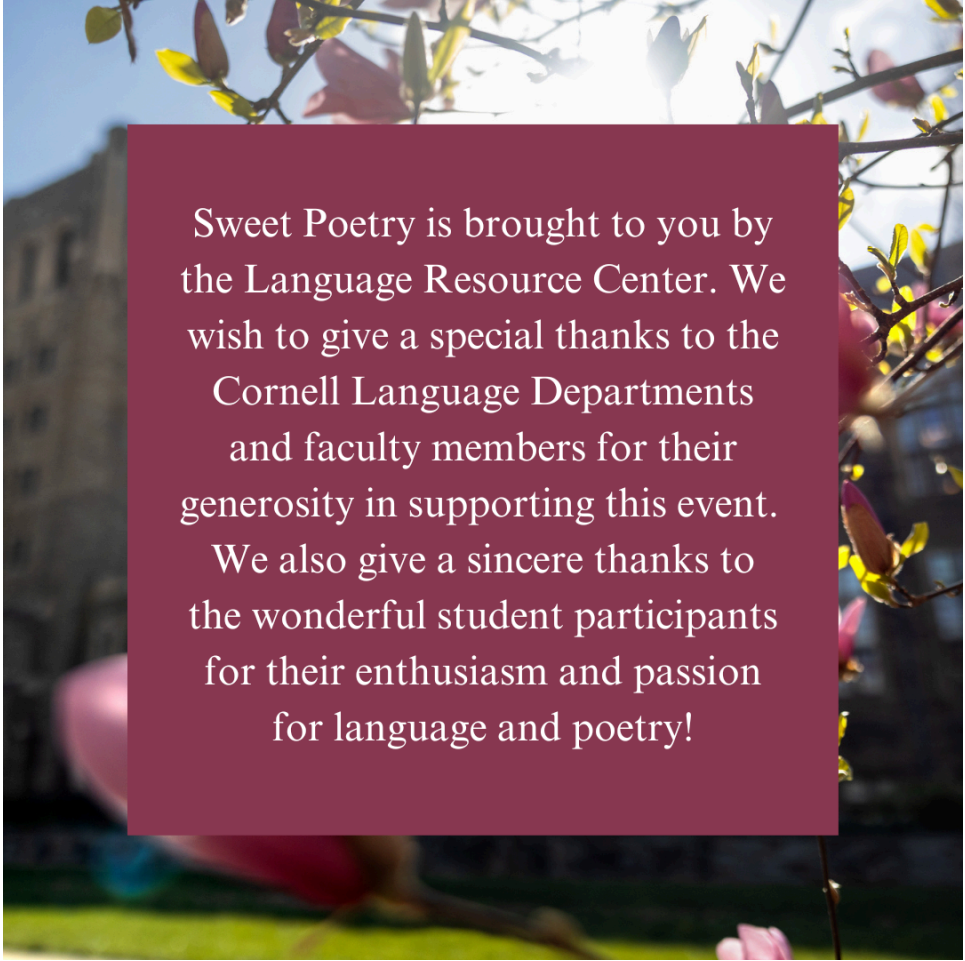
“The limits of my language are the limits of my world.” – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Austrian philosopher*

“Poetry begins where language starts: in the shadows and accidents of one person’s life.” – Eavan Boland, *Irish poet*

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The background of the slide features a photograph of a building, likely a Cornell University structure, partially obscured by the branches and blossoms of a flowering tree in the foreground. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly out-of-focus manner, with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The text is overlaid on a dark red rectangular box in the center of the image.

Sweet Poetry is brought to you by
the Language Resource Center. We
wish to give a special thanks to the
Cornell Language Departments
and faculty members for their
generosity in supporting this event.
We also give a sincere thanks to
the wonderful student participants
for their enthusiasm and passion
for language and poetry!

Land Acknowledgement

Cornell University is located on the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:nq? (the Cayuga Nation). The Gayogohó:nq? are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign Nations with a historic and contemporary presence on this land. The Confederacy precedes the establishment of Cornell University, New York state, and the United States of America. We acknowledge the painful history of Gayogohó:nq? dispossession, and honor the ongoing connection of Gayogohó:nq? people, past and present, to these lands and waters.

The [Indigenous Dispossession Project](#) at Cornell has more information about the history of dispossession of native lands in the United States.

Pronunciation guide: Gayogohó:nq? is approximately Guy-yo-KO-no and Haudenosaunee is approximately Ho-di-no-SO-ni.

Introduction

Please welcome Drs. Emilia Mahiques and Macarena Tejada López for an introduction to Sweet Poetry's mission of community, connection, and appreciation for language and culture.

We are interested in collecting testimonies of empathy, kindness, and compassion between people of different groups: a student, a professor, an administrator, or an employee. Please scan the QR code or use the link below to share with us an experience you may have had:



[Link to share your testimony](#)

Polish

Poem

“Cat in an Empty Apartment”

Wisława Szymborska

1993

Translated by Stanisław Barańczak & Clare Cavanagh

Background

A household name in Polish residences, Wisława Szymborska was a Nobel Prize-winning poet who frequently wrote about themes of longing. This particular poem is written from the point of view of a cat.

Reader

Veronika Kowalski

Kot w Pustym Mieszkaniu

Umrzeć – tego nie robi się kotu.
Bo co ma począć kot
w pustym mieszkaniu.
Wdrapywać się na ściany.
Ocierać między meblami.
Nic niby tu nie zmienione,
a jednak pozamieniane.
Niby nie przesunięte,
a jednak porozsuwane.
I wieczorami lampa już nie świeci.

Słyszać kroki na schodach,
ale to nie te.
Ręka, co kładzie rybę na talerzyk,
także nie ta, co kładła.

