

Jewels, horses, women, wine, and song.”

The King said grandly, “Even as we are fed
See that our slave is also. He’s in favor.
Take notice, Haman, he’s in favor with us.”

There came to court a merchant selling pearls,
A smaller pearl he asked a thousand for,
A larger pearl he asked five hundred for.
The King sat favoring one pearl for its bigness.
And then the other for its costliness.
(He seems to have felt limited to one),
Till the ambassadors from Punt or somewhere
Shuffled their feet as if to hint respectfully,
“The choice is not between two pearls, O King.
But between peace and war as ever conceive it.
We are impatient for your royal answer.”
No estimating how far the entente
Might have deteriorated had not someone
Thought of the kitchen slave and had him in
To put an end to the King’s vacillation.

And the slave said, “The small one’s worth the price,
But the big one is worthless. Break it open.
My head for it - you’ll find the big one hollow.
Permit me.” And he crushed it under his heel
And showed them it contained a live teredo.

“But tell us how you knew,” Darius cried.

“Oh, from knowledge of its quintessence.
I told you I knew the quintessence of jewels.
But anybody could have guessed in this case,
From the pearl’s having its own native warmth.
Like flesh, there must be something living in it.”

“Feed him another feast of recognition”