

## MY TEENAGE LOVE POEMS

I read Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* a little too late. Rilke says to avoid "love" poems for as long as possible when one begins to write, because love presents the greatest challenge for a writer. Love poems were the first things I wrote. But that's everyone, I know.

My love poems were sonnets. Perfectly metered. I may have already told you this but it's something I can't let go of. This idea that I as some quiet, slightly know-it-all, people-pleasing, quivering little raggedy haired boy, who never broke the rules, was unwittingly breaking perhaps the only concrete rule of poetry set down by one of the most lasting writers of the last two hundred years.

I loved writing these poems more than I loved the girl I was writing them for. And I was so unassuming about them that I never kept any extra copies for myself. I just took joy (and agony) in the making. When I finally stitched them up--all twelve (or was it twenty-five? Fifty?) of them into a little paper book, and handed them to my supposed beloved, neither she nor I ever spoke of it again; even in that moment, we barely acknowledged what was happening. It was a screaming ejaculation of teenage cringe-worthiness. And the fluid was coming from a skene's gland; so the process seemed to take an eternity and was that much more intense for it. I cannot overstate how absolutely devastatingly awkward this moment was. I was standing on the lower end of a dry-grassed hill when it happened, next to a stable of horses, watching the sun bleed into the earth and turn my beloved's dark hair into a dimming crimson.

I'm not kidding. We were at a party for one of the kids on our improv team, who's family owned a ranch in town. It could have easily gone a different direction given the setting... but I would have been ok had, after that moment, a horse broke out of the stable and trampled me to death. Luckily for us both, we were alone.

In retrospect, all of that was truly enough. Perfect.

I don't remember what those poems say and I don't even know if they still exist. My best work is probably lost forever.

These days I'm a little naughtier; a little more aggressive towards authority, and I have an overly conceited concern with my place in posterity. I try to save multiple copies of all my work, if I can. And this is good; necessary even. I guess.

Though I'd rather hold on to that kid who, on his worst days, took to a simple act of innocence (or was it pure arrogance?) in expressing what he knew was beyond his capacity for expression. And so nothing for him, in the moment of this expressing, existed beyond his attempt to express it.

I do not bemoan the loss of these poems (is "loss" the right word? She, after all, was always the rightful owner; not me). Writing them is one of the few things I can look back on in my years as

a messed-up teen and say, "I don't regret that at all. Not one bit." That and turning in half-finished novellas two weeks late instead of the three pages that were asked to be completed on time. That is, if I turned anything in at all. I probably should have been more up front with my teachers with where I was in life; I get the sense in retrospect that they did truly want to help me. I was doing my best. Trying so hard to please I ended up insulting instead. But I don't regret all the writing I did in the process. And doing plays. At school. In the park.

I do wish I could remember just a little of what I was actually writing about, so that I can replicate that kind of innocence. Or supreme confidence.

But it is enough to know that if I could go back to my early days and my teens, I would change everything. Except the time I spent writing and acting; playing in general; I'd only do it more.

I'd break all those dumb rules that ended up ensuring nothing for me but a now desperate desire to make up for lost time. And I'd take a little more care to study what I did not know about the crafts that were there to impart meaning onto a youth all too squandered by timidity.

No, if I went back, I wouldn't do it all the same. Not at all.

\*\*\*

*Mohammad Shehata's blog.* [mohammadshehata.com](http://mohammadshehata.com)