Coś się tu nie zaczyna
w swojej zwykłej porze.
Coś się tu nie odbywa
jak powinno.
Ktoś tutaj był i był,
a potem nagle zniknął
i uporczywie go nie ma.

Do wszystkich szaf się zajrzało.
Przez półki przebiegło.
Wcisnęło się pod dywan i sprawdziło.
Nawet złamało zakaz
i rozrzuciło papiery.
Co więcej jest do zrobienia.
Spać i czekać.

Niech no on tylko wróci,
niech no się pokaże.
Już on się dowie,
że tak z kotem nie można.
Będzie się szło w jego stronę
jakby się wcale nie chciało,
pomalutku,
na bardzo obrażonych łapach.
I żadnych skoków pisków na początek.

“Cat in an Empty Apartment”

Die – you can’t do that to a cat.
Since what can a cat do
in an empty apartment?
Climb the walls?
Rub up against the furniture?
Nothing seems different here,
but nothing is the same.
Nothing has been moved,
but there’s more space.
And at nighttime no lamps are lit.

Footsteps on the staircase,
but they’re new ones.
The hand that puts fish on the saucer
has changed, too.

Something doesn’t start
at its usual time.
Something doesn’t happen
as it should.
Someone was always, always here,
then suddenly disappeared
and stubbornly stays disappeared.

Every closet has been examined.
Every shelf has been explored.
Excavations under the carpet
turned up nothing.
A commandment was even broken:
papers scattered everywhere.
What remains to be done.
Just sleep and wait.

Just wait till he turns up,
just let him show his face.
Will he ever get a lesson
on what not to do to a cat.
Sidle toward him
as if unwilling
and ever so slow
on visibly offended paws,
and no leaps or squeals at least to start.

Urdu

Poem

“Prayer”

Muhammah Iqbal

1902

Background

“Lab pe aati hai dua” also known as “bachche ki dua” (children’s prayer) by Muhammah Iqbal is one of the first Urdu poems my father taught me, as he fondly recalls his youth in Pakistan. This poem often finds its way into our conversations, accompanied by the melodies of hudhud birds at dawn and the nostalgic recitations of this dua (prayer) within Pakistani school assemblies. Its enduring fame is attributed not only to its enchanting verses but also to its esteemed author, hailed as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, earning him the revered title of Allamah. This dua is merely a fragment of the exquisite tapestry of literary gems that Allama Iqbal has gifted to the world but it serves as a guiding light, reminding us of the beauty found in simple prayers uttered from the depths of the heart.

Reader

Saltanat Fatima

لب پہ آتی ہے دعا

“Prayer”

Urdu	Roman Urdu	English Translation
لب پہ آتی ہے دعا بن کے تمنا میری زندگی شمع کی صورت ہو خدا یا میری	lab pe aati hai dua ban ke tamanna miri zindagi shamma ki surat ho Xudaaya miri	My longing comes to my lips as a supplication of mine Oh God! May like a shining candle be the life of mine
دور دنیا کا میرے دم سے اندھیرا ہو جائے ہر جگہ میرے چمکنے سے اُجالا ہو جائے	duur dunya ka mere dam se andhera ho jaye har jagah mire chamakne se ujaala ho jaye	May the darkness of this world disappear through this life of mine May every place light up with the sparkling light of mine
ہو میرے دم سے یوں ہی میرے وطن کی زیست جس طرح پھول سے ہوتی ہے چمن کی زیست	ho mire dam se yunhi mire vatan ki zeenat jis tarha phuul se hoti hai chaman ki zeenat	May my homeland, through me, attain elegance Just as the garden, through flowers, attains elegance
زندگی ہو میری پروانے کی صورت، یا رب علم کی شمع سے ہو مجھ کو محبت، یا رب	zindagi ho miri parwane ki surat, ya Rabb ilm ki shamma se ho mujh ko muhabbat, ya Rabb	May my life be like that of the moth, Oh Lord May my love be for the beacon of knowledge, Oh Lord
ہو میرا کام غریبوں کی حمایت کرنا درد مندوں سے ضعیفوں سے محبت کرنا	ho mira kaam ghareebon ki himaayat karna dardmandon se za'eefon se muhabbat karna	May my life's way be to support the needy And to love the old and the grief-stricken
میرے اللہ! بُرائی سے بچانا مجھ کو نیک جو راہ ہو، اُس رہ چلاانا مجھ کو	mire Allah! buraai se bachaana mujhko nek jo raah ho, us reh pe chalaana mujhko	My God! Protect me from the evil ways Walk me through the path that leads to virtue

Irish

Poem

“My Own Love (In Brackets)”

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

1988

Background

Mo Ghrá-sa is a poem written in the Irish language by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, one of the foremost poets of the Irish language in the 20th century. The poem is a love letter from the poet to her partner, expressing her deep feelings of affection and devotion. In the poem, Ní Dhomhnaill describes the joy and fulfillment that her love brings to her life, and she reflects on the bond that she shares with her partner.

Reader

Vishnu Pusarapu

Mo Ghrá-Sa

“My Own Love”

Nil mo ghrá-sa
Mar bhláth na n-airní
Ar bhíonn i ngairdín
(nó ar chrann ar bith)

My own love
he's no blackthorn flower
in a garden
(nor on any tree)

is má tá aon ghaol aige
le nóiníní
is as a chluasa a fhásfaidh siad
(nuair a bheidh sé ocht dtroigh síos)

and if he's anything to do
with daisies
it's from his ears they'll grow
(when he's eight feet under)

ní haon ghlaise cheolmhar
iad a shúile
(táid róchóngarach dá chéile
ar an gcéad dul síos)

His eyes do not shine
like a mountain stream
(they're much too close-set
to make him a Hollywood dream)

is más slim é síoda
tá ribí a ghruaige
(mar bhean dhubh Shakespeare)
ina _wire_ deilgní.

and if silk is smooth
the hairs of his head
(like Shakespeare's Dark Lady)
are thorny wire.

