

Antique

BY ROBERT PINSKY

I drowned in the fire of having you, I burned
In the river of not having you, we lived
Together for hours in a house of a thousand rooms
And we were parted for a thousand years.
Ten minutes ago we raised our children who cover
The earth and have forgotten that we existed.
It was not maya, it was not a ladder to perfection,
It was this cold sunlight falling on this warm earth.

When I turned you went to Hell. When your ship
Fled the battle I followed you and lost the world
Without regret but with stormy recriminations.
Someday far down that corridor of horror the future
Someone who buys this picture of you for the frame
At a stall in a dwindled city will study your face
And decide to harbor it for a little while longer
From the waters of anonymity, the acids of breath.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57102/antique-56d23a4272507>

Link to audio of poem

Audio:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57103/samurai-song>

Samurai Song

BY ROBERT PINSKY

When I had no roof I made
Audacity my roof. When I had
No supper my eyes dined.

When I had no eyes I listened.
When I had no ears I thought.
When I had no thought I waited.

When I had no father I made
Care my father. When I had
No mother I embraced order.

When I had no friend I made
Quiet my friend. When I had no
Enemy I opposed my body.

When I had no temple I made
My voice my temple. I have
No priest, my tongue is my choir.

When I have no means fortune
Is my means. When I have
Nothing, death will be my fortune.

Need is my tactic, detachment
Is my strategy. When I had
No lover I courted my sleep.

Rhyme, by Robert Pinsky

Air an instrument of the tongue,
The tongue an instrument
Of the body, the body
An instrument of spirit,
The spirit a being of the air.
A bird the medium of its song.
A song a world, a containment
Like a hotel room, ready
For us guests who inherit
Our compartment of time there.
In the Cornell box, among
Ephemera as its element,
The preserved bird—a study
In spontaneous elegy, the parrot
Art, mortal in its cornered sphere.
The room a stanza rung
In laddered filament
Clambered by all the unsteady
Chambered voices that share it,
Each reciting I too was here—
In a room, a rhyme, a song.
In the box, in books: each element
An instrument, the body
Still straining to parrot
The spirit, a being of air.

INSTRUMENT

It was a little newborn god
That made the first instrument:
Sweet vibration of
Mind, mind, mind
Enclosed in its orbit.

He scooped out a turtle's shell
And strung it with a rabbit's guts.
O what a stroke, to invent
Music from an empty case
Strung with bloody filaments—

The wiry rabbitflesh
Plucked or strummed,
Pulled taut across the gutted
Resonant hull of the turtle:
Music from a hollow shell
And the insides of a rabbit.
Sweet conception, sweet
Instrument of mind,

Mind, mind: Mind
Itself a capable vibration
Thrumming from here to there
In the cloven brainflesh
Contained in its helmet of bone—
Like an electronic boxful
Of channels and filaments
Bundled inside a case,
A little musical robot

Dreamed up by the mind
Embedded in the brain
With its blood-warm channels
And its humming network
Of neurons, engendering

The newborn baby god—
As clever and violent
As his own instrument
Of sweet, all-consuming
Imagination, held
By its own vibration:

Mind, mind, mind pulled
Taut in its bony shell,
Dreaming up Heaven and Hell.