

Poetry Anthology

The Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) English Literature
Poetry Anthology

should be used to prepare for Component 2 of your assessment

Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) English Literature Poetry Anthology

The Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) English Literature Poetry Anthology should be used to prepare students for assessment in:

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Relationships

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

- O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.
- 5 O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.
- I see a lily on thy brow,
10 With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.
- I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful – a faery's child,
15 Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.
- I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
20 And made sweet moan.
- I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.
- 25 She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said –
'I love thee true'.
- She took me to her elfin grot,
30 And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.
- And there she lulled me asleep
And there I dreamed – Ah! woe betide! –
35 The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.
- I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried – 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
40 Thee hath in thrall!'
- I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.
- 45 And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

John Keats

A Child to his Sick Grandfather

Grand-dad, they say you're old and frail,
 Your stocked legs begin to fail:
 Your knobbed stick (that was my horse)
 Can scarce support your bended corse,
 5 While back to wall, you lean so sad,
 I'm vexed to see you, dad.

You used to smile and stroke my head,
 And tell me how good children did;
 But now, I wot not how it be,
 10 You take me seldom on your knee,
 Yet ne'ertheless I am right glad,
 To sit beside you, dad.

How lank and thin your beard hangs down!
 Scant are the white hairs on your crown;
 15 How wan and hollow are your cheeks!
 Your brow is rough with crossing breaks;
 But yet, for all his strength be fled,
 I love my own old dad.

The housewives round their potions brew,
 20 And gossips come to ask for you;
 And for your weal each neighbour cares,
 And good men kneel, and say their prayers;
 And everybody looks so sad,
 When you are ailing, dad.

25 You will not die and leave us then?
 Rouse up and be our dad again.
 When you are quiet and laid in bed,
 We'll doff our shoes and softly tread;
 And when you wake we'll aye be near
 30 To fill old dad his cheer.

When through the house you shift your stand,
 I'll lead you kindly by the hand;
 When dinner's set I'll with you bide,
 And aye be serving at your side;
 35 And when the weary fire turns blue,
 I'll sit and talk with you.

I have a tale both long and good,
 About a partlet and her brood,
 And cunning greedy fox that stole
 40 By dead of midnight through a hole,
 Which slyly to the hen-roost led –
 You love a story, dad?

And then I have a wondrous tale
 Of men all clad in coats of mail,
 45 With glittering swords – you nod, I think?
 Your fixed eyes begin to wink;
 Down on your bosom sinks your head –
 You do not hear me, dad.

Joanna Baillie

Relationships

She Walks in Beauty

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
5 Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
10 Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
15 The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

Lord Byron

A Complaint

There is a change—and I am poor;
Your love hath been, nor long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
5 And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count!
Blest was I then all bliss above!
Now, for that consecrated fount
10 Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I? shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love—it may be deep—
I trust it is,—and never dry:
15 What matter? if the waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.
—Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

William Wordsworth

Relationships

Neutral Tones

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
 – They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

5 Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
 On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
10 Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
 Like an ominous bird a-wing...

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
15 Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
 And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

Thomas Hardy

Sonnet 43

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways! –
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.
5 I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight –
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right, –
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise;
I love thee with the passion, put to use
10 In my old griefs, ... and with my childhood's faith:
I love thee with the love I seemed to lose
With my lost Saints, – I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! – and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Relationships

My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each

30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such a one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
50 Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning

Relationships

1st Date – She

I said I liked classical music.
It wasn't exactly a lie.
I hoped he would get the impression
That my brow was acceptably high.

5 I said I liked classical music.
I mentioned Vivaldi and Bach.
And he asked me along to this concert.
Here we are, sitting in the half-dark.

I was thrilled to be asked to the concert.
10 I couldn't care less what they play
But I'm trying my hardest to listen
So I'll have something clever to say.

When I glance at his face it's a picture
Of rapt concentration. I see
15 He is totally into this music
And quite undistracted by me.

1st Date – He

She said she liked classical music.
I implied I was keen on it too.
Though I don't often go to a concert,
It wasn't entirely untrue.

5 I looked for a suitable concert
And here we are, on our first date.
The traffic was dreadful this evening
And I arrived ten minutes late.

So we haven't had much time for talking
10 And I'm a bit nervous. I see
She is totally lost in the music
And quite undistracted by me.

In that dress she is very attractive –
The neckline can't fail to intrigue.
15 I mustn't appear too besotted.
Perhaps she is out of my league.

Where are we? I glance at the programme
But I've put my glasses away.
I'd better start paying attention
20 Or else I'll have nothing to say.

Wendy Cope

Valentine, by Carol Ann Duffy

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Relationships

One Flesh

Lying apart now, each in a separate bed,
He with a book, keeping the light on late,
She like a girl dreaming of childhood,
All men elsewhere – it is as if they wait
5 Some new event: the book he holds unread,
Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead.

Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion,
How cool they lie. They hardly ever touch,
Or if they do it is like a confession
10 Of having little feeling – or too much.
Chastity faces them, a destination
For which their whole lives were a preparation.

Strangely apart, yet strangely close together,
Silence between them like a thread to hold
15 And not wind in. And time itself's a feather
Touching them gently. Do they know they're old,
These two who are my father and my mother
Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?

Elizabeth Jennings



i wanna be yours

let me be your vacuum cleaner
breathing in your dust
let me be your ford cortina
i will never rust
5 if you like your coffee hot
let me be your coffee pot
you call the shots
i wanna be yours

let me be your raincoat
10 for those frequent rainy days
let me be your dreamboat
when you wanna sail away
let me be your teddy bear
take me with you anywhere
15 i don't care
i wanna be yours

let me be your electric meter
i will not run out
let me be the electric heater
20 you get cold without
let me be your setting lotion
hold your hair
with deep devotion
deep as the deep
25 atlantic ocean
that's how deep is my emotion
deep deep deep deep de deep deep
i don't wanna be hers
i wanna be yours

John Cooper Clarke

Relationships

Love's Dog

What I love about love is its diagnosis

What I hate about love is its prognosis

What I hate about love is its me me me

What I love about love is its Eat-me/Drink-me

5 What I love about love is its petting zoo

What I love about love is its zookeeper – you

What I love about love is its truth serum

What I hate about love is its shrinking potion

What I love about love is its doubloons

10 What I love about love is its bird-bones

What I hate about love is its boil-wash

What I love about love is its spin-cycle

What I loathe about love is its burnt toast and bonemeal

What I hate about love is its bent cigarette

15 What I love about love is its pirate

What I hate about love is its sick parrot

Jen Hadfield

Nettles

My son aged three fell in the nettle bed.
'Bed' seemed a curious name for those green spears,
That regiment of spite behind the shed:
It was no place for rest. With sobs and tears
5 The boy came seeking comfort and I saw
White blisters beaded on his tender skin.
We soothed him till his pain was not so raw.
At last he offered us a watery grin,
And then I took my billhook, honed the blade
10 And went outside and slashed in fury with it
Till not a nettle in that fierce parade
Stood upright any more. And then I lit
A funeral pyre to burn the fallen dead,
But in two weeks the busy sun and rain
15 Had called up tall recruits behind the shed:
My son would often feel sharp wounds again.

Vernon Scannell



Relationships

The Manhunt

After the first phase,
after passionate nights and intimate days,
only then would he let me trace
the frozen river which ran through his face,
5 only then would he let me explore
the blown hinge of his lower jaw,
and handle and hold
the damaged, porcelain collar-bone,
and mind and attend
10 the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade,
and finger and thumb
the parachute silk of his punctured lung.
Only then could I bind the struts
and climb the rungs of his broken ribs,
15 and feel the hurt
of his grazed heart.
Skirting along,
only then could I picture the scan,
the foetus of metal beneath his chest
20 where the bullet had finally come to rest.
Then I widened the search,
traced the scarring back to its source
to a sweating, unexploded mine
buried deep in his mind, around which
25 every nerve in his body had tightened and closed.
Then, and only then, did I come close.

Simon Armitage

My Father Would Not Show Us

Which way do we face to talk to the dead?

Rainer Maria Rilke

My father's face
five days dead
is organised for me to see.

It's cold in here
5 and the borrowed coffin gleams unnaturally;
the pine one has not yet been delivered.

Half-expected this inverted face
but not the soft, for some reason
unfrozen collar of his striped pyjamas.

10 This is the last time I am allowed
to remember my childhood as it might have been:
a louder, braver place,
crowded, a house with a tin roof
being hailed upon, and voices rising,
15 my father's wry smile, his half-turned face.

My father would not show us how to die.
He hid, he hid away.
Behind the curtains where his life had been,
the florist's flowers curling into spring,
20 he lay inside, he lay.

He could recall the rag-and-bone man
passing his mother's gate in the morning light.
Now the tunnelling sound of the dogs next door;
everything he hears is white.

25 My father could not show us how to die.
He turned, he turned away.
Under the counterpane, without one call
or word or name,
face to the wall, he lay.