Ach is cuma sin.
Tugann sé dom
Úlla
(is nuair a bhíonn sé i ndea-ghiúmar
caora finiúna).

But it doesn't matter.
He gives me
apples
(and when he's in good humor
he gives me grapes).

French

Poem

“Autumn Leaves”

Jacques Prévert

1945

Background

Les feuilles mortes is one of hundreds of poems written by Jacques Prévert (1900-1977). After having been set to a tune similar to a lullaby, the words have become the lyrics to one of the most well-known jazz standards, and a personal favorite. It mourns a lost love.

Reader

Veronika Kowalski

Les Feuilles Mortes

Oh, je voudrais tant que tu te souviennes
Des jours heureux où nous étions amis
En ce temps-là, la vie était plus belle
Et le soleil plus brûlant qu'aujourd'hui

Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle
Tu vois, je n'ai pas oublié
Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle
Les souvenirs et les regrets aussi

Et le vent du Nord les emporte
Dans la nuit froide de l'oubli
Tu vois, je n'ai pas oublié
La chanson que tu me chantais

C'est une chanson qui nous ressemble
Toi tu m'aimais, et je t'aimais
Nous vivions tous les deux ensemble
Toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais

Mais la vie sépare ceux qui s'aiment
Tout doucement, sans faire de bruit
Et la mer efface sur le sable
Les pas des amants désunis

“Autumn Leaves”

How I wish that you would remember
The good old days, when we were close
The point where life was good
And the sun was brighter than today

Autumn leaves are shoveled away
But my image of you is lasting
Autumn leaves are hidden away
Fond memories as well as regrets

The north wind carries them
Through the cold night to be forgotten
But me, I haven't forgotten
That song you sang to me

It's an old tune that mirrors us
You who loved me, and I loved you
It was just the two of us
You who loved me, and I, who loved you

But life happens and separates lovers
Ever so softly, without a sound
And the ocean erases from the sand
The footsteps of loves long gone

Hindi

Poem

“A Thought Came to My Lips”

Javed Akhtar

2011

Background

Javed Akhtar is a celebrated Indian poet, lyricist, and screenwriter known for his profound exploration of human emotions and experiences in his poetry and lyrics. Javed Akhtar’s ghazal (poem) “Ik baat honton tak hai” (“A thought came to my lips”) explores the theme of unspoken emotions and silent communication between two individuals. The poet suggests that there are feelings and desires that are felt deeply but remain unexpressed verbally, observed only through the eyes. The essence of these feelings is compared to a fragrance in the air, perceptible yet intangible, known to all, yet shrouded in mystery. Ultimately, this ghazal captures the ineffable essence of silent communication and the profound depth of shared emotions between friends or lovers, alike.

Reader

Janhvie Joshi

Ik Baat Honton Tak Hai

Ik baat honton tak hai jo aayi nahin
Bas ankhon say hai jhaankti
Tumse kabhi,
mujhse kabhi
Kuch lafz hain woh maangti
Jinko pehanke honton tak aa jaaye woh...
Aawaaz ki baahon mein baahein daalke ithlaye woh
Lekin jo yeh ik baat hai
Ahsas hi ahsas hai
Khushboo si hai jaise hawa mein tairti
Khushboo jo be-aawaaz hai
Jiska pata tumko bhi hai
Jiski khabar mujhko bhi hai
Duniya se bhi chupta nahin
Yeh jaane kaisa raaz hai

“A Thought Came to My Lips”

A thought came to my lips, which is not to flee
It stole a glance from under your eyes
Sometimes from you,
Sometimes from me,
It asked for words to set it free
Words from the lips to wear and to flee
A voice it can embrace, and sway with glee
But this thought
It's a feeling, just a feeling
Like a fragrance floating in the breeze
A fragrance that is unspeaking
Whose scent, you also have
Whose knowledge, I also have
From the world, it is not hidden
Who knows what type of secret is this

Portuguese

Poem

“XXI: If I Could Caress in My Mouth the Whole World”

Fernando Pessoa (under heteronym Alberto Caeiro)

1914

Background

Renowned poet Fernando Pessoa wrote under three main literary personas, giving each of these heteronyms a complex life separate from his own filled with unique aesthetics and psychology. The persona of this poem, Alberto Caeiro, is special for his simple perceiving of the world as opposed to interpretation, evoking a sense of wide-eyed childlike wonder and primality. The following poem explores natural living as encompassing both happiness and unhappiness.

Readers

Isabela Carvalho

Giselle Oldani

XXI: Se Eu Pudessem Trincar a Terra Toda

Se eu pudesse trincar a terra toda
E sentir-lhe um paladar,
E se a terra fosse uma coisa para trincar
Seria mais feliz um momento...
Mas eu nem sempre quero ser feliz.
É preciso ser de vez em quando infeliz
Para se poder ser natural...

Nem tudo é dias de sol,
E a chuva, quando falta muito, pede-se.
Por isso tomo a infelicidade com a felicidade
Naturalmente, como quem não estranha
Que haja montanhas e planícies
E que haja rochedos e erva

O que é preciso é ser-se natural e calmo
Na felicidade ou na infelicidade,
Sentir como quem olha,
Pensar como quem anda,
E quando se vai morrer, lembrar-se de que o dia morre,
E que o poente é belo e belo a noite que fica...
Assim é e assim seja...

“XXI: If I Could Caress in My Mouth the Whole World”

If I could caress in my mouth the whole world
And feel her full bodied taste,
And if the earth was a thing to bite upon
Would I be happier for that brief moment...
But I don't always want to be happy.
You have to be, once in a while, unhappy
In order to be normal...

