

Texts for Class 5: Memory

Thomas Hood: "I remember" (1844)

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:

It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

C. P. Cavafy: From the Drawer (1923)

I had in mind to place it on a wall of my room.

But the dampness of the drawer damaged it.

I won't put this photograph in a frame.

I ought to have looked after it more carefully.

Those lips, that face—
ah if only for a day, only for an
hour their past would return.

I won't put this photograph in a frame.

I'll endure looking at it, damaged as it is.

Besides, even if it weren't damaged,
it would be annoying to be on guard lest some
word, some tone of voice betrayed—
if they ever questioned me about it.

— tr. Daniel Mendelsohn

C. P. Cavafy: The City

You said: "I'll go to another country, go to another shore,
find another city better than this one.

Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong
and my heart lies buried like something dead.

How long can I let my mind moulder in this place?

Wherever I turn, wherever I look,

I see the black ruins of my life, here,

where I've spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them totally."

You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.
This city will always pursue you.
You'll walk the same streets, grow old
in the same neighborhoods, turn gray in these same houses.
You'll always end up in this city. Don't hope for things elsewhere:
there's no ship for you, there's no road.
Now that you've wasted your life here, in this small corner,
you've destroyed it everywhere in the world.

— *tr. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard*

C. P. Cavafy: *The God Abandons Antony* (1910)

When suddenly, at midnight, you hear
an invisible procession going by
with exquisite music, voices,
don't mourn your luck that's failing now,
work gone wrong, your plans
all proving deceptive—don't mourn them uselessly.
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,
say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving.
Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say
it was a dream, your ears deceived you:
don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,
as is right for you who proved worthy of this kind of city,
go firmly to the window
and listen with deep emotion, but not
with the whining, the pleas of a coward;
listen—your final delectation—to the voices,
to the exquisite music of that strange procession,
and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.

— *tr. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard*

C. P. Cavafy: Ithaca (1910)

As you set out for Ithaca
hope that your journey is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare sensation
touches your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope that your journey is a long one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors you're seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and learn again from those who know.

Keep Ithaca always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so that you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.
Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would have not set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: “Music, when soft voices die” (1821)

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory;
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

Victoria Kamhi: “Aranjuez, ma pensée” (1988)

Aranjuez!
May is the season of roses,
already opened in the sun, magnolias in bloom
bend toward the clear waters of the Tagus.
And at night, the two-hundred-year-old park
comes alive with whispers,
rustlings, and subtle scents...

[...]

My love,
I look for you among the leaves
where so many powerful memories abound
of past time,
of happy days,
of our twenty years together.

— *abridgement and trans, rb.*

Marcel Proust: In Search of Lost Time, excerpt

One day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea... She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines'... And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake.

No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place.

An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory - this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself... I put down my cup and examine my own mind... I place in position before my mind's eye the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at a great depth; I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed.

Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind.

[...]

Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up out of the very depths of my being?

And suddenly the memory returns. The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray... my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea... when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.