

“You’re right,” the ex-King said, “we’ll need some money.
How would it be for you to take your father
To the slave auction in some marketplace
And sell him into slavery? My price
Should be enough to set you up in business—
Or making verse if that is what you’re bent on.
Don’t let your father tell you what to be.”

The ex-King stood up in the marketplace
And tried to look ten thousand dollars’ worth
To the first buyer coming by who asked
What good he was he boldly said, “I’ll tell you:
I know the Quintessence of many things.
I know the Quintessence of food, I know
The Quintessence of jewels, and I know
The Quintessence of horses, men and women.”

The eunuch laughed: “Well that’s a lot to know.
And here’s a lot of money. Who’s the taker?
This larrikin? All right. You come along.
You’re off to Xanadu to help the cook.
I’ll try you in the kitchen first on food
Since you put food first in your repertory.
It seems you call quintessence quintessence.

“I’m a Rhodes scholar - that’s the reason why.
I was at college in the Isle of Rhodes.”

The slave served his novitiate dishwashing.
He got his first chance to prepare a meal
One day when the chief cook was sick at heart.
(The cook was temperamental like the King.)
And the meal made the banqueters exclaim
And the Great King inquire whose wok it was.

“A man’s out there who claims he knows the secret.
Not of food only but of everything.