It's not all days of sunshine
As the rain, when far away, does appear.
And so I take the unhappiness with the happiness
Naturally, like someone not surprised
That there are mountains and plains
And that there are rocks and grass...

What is needed is to be natural and calm
In happiness or in unhappiness,
Feeling like one who is seeing,
Thinking like one who has been,
And when it is time to go, remember that the day goes too,
And that the sunset is beautiful and it's beautiful at night too...
It is the way it is, and that's how it is...

Japanese

Poem

“Solar Eclipse”

Rachel Ho

2024

Background

Rachel is a senior majoring in Computer Science currently in her fourth semester of Japanese. She is excited to spend her summer abroad this year continuing her Japanese studies in Osaka! After learning about a Japanese folktale on the origin of the solar eclipse and the sun goddess Amaterasu, her class was tasked with writing haikus, a short form of poetry that originated in Japan, about solar eclipses – also in light of the recent total solar eclipse. This haiku is about the brief yet special moment of time the sun and the moon meet each other in the sky.

Reader

Rachel Ho

日食
“Solar Eclipse”

太陽と月
少しだけ会う
今度またね

The sun and the moon
Meet for only a moment
Until the next time

French

Poem

“To Two Beautiful Eyes”

Théophile Gautier

1833

Translated by David Paley

Background

Théophile Gautier was a French poet, author, and critic, who was prominent in the 19th-century Romantic movement. His poetry, characterized by its musicality and sensual imagery, captured the essence of beauty and love.

When my late grandfather and grandmother had an arranged marriage in India, my grandfather was enamored by my grandmother’s large and beautiful eyes. Years later after bearing children, my grandmother received her Master’s degree in French Language and Culture. My grandfather studied a little bit of French, mostly the pronunciation, such that he would be able to recite the poem “À Deux Beaux Yeux” to my grandmother in French. My father told me that this was the most romantic aspect of his parents’ relationship during his upbringing.

Reader

Janhvie Joshi

À Deux Beaux Yeux

Vous avez un regard singulier et charmant;
Comme la lune au fond du lac qui la reflète,
Votre prunelle, où brille une humide paillette,
Au coin de vos doux yeux roule languissamment;

Ils semblent avoir pris ses feux au diamant;
Ils sont de plus belle eau qu'une perle parfaite,
Et vos grands cils émus, de leur aile inquiète
Ne voilent qu'à demi leur vif rayonnement.

Mille petits amours à leur miroir de flamme
Se viennent regarder et se trouvent plus beaux,
Et les désirs y vont rallumer leurs flambeaux.

Ils sont si transparents qu'ils laissent voir votre âme,
Comme une fleur céleste au calice idéal
Que l'on apercevrait à travers un cristal.

“To Two Beautiful Eyes”

Remarkable charm does from your glances arise
Like the moon reflected from the depths of a lake,
Where glistening sequins glow in the light
To play in the corners of amorous eyes.

It seems they have taken their diamond blaze
From perfect pearls in more beautiful waters;
And, so anxiously beating, your fluttering lashes
Veil only a half of their radiant gaze.

A thousand admirers who search for beauty untold
Come to look into your mirrors of flame
Where their desires return to light torches again.

So transparent are they that one sees in your soul
A heavenly flower that has so flawless a petal
Like that perceived when viewed through a crystal.

Bangla

Poem

“Endless Love”

Rabindranath Thakur (Tagore)

1890

Background

Rabindranath Thakur was born on Tuesday, 7th May 1861 in a wealthy family in Calcutta. Even though he is mainly known as a poet, his versatile talent showered upon different branches of art, such as novels, short stories, dramas, articles, essays, painting, etc. This poem delves into the timeless nature of love, envisioning its existence through numerous lives and epochs. The speaker professes having loved the beloved in various guises, suggesting an enduring connection transcending mortal boundaries.

Reader

Natasha Zarrin

অনন্ত প্রেম

তোমারেই যেন ভালোবাসিয়াছি শত রূপে শতবার
জনমে জনমে, যুগে যুগে অনিবার।
চিরকাল ধরে মুগ্ধ হৃদয় গাঁথিয়াছে গীতহার,
কত রূপ ধরে পরেছ গলায়, নিয়েছ সে উপহার
জনমে জনমে, যুগে যুগে অনিবার।

যত শুনি সেই অতীত কাহিনী, প্রাচীন প্রেমের ব্যথা,
অতি পুরাতন বিরহমিলন কথা,
অসীম অতীতে চাহিতে চাহিতে দেখা দেয় অবশেষে
কালের তিমিররজনী ভেদিয়া তোমারি মুরতি এসে,
চিরস্মৃতিময়ী ধ্রুবতারকার বেশে।

আমরা দুজনে ভাসিয়া এসেছি যুগল প্রেমের স্রোতে
অনাদিকালের হৃদয়-উৎস হতে।
আমরা দুজনে করিয়াছি খেলা কোটি প্রেমিকের মাঝে
বিরহবিধুর নয়নসলিলে, মিলনমধুর লাজে—
পুরাতন প্রেম নিত্যনূতন সাজে।

আজি সেই চিরদিবসের প্রেম অবসান লভিয়াছে
রাশি রাশি হয়ে তোমার পায়ের কাছে।
নিখিলের সুখ, নিখিলের দুখ, নিখিল প্রাণের প্রীতি,
একটি প্রেমের মাঝারে মিশেছে সকল প্রেমের স্মৃতি—
সকল কালের সকল কবির গীতি।

“Endless Love”

I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times...
In life after life, in age after age, forever.
My spellbound heart has made and remade the necklace of songs,
That you gracefully accept as a gift, wear beautifully round your neck in your
many forms,
In life after life, in age after age, forever.