Ingrid de Kok

Conflict

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A Poison Tree

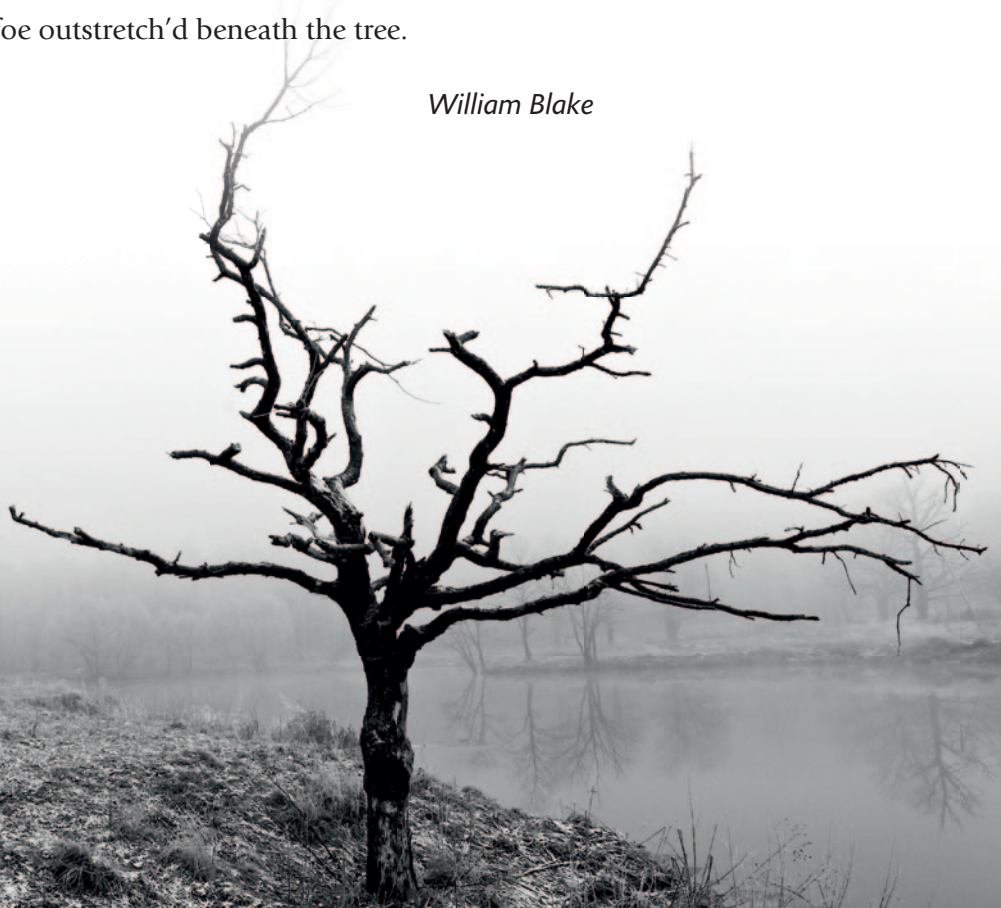
I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

5 And I water'd it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
10 Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veil'd the pole:
15 In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

William Blake





The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

5 Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
10 And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there roll'd not the breath of his pride:
15 And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
20 The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Lord Byron

Conflict



Extract from The Prelude

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
5 Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
10 Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
15 The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
20 Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
25 And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
30 And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, –
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
35 That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
40 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

