TO SYLVIA ON HER FOURTEENTH BIRTHDAY

Alden A. Nowlan

Suspicious of the customary oughts,
    the peevish algebra of argument,
I too am pricked by quint-thorned senses, share
    your brittle joys, your skittish discontent.

All royal questions lead to wharves of where,
    zig-zag through seas of why to farther riddles:
philosophers ransack the violin
    until they doubt that anybody fiddles.

Life being various, Goliath falls
    prey to the stone-propelled tribute of love,
sometimes; such singular plurality
    affiliates the tiger and the dove.

To traffick with reality involves
    the risk of shrinkage—shrinkage is to know,
say, that your patron saint was half a rogue
    and, knowing, crow.

Sylvia, truth is vast and more
    than two and two are firmly four,
for two and two sometimes will be
    an atom of infinity.

You, in your bicycle pants,
torero tight around
the April slenderness of boy-girl legs;
you, whose ambition
    is to have sixteen years
and a boy with a motorcycle,
what can I add who love you
    neither as father nor lover
but with a love greater
    and less than theirs,
being almost impersonal?