Whenever I hear old chronicles of love, its age-old agony,
Its ancient tale of union and separation.
As I stare on and on into the past, in the end you emerge,
Clad in the light of an eternal-star piercing the darkness of time:
You become an image of what is remembered forever.

You and I have floated here on the stream that springs from the fount.
At the heart of time, love of one for another.
We have played alongside millions of lovers, shared in the same
Shy sweetness of meeting, the same distressful tears of farewell –
Old love but in shapes that renew and renew forever.

Today it is heaped at your feet, it has found its end in you
The love of all man's days both past and forever:
Universal joy, universal sorrow, universal life.
The memories of all loves merging with this one love of ours –
And the songs of every poet past and forever.

Spanish

Poem

“I Fall Into the Mouth”

Juliana Torres Forero

2024

Background

This poem gives voice to a human body losing its contours on its journey through a river. It talks about the transmutation of the flesh in the process of dying when the body overflows its limits and begins to melt with other living forms. With the rhythm and musicality of short verses and precise images, the poem shows the journey toward the union with the environment and its vital forces.

Reader

Juliana Torres

Desemboco

*el animal se revuelca en el barro
está cantando*

Blanca Varela

Estos son mis esfuerzos
bajo la lumbre
que recibí al morir
me cargo de savia
y del calor de las manadas
que vociferan solas en el río
me acostumbro a ser
el olor de las piedras
y la humedad del musgo

las sombras encienden
mi cuerpo extinto
el oleaje me abre
como un manto de agua
yo cobijo a todas las criaturas
que burbujan su vivir
y les digo con destellos
a los que quisieron domarme
que se aparten que me dejen sola
yo ya no participo
de su mundo desconocedor
de la herida primaria de los ríos

las aguas se abren se derraman
se cargan de voces susurran la historia
de su tiempo sin hombres
en esa geografía soy yo la india

con mi cabellera suelta
alga iridiscente

mi piel membranosa
abre su lengua
y lame a la pájara
que dejó sus huevos
cerca de la orilla
los huevos me miran nacer
brillan en la soledad
de su tiempo
se rompen chillan
en el lodazal
donde se arremolina el agua

me hundo y gozo
de los peces mordiendo mis muslos
de la risa del oleaje
del estallido de las hojas
que caen desde los abetos
soy la piedra antes de que existiera
esta voz ronca de la luz
entre la tierra dormida
en el lecho que me recibe

caigo en la desembocadura
el mar se agolpa en mi frente morena
me cubre toda de espumas
corales y ramas
a las que no busco asirme
y dejo que la vida me despida
con su canto animal
el calor del río
cuando el cuerpo lo amansa.

“I Fall Into the Mouth”

*the animal wallows in the mud
it is singing*

Blanca Varela

These are my efforts
under the flame
that I received when dying
I am charged with sap
and the warmth of the herds
howling alone in the river
I get used to be
the smell of the stones
and the humidity of the moss

the shadows ignite
my extinct body
the waves open me up
like a mantle of water
I shelter all creatures
bubbling their lives
and I say with glimmers
to those who tried to tame me
to move away and leave me alone
I no longer participate
of their world ignorant
of the primal wound of rivers

the waters open pour out
they are filled with voices murmuring the story
of their time without men
in that geography I am the Indian woman

with my flowing hair
iridescent seaweed

my membranous skin
opens its tongue
and licks the bird
that left its eggs
near the shore
the eggs watch my birth
they shine in the solitude
of their time
they break they screech
in the mire
where the water swirls

I sink and find pleasure
in the fish biting my thighs
in the laughter of the waves
the bursting of the leaves
falling from fir trees
I am the stone before it existed
this hoarse voice of light
among the dormant earth
on the riverbed receiving me

I fall into the mouth
the sea rushes against my forehead
it covers me with foam
corals and branches
to which I do not seek to cling
and I let life bid me farewell
with its animal song
the heat of the river
when the body tames it.

Kazakh

Poem

“Wake Up, Kazakh”

Mirjaqip Dulatuly

1909

Background

This poem was written by Mirjaqip Dulatuly, a Kazakh poet, writer, and politician. He had a giant impact on Kazakhs in the 20th century. He was one of the creators of the “Kazakh” newspaper, which was illegal in the Soviet Union. Dulatuly fought for Kazakh autonomy and was trying to educate Kazakh people because the Russian government severely discriminated against them. Kazakh people were not allowed to speak Kazakh language or read Kazakh books. He encouraged Kazakhs to learn their native language and wrote many books in Kazakh, too. In 1928, the Soviet authorities imprisoned Dulatuly for ten years. While there, he continued writing poems and books in Kazakh, spreading them among Kazakh people. Dulatuly died in a camp in 1935. However, the Kazakh nation remembers him and is grateful for his education and books.

This poem encourages Kazakhs to “wake up!” and not forget about our ancestors’ hardships. Dulatuly encourages us to be proud of our nation and to keep fighting for freedom.

Reader

Aigerim Orynassar

Оян, Қазақ

Көзіңді аш, оян қазақ, көтер басты,
Өткізбей қараңғыда бекер жасты.
Жер кетті, дін нашарлап, хал арам боп,
Қарағым, енді жату жарамас-ты.
Найзаменен түртсе де,
Жатырсын, қазақ, оянбай.
Мұнша қалың ұйқыны
Бердің бізге, ой, Алла-ай!
Бар ма екен біздей ғафыл жұрт,
Атырафқа көз салсақ.
Көзі іскенше ұйқыға
Келе жатқан тоя алмай?
Етемін үміт жастардан,
Жаңа гүл шашқан бақшадай.
Мұрадын оңай кім табар,
Жар салып жұртқа қақсамай?
Халыққа, жастар, басшы бол!
Қараңғыда жетектеп.
Терең судан өтер ме,
Мың қойды серке бастамай?

