

Jim Sanborn
A Comma, A (2003)
Excerpts

Line 1, Spanish
Gabriel García Márquez, *Of Love and Other Demons*

The girl was sleeping. The Marquis saw her motionless and pale, and wondered if he preferred to see her dead or suffering the torment of rabies. He adjusted the mosquito net so the bats would not drain her blood, he covered her so she would not cough, and he kept watch next to the bed, feeling the new joy of knowing he loved her as he had never loved in this world.

Line 2, English
Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*

"Do you know," she began in her usual tone of dispassionate inquiry, "you are a wonderful example of a double personality. The you that I used to know and didn't like, and the occasional you that when I do catch a glimpse of it seems to me so very wonderful, haven't any possible connection with each other."

Line 3, Ethiopian
***The Neggesta Azeb* [The Story of the Queen of Sheba]**

Upon the queen's arrival, King Solomom and his ministers were very happy and welcomed her with honor. During their conversations the queen tested the king with riddles which he solved quickly as there was nothing unknown to him. After these events the king honored the queen further by throwing a large reception because he wanted to show her his kingdom. She viewed the event while seated on a throne behind a curtain so that she could see the splendor but not be seen by the public.

Line 4, English
Maya Angelou, *Poems*

They went home and told their wives, that never once in all their lives, had they known a girl like me. But...they went home. They said my house was licking clean, no word I spoke was ever mean. I had an air of mystery. But...they went home.

Line 5, Greek
Sappho, *Poems*

Looking at you even a second my voice won't come any more, but my tongue breaks, all at once a little fire runs up and over my skin my eyes can't see my ears, they roam, sweat starts pouring down, trembling comes on all over. I am greener than grass, and I seem like I could die.

Line 6, English
Arundhah Roy, *The God of Small Things*

She was surprised at the extent of her daughter's physical ease with him. Surprised that her child seemed to have a sub-world that excluded her entirely. A tactile world of smiles and laughter that she, her mother, had no part in. Ammu recognized vaguely that her thoughts were shot with a delicate, purple tinge of envy.

Line 7, Classical Latin
Ovid, *The Art of Love*

But avoid men who possess elegance and good looks and who arrange their hair in its proper place. What they tell you they have told a thousand women; their fancy wanders and has no fixed abode. What can a woman do when her lover is smoother than herself and may perhaps have more lovers than she?

Line 8, French
Colette, *Letters*

Don't count on my writing you a long letter full of ingenious perceptions and definite sentences on the conjugal life awaiting you...So come. Do you happen to have boxing gloves?

Line 9, English

Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*

She dribbled viscous juices down her chin and before I could help her wipe them away, I eyed the napkin; could I steal it? Already my hand was creeping over the tablecloth like something out of Poe. She touched me and I yelped.

Line 10, Spanish

Pablo Neruda, *Residence on Earth*

Well, my knees, like knots, private, functional, evident, separate neatly the halves of my legs: and really two different worlds, two different sexes are not so different as the two halves of my legs. From the knee to the foot a hard form, mineral, coldly useful, appears, a creature of bone and persistence, and the ankles are now nothing but the naked purpose, exactitude and necessity definitely disposed.

Line 11, English

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*

Oh, what a very uninteresting correspondence! Who on earth writes on pink paper? How silly to write on pink paper! It looks like the beginning of a middle-class romance. Romance should never begin with sentiment. It should begin with science and end with a settlement.

Line 12, Chinese

Wang Xizhi, *The Orchid Pavilion Poems*

The place was one of mighty mountains and towering ridges covered with lush forests and tall bamboo, where a clear stream with swirling eddies cast back a sparkling light upon both shores. From this we cut a winding channel in which to float our winecups, and around this everyone took their appointed seats. True, we did not have the harps and flutes of a great feast, but a cup of wine and a song served well enough to free our most hidden feelings.

Line 13, Creek/Muscogee Nation, Native American

Tchillillis Kahishta Legend

They made white arrows and shot them, to see if they were good people. But the people took their white arrows, painted them red, and shot them back. When they showed these to their chief, he said that it was not a good sign; if the arrows returned had been white,

they could have gone there, but as they were red, they must not go. Nevertheless, some of them went to see what sort of people they were, and found their houses deserted...

Line 14, English

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*

Well, Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy really does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me in broad daylight this morning, in front of that dreadful statue of Achilles. Really, the things that go on in front of that work of art are quite appalling.

Line 15, Spanish

Pablo Neruda, *Residence on Earth*

Nights with bright pivots, departure, matter, uniquely. voice, uniquely naked each day. Upon your breasts of still current, upon your legs of harshness and water, upon the permanence and pride of your naked hair I want to lie...

Line 16, French

Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

Leon now seemed taller, handsomer, more charming, less distinct: although he was separated from her, he had not left her: he was still there, and everything in the house seemed to retain his shadow. She could not take her eyes from the carpet he had worked on, the empty chairs he had sat in. This memory of Leon stood at the center of her boredom, crackling and glowing there like a traveler's campfire abandoned in the snow of a Russian steppe.

Line 17, English/Maori

Keri Hulme, *The Bone People*

He waits the space of three breaths before saying, casually, kindly, "And I thought my tribe were the devout cannibals. At last, they used to check first whether the dinner still had a use for the heart or not."

Line 18, Russian

Mikhail Bulgakov, *Enter the Hero*

She was carrying some of those repulsive yellow flowers. God knows what they're called, but they are somehow always the first to come out in spring. They stood out very

sharply against her black dress. She was carrying yellow flowers! It's an ugly color...Then, if you can believe it, she said: "Do you like my flowers?" "No."

Line 19, English

Maya Angelo, *Poems*

When love is a shimmering curtain Before a door of chance That leads to a world in question Wherein the macabre dance Of bones that Seattle in silence Of blinded eyes and rolls of thick lips thin, denying A thousand powdered moles Where touch to touch is feel And life a weary whore I would be carried off, not gently To a shore, Where love is the scream of anguish And no curtain drapes the door.

Line 20, French

Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

He had given Emma his arm; she leaned on his shoulder a little and looked up at the faraway disk of the sun flooding the mist with the dazzling pallor. Then she turned her head: Charles was there. His cap was pulled down to his eyebrows, and his thick lips were quivering, which added a certain stupidity to his face; even his back, his placid back, was irritating to look at: it was as though she could see all his dullness spread...

Line 21, Arabic

Unknown author and title

I knew While we were at the station That you were waiting for another man I knew While I was carrying your luggage That you would be traveling with another man I knew that I was No more than a disposable Chinese fan Used to shield you From the heat of the summer. I also knew...

Line 22, English

Richard Brautigan, *An Unfortunate Woman*

A cold bleak December rain fell out of the sky, and the man went back to talking about his love life, and I felt as if I were slowly shrinking in the car, getting smaller, almost childlike and my clothes hung about me like a tent. I wish I could have said something that would have been helpful to him, but I didn't feel qualified after the shoes fell off my feet onto the floor of the car.

Line 23, Spanish

Pablo Neruda, *Residence on Earth*

For a long time, I have stayed looking at my long legs, with infinite and curious tenderness, with my accustomed passion, as if they had been the legs of a divine woman, deeply sunk in the abyss of my thorax: and to tell the truth, when time, when time passes over the earth, over the roof, over my impure head, and it passes, time passes...

Line 24, English

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*

The sin of my youth, that I had thought was buried, rose up in front of me, hideous, horrible, with its hands at my throat. I could have killed it forever, sent it back into its tomb, destroyed its record, burned the one witness against me.