

SESTINA

Robert Petty

O' could this scribbling brain but satisfy
 The hunger of love's parasitic rhyme,
 Realize the meter of this beating heart,
 Before its rhythms fade in endless night,
 This growth of mortal living then would be
 More than a bone poked from life's little cage.

Or could I fool the sentinel, break the cage,
 What withered now, should grow and satisfy?
 Would I, beneath a stranger daylight, be
 Love's poet laureate, living but to rhyme
 The ageless idiom of desire, and in the night
 Compile the long anthology of the heart?

If so, what entries then from this sad heart,
 Whose contour is the limit of a cage?
 What dream by day, what lyric hope by night,
 New-born by it, could vaguely satisfy
 The desperate prayer of man's immortal rhyme,
 Or teach alone what this tired flesh could be.

How satirical, this dream of what could be,
 The witless fingers of this fretting heart,
 Which scrawls about the dust its epic rhyme;
 Or with the broken twigs that find its cage,
 Plies dialogue by day to satisfy
 That too well known soliloquy of the night.

And yet, who does not read life's poem by night,
 Rewrite the scattered symbols, yearn to be
 To those simplicities bound, which satisfy
 And unknowingly attend the ornate heart?
 And who does not, within his separate cage,
 Murmur love's couplet somewhere in that rhyme?

O' when love breaks this monologue of rhyme,
 As dawn relieves the throbbing of the night,
 Erect, at last, in its expanding cage,
 This hungry beast shall know what it's to be,
 Shall with a stranger's laughing winged heart,
 Ascend the dark, and it shall satisfy—

Satisfy . . . or else another rhyme—
 Heart, the minstrel of a paler night—
 Before it knows the meaning of the cage . . .

ALONE

Robert Petty

O there were days he seemed to hang in air,
 And watch himself and all the world go by,
 With every poet's song—an idle cry,
 And every lover's glance—a wanton stare.

He dwelt alone with unforgotten pain,
 Too severed from the meaning of forget,
 As if by Longing's hand he had been set
 To mingle with eternal dust and rain.

Each year he felt the throbbing spring anew,
 The murmuring wilderness ever braced his mind,
 For there within its shadows he could find
 A friend, a silent friend who could be true ;

And then one day, within a woodland pool,
 He saw the lonely face of all mankind.

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DREAM

Robert Petty

It was a dream I dreamed with open eyes,
 A dream whose haunting vision grips my mind—
 We had found what all hearts yearn to find,
 And having held it, turned in dread surprise
 To hear insidious laughs and pagan cries,
 And standing hand in hand, with trembling breath,
 We saw there, draped in scarlet, Love and Death
 Racing wild across the withered skies.

Obscured, I could not see who won the race,
 Nor even toward the end who was ahead,
 I only now recall your soft embrace,
 And fragments of the tender words you said,
 And that I looked into your shadowed face,
 And that you, weeping, turned your eyes and fled.