“Wake Up, Kazakh”

Open your eyes, wake up Kazakh, raise your head,
Don't spend your youth in the dark.
The land is gone, the religion is deteriorating, and the people are unclean.
Look, it's not good to be sleeping now.
Though thrust with a spear,
You are sleeping, Kazakh, and not waking up.
Such a deep sleep
You gave us, oh God!
Are there people as ignorant as us?
Let's look at the confession.
We are sleeping until our eyes are swollen.
And still can't get enough of it.
My hope is from the youth,
Like from a newly blooming garden.
Because who else would keep the inheritance?
And keep the people awake?
Be the leader of the people, youth!
Leading in the dark.
Can we cross the deep water?
Without our strong people?

Italian

Poem

“What Infinite Providence and Art”

Francesco Petrarch

c. 1327

Italian

Background

Francis Petrarch, born Francesco di Petrarco in the year 1304 in the Comune di Arezzo, was a scholar and poet of the early Renaissance period in Italy. The poem, titled “Que’ ch’infinita providentia et arte,” is the fourth sonnet in his work titled “Il Canzoniere” and is one of many dedicated to a woman named Laura. Laura, a woman who he first saw in the church of Sainte-Claire d’Avignon, served as an inspiration to continue writing following his retirement as a priest. The subtle confession of his reverence for her, as demonstrated through the divinity imbued to her birth, reflects a love that is not dominated by lust or desire, but by admiration. In the end, his love remained unrequited.

Reader

Jason Moore

Que' ch'infinita Providentia et Arte

Que' ch'infinita providentia et arte
mostrò nel suo mirabil magistero,
che criò questo et quell'altro hemispero,
et mansüeto piú Giove che Marte,

vegnendo in terra a 'lluminar le carte
ch'avean molt'anni già celato il vero,
tolse Giovanni da la rete et Piero,
et nel regno del ciel fece lor parte.

Di sé nascendo a Roma non fe' gratia,
a Giudea sí, tanto sovr'ogni stato
humiltate exaltar sempre gli piacque;

ed or di picciol borgo un sol n'à dato,
tal che natura e 'l luogo si ringratia
onde sí bella donna al mondo nacque.

“What Infinite Providence and Art”

What infinite providence and art
He showed in his wonderful mastery,
who created this and the other hemisphere,
and Jupiter far gentler than Mars,

descending to earth to illuminate the page
which had for many years concealed the truth,
taking John from the nets, and Peter,
and making them part of heaven's kingdom.

It did not please him to be born in Rome,
but in Judea: to exalt humility
to such a supreme state always pleases him;

and now from a little village a sun is given,
such that the place, and nature, praise themselves,
out of which so lovely a lady is born to the world.

Sanskrit

Poem

“Nirvana Shatkam”
Adi Shankaracharya
788-820 CE

Background

Adi Shankaracharya, a philosopher and social reformer born in the 8th century CE, embarked on a spiritual journey at the age of eight, renouncing worldly life. According to legend, when he encountered his guru, Govinda Bhagavatpada, Shankaracharya was asked a fundamental question: “Who are you?” In response, he recited the Nirvana Shatkam, which later became a cornerstone text for the Advaita (non-dualistic) school of Indian philosophy. Many of us tend to identify ourselves solely with our bodies, minds, intellects, senses, or relationships. In these verses, Shankaracharya begins by refuting these common perceptions of the self and asserts that the true nature of self transcends these limited identifications and is nothing but pure divine bliss referred to as Shiva.

Reader

Suresh Kamath Bola

निर्वाणषट्कम्

मनोबुद्ध्यहङ्कार चित्तानि नाहं न च श्रोत्रजिह्वे न च घ्राणनेत्रे ।
न च व्योम भूमिर्न तेजो न वायुः चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥१॥
न च प्राणसंज्ञो न वै पञ्चवायुः न वा सप्तधातुः न वा पञ्चकोशः ।
न वाक्पाणिपादं न चोपस्थपायु चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥२॥
न मे द्वेषरागौ न मे लोभमोहौ मदो नैव मे नैव मात्सर्यभावः ।
न धर्मो न चार्थो न कामो न मोक्षः चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥३॥
न पुण्यं न पापं न सौख्यं न दुःखं न मन्त्रो न तीर्थं न वेदा न यज्ञाः ।
अहं भोजनं नैव भोज्यं न भोक्ता चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥४॥
न मृत्युर्न शङ्का न मे जातिभेदः पिता नैव मे नैव माता न जन्मः ।
न बन्धुर्न मित्रं गुरुर्नैव शिष्यं चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥५॥
अहं निर्विकल्पो निराकाररूपो विभुत्वाच्च सर्वत्र सर्वेन्द्रियाणाम् ।
न चासङ्गतं नैव मुक्तिर्न मेयः चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥६॥

English Transliteration

mano buddhyahamkāracittāni nāham na ca śrotra jihve na ca ghrāṇa netre
na ca vyoma bhūmir na tejo na vāyuh cidānanda rūpah śivoham śivoham ॥

na ca prāṇa saṁjñō na vai pañcavāyuh na vā saptadhātur na vā pañcakośah
na vākpāṇipādaḥ na copasthapāyū cidānanda rūpah śivoham śivoham ॥

na me dveṣa rāgau na me lobha mohau mado naiva me naiva mātsarya bhāvah
na dharmo na cārtho na kāmo nā mokṣah cidānanda rūpah śivoham śivoham ॥

na puṇyaṁ na pāpaṁ na saukhyaṁ na duhkham na mantro na tīrthaṁ na vedāḥ na yajñāḥ
aham bhojanaṁ naiva bhojyaṁ na bhoktā cidānanda rūpah śivoham śivoham ॥

na mṛtyur na śankā na me jātibhedaḥ pitā naiva me naiva mātā na janma
na bandhur na mitraṁ gururnaiva śiṣyah cidānanda rūpah śivoham śivoham ॥

aham nirvikalpo nirākāra rūpo vibhutvācca sarvatra sarvendriyāṇām
na cāsaṁgataṁ naiva muktir na meyaḥ cidānanda rūpah śivoham śivoham ॥

