

## 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?