“Nirvana Shatkam”

I am not the mind, intellect, ego, or memory,
I am not the senses of hearing, taste, smell, or sight,
I am not the sky, earth, fire, water, or wind,
I am the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

I am neither the vital energy (prana), nor the five vital airs (Panchavayu),
I am not the seven elements of the body (Sapta Dhatu), nor the five sheaths (Panchakosha),
I am neither the speech, nor the hands, nor the feet, nor the organs of procreation and elimination (upastha),
I am the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

I have neither aversion nor attachment, neither greed nor delusion,
I have neither arrogance nor jealousy,
I have no duty, no wealth, no desire for pleasure, nor liberation,
I am the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

I am neither virtue nor vice, neither pleasure nor pain,
I am neither mantra nor sacred place, neither scripture nor ritual,
I am neither the one who experiences, the experience itself, nor the object being experienced,
I am the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

I am neither death nor doubt, nor any distinction of caste,
I have neither father nor mother, nor even birth,
I am neither relative nor friend, neither teacher nor disciple,
I am the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

I am without attributes, without form,
I am all-pervading and exist everywhere,
I am not attached to anything, nor am I bound,
I am the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

German

Poem

“Songs from an Island”

Ingeborg Bachmann

1954

Background

Ingeborg Bachmann was an Austrian poet and writer, who was one of the prominent figures of 20th-century German literature. Born in Klagenfurt, she later moved to study at different universities around the country, including the University of Vienna, where she did her PhD in Philosophy. Bachmann’s literature and poems were some of my first exposure to Austrian and German literature, and this excerpt from “Songs from an Island” exhibits much of the same lyricism, natural imagery, and haunting ability of the poem to linger in my mind long after I’ve read it, that drew me to her works in the first place.

Reader

Emily Hong

Lieder von einer Insel

Wenn einer fortgeht, muß er den Hut
mit den Muscheln, die er sommerüber
gesammelt hat, ins Meer werfen
und fahren mit wehendem Haar,
er muß den Tisch, den er seiner Liebe
deckte, ins Meer stürzen,
er muß den Rest des Weins,
der im Glas blieb, ins Meer schütten,
er muß den Fischen sein Brot geben
und einen Tropfen Blut ins Meer mischen,
er muß sein Messer gut in die Wellen treiben
und seinen Schuh versenken,
Herz, Anker und Kreuz,
und fahren mit wehendem Haar!
Dann wird er wiederkommen.
Wann?
Frag nicht.

“Songs from an Island”

When someone departs he must throw his hat,
filled with the mussels he spent the summer
gathering, in the sea
and sail off with his hair in the wind,
he must hurl the table,
set for his love, in the sea,
he must pour the wine,
left in his glass, into the sea,
he must give his bread to the fish
and mix a drop of his blood with the sea,
he must drive his knife deep into the waves
and sink his shoes,
heart, anchor, and cross,
and sail off with his hair in the wind.
Then he will return.
When?
Do not ask.

American Sign Language

Poem

“Eye Music”

Ella Mae Lentz

1995

Translated by Bianca Waked

Background

Written by the American poet Ella Mae Lentz, “Eye Music” tells the visual story of music through the image of long, unending telephone wires. Growing up Deaf in a hearing family, I often found myself captivated by this exact phenomenon. The familiarity of this experience, then, led to my choosing this poem for this evening’s program. I hope you enjoy my tribute to this ordinary, beautiful experience that is so common within the Deaf community.

Signer

Bianca Waked

Eye Music

The eye music of the telephone wires. Sheets of music with lines that rise and fall, flowing through time and space. Ears for hearing? There is no need. Pianos and flutes and drums? There is no need. Watching those wires, that is the flute and the piano, and the pole is the drum. See the single wire, a bold, wandering wire. See the wire multiply into the songs and rhythms of the pole—up and down, high and low, high and low. Feel this incredible music seep into you. And as to what happens inside these telephone wires?

We can only wonder.

Mandarin

Poem

“Mountain City”

Hu Shih

c. 1920

Background

In the poem “Mountain City,” the poet 胡适 (Hu Shih), a renowned Chinese writer and philosopher and a Cornell alum, draws a parallel between Cornell University and a serene mountain city. With vibrant descriptions, the poet paints Cornell’s campus as a peaceful terrain filled with deep gorges, peaceful lakes, and vibrant foliage. Through this analogy, 胡适 captures the charm and tranquility of Cornell’s surroundings, invoking feelings of serenity and satisfaction. As a Cornell alum, 胡适 likely found inspiration from his time at the university to create this poem, emphasizing the timeless beauty of Cornell’s natural setting and its enduring impact on those who have experienced its corridors.

Reader

Celina Chen

山城
“Mountain City”

漫说山城小，春来不羡仙。
壑深争作瀑，湖静好摇船。
归梦难回首，劳人此息肩。
绿阴容偃卧，平野草芊芊。

Don't state our mountain city is small,
We don't envy the immortals in the spring.
Deep ravines contend to form waterfalls,
Calm lakes perfect for boating.

Dreams of returning home are hard to look back on,
Weary travelers find rest here.
Green shades accommodate rest and nap,
Grasses on the plain are lush and dense.

Swahili

Poem

“Whispers of the Heart”

Shaaban bin Robert

c. 1959

Background

Shabaan bin Robert is one of the most famous poets, authors, and intellectuals in East Africa. Often known as the “Poet Laureate of Swahili” and the father of Swahili, he has been honored as the national poet of Tanzania. His poem “Moyo Wanambia” discusses the various ways in which the heart communicates with his mind and the rest of his body. The message – follow your heart, but be careful how far you go – resonates with readers both past and present who are struggling to grapple with the complexities and messiness of love, life, and passion.

Readers

Trisha Bhujle

Janeth Manyalla

Tony Kariuki

Oluoma Iruoajanma

Moyo Wanambia

MOYO wanambia penda, mtu mjinga sipende,
Mjinga ukimpenda, hajui nini atende,
Moyo wanambia tenda, lisilotendwa sitende,
Fanya wanavyotenda, wenzio wasikushinde.

Moyo wanambia imba, wimbo mbaya siimbe,
Imba wimbo wa kupamba, uwapumbaze wakembe,
Moyo wanambia omba, ombi ovu usiombe,
Omba Mungu Muumba, dhiki azifanye chembe.

Moyo wanambia tunga, lisilokuwa situnge,
Lisilofaa kutunga, karibu yake jitenge,
Moyo wanambia jenga, kwa karata usijenge,
Jenga jengo la mchanga, kwa mawe kuta ufunge.

Moyo wanambia meza, kinachokwama simeze,
Kinachokwama kumeza, kinywani sielekeze,
Moyo wanambia uza, roho yako usiuze,
Fanya unavyoweza, neno hili jikataze.

“Whispers of the Heart”

My heart tells me to love, but not to love a fool;
When you love a fool, he knows not what to do.
My heart tells me to do, but not to do the forbidden;
Only do what others do, that you may not be outdone.

My heart exhorts me to sing, but not to sing a bad song;
Sing that embroidered melody and put your detractors to shame.
The heart prompts me to beg; but not to beg for something evil;
Ask the Almighty to minimize the load of human suffering.

My heart urges me to compose, but not to compose sweet nothings;
You must always keep away from unworthy compositions.
The heart tells me to build, but not a house of cards;
Erect a house of mud, and with stone knit the walls.

My heart tells me to swallow, but not to swallow what chokes;
What chokes when swallowed, you must not bring to your mouth.
The heart urges me to sell, but not to sell my soul;
Do what you can, and refrain from this evil.

Ukrainian

Poem

“Wings”

Lina Kostenko

1958

Background

“Wings” by Lina Kostenko holds a special place in the hearts of many Ukrainians. In this poem, Kostenko asserts that a person rich in spirit is capable of achieving anything, suggesting that even though one may not physically fly, they possess metaphorical wings. This poem is a notable segment of Kostenko’s expansive collection, “The Seagull on the Ice.” Lina Vasylivna Kostenko is a renowned Ukrainian poet and pioneer, a prominent figure of the Sixtiers poetry movement, she is widely regarded as one of Ukraine’s leading poets. Moreover, she is credited with revitalizing Ukrainian-language lyric poetry.

Reader

Sumajja Denysiuk

Крила

А й правда, крилатим ґрунту не треба.
Землі немає, то буде небо.
Немає поля, то буде воля.
Немає пари, то будуть хмари.
В цьому, напевно, правда пташина...
А як же людина? А що ж людина?
Живе на землі. Сама не літає.
А крила має. А крила має!
Вони, ті крила, не з пуху-пір"я,
А з правди, чесноти і довір"я.
У кого — з вірності у коханні.
У кого — з вічного поривання.
У кого — з щирості до роботи.
У кого — з щедрості на турботи.
У кого — з пісні, або з надії,
Або з поезії, або з мрії.
Людина нібито не літає...
А крила має. А крила має!

“Wings”

Who has the wings Doesn't need the ground
When land is missed He'll fly around
Without fields He loves the will
Without wife Still loves the life.
We live on earth We can not fly
But from the birth We touch the sky
The humans fly When they just smile
Man's wings are not From feather –
the soul and thought Inside the leather
They take us high When we're inspired
When man in love He flies like dove
With these emotions We cross the oceans
The dreams Rise wings
Good friend indeed
Takes off the land from feet
Who said we never fly? If feelings take so high!

French and Mandarin

Poem

“The Fourth Season”

Wen Liang

2024

Background

This is an escape from reality. Join me.

Reader

Wen Liang

La Quatrième Classe

Un espiègle rayons de lumière
s'est glissé par la fenêtre en flottant.
Le fil de pensée l'a suivi, en l'air vagabondant
du quatrième amendement à la quatrième saison.
Des graines de poussière
montraient, dérivaien, et dansaient.
A l'extérieur de la fenêtre en demi-lune,
sous le ciel bleu clair,
il y a d'épaisses branches,
il y a d'imposantes collines,
il y a la mémoire du jardin,
il y a des visages jeunes qui sourient sans souci.
La vue est hypnotisant,
c'est l'odeur du printemps qui approche.

一束阳光溜进窗户
漂在空中
思绪开始跟着徘徊
从第四修正案
到第四季美景

空气中的灰尘变得生动
半框的窗户外
湛蓝的天空里
是粗壮的树枝
是高耸的山坡

是记忆里凡尔赛宫外的花园
是年轻、肆无忌惮的笑容
是窗外令人痴迷的景
是空气里春天将近的气息

“The Fourth Season”

A shaft of sunlight sneaked in,
floating around.
A train of thoughts followed behind,
wandering along,
from the 4th amendment to the 4th season.
Dust climbed, drifted, danced.
Outside the half-framed window,
under the blazing blue sky.
it's the thick branch,
it's towering hillside,
it's the Jardin in memory,
it's unbridled smile on young faces,
it's the mesmerizing view outside,
it's smell of approaching spring.

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Thank you!

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Thank You!