William Wordsworth



The Man He Killed

'Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

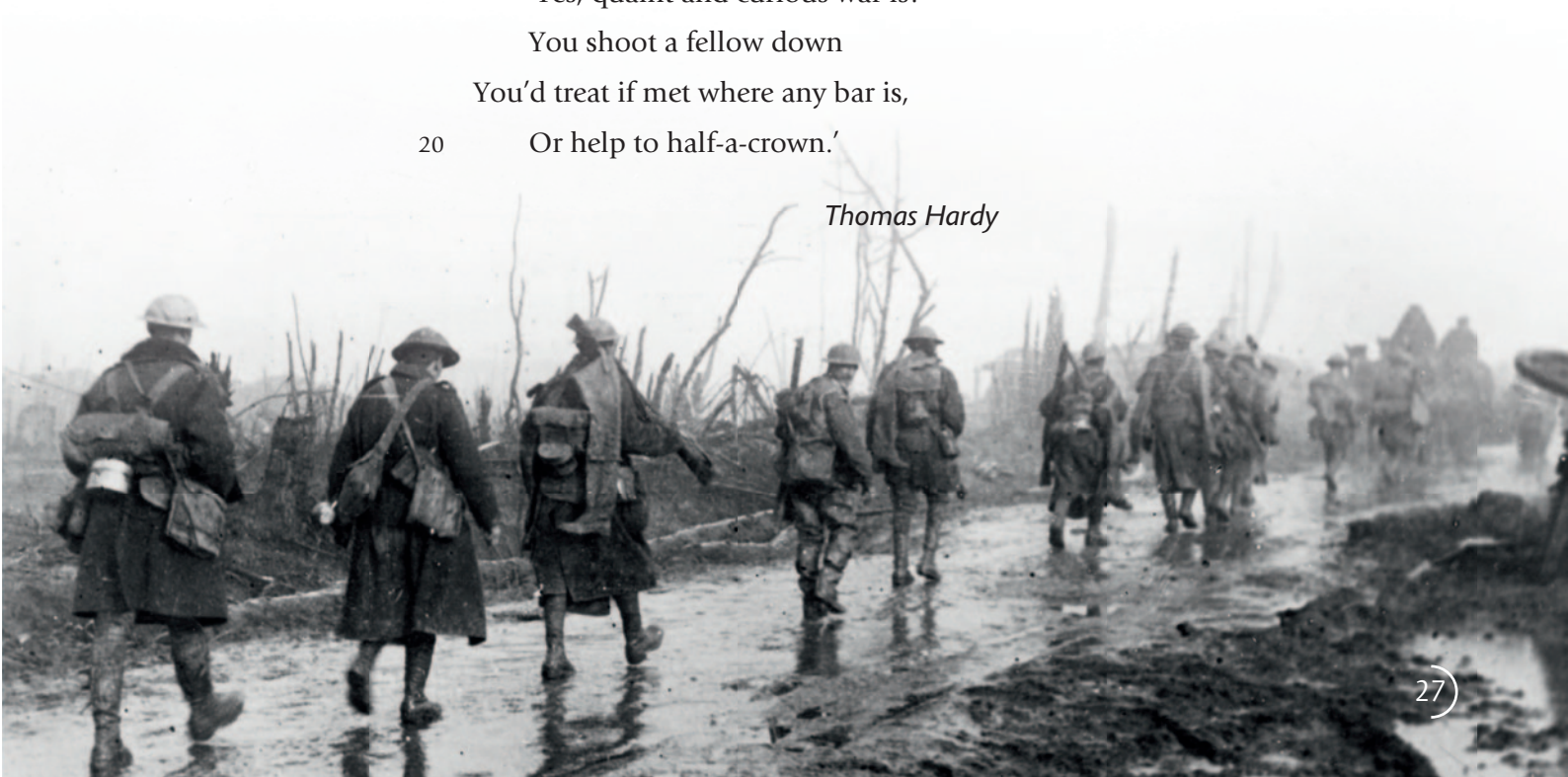
5 'But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

'I shot him dead because –
10 Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

'He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like – just as I –
15 Was out of work – had sold his traps –
No other reason why.

'Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
20 Or help to half-a-crown.'

Thomas Hardy



Conflict



Cousin Kate

I was a cottage-maiden
 Hardened by sun and air,
Contented with my cottage-mates,
 Not mindful I was fair.
5 Why did a great lord find me out
 And praise my flaxen hair?
Why did a great lord find me out
 To fill my heart with care?

He lured me to his palace-home –
10 Woe's me for joy thereof –
To lead a shameless shameful life,
 His plaything and his love.
He wore me like a golden knot,
 He changed me like a glove:
15 So now I moan an unclean thing
 Who might have been a dove.

O Lady Kate, my Cousin Kate,
 You grow more fair than I:
He saw you at your father's gate,
20 Chose you and cast me by.
He watched your steps along the lane,
 Your sport among the rye:
He lifted you from mean estate
 To sit with him on high.

25 Because you were so good and pure
 He bound you with his ring:
The neighbours call you good and pure,
 Call me an outcast thing.
Even so I sit and howl in dust
30 You sit in gold and sing:
Now which of us has tenderer heart?
 You had the stronger wing.

O Cousin Kate, my love was true,
 Your love was writ in sand:
35 If he had fooled not me but you,
 If you stood where I stand,
He had not won me with his love
 Nor bought me with his land:
I would have spit into his face
40 And not have taken his hand.

Yet I've a gift you have not got
 And seem not like to get:
For all your clothes and wedding-ring
 I've little doubt you fret.
45 My fair-haired son, my shame, my pride,
 Cling closer, closer yet:
Your sire would give broad lands for one
 To wear his coronet.

Christina Rossetti



Half-caste

Excuse me
 standing on one leg
 I'm half-caste

Explain yusef
 5 wha yu mean
 when you say half-caste
 yu mean when picasso
 mix red an green
 is a half-caste canvas/
 10 explain yusef
 wha yu mean
 when yu say half-caste
 yu mean when light an shadow
 mix in de sky
 15 is a half-caste weather/
 well in dat case
 england weather
 nearly always half-caste
 in fact some o dem cloud
 20 half-caste till dem overcast
 so spiteful dem dont want de sun pass
 ah rass/
 explain yusef
 wha yu mean
 25 when you say half-caste
 yu mean tchaikovsky
 sit down at dah piano
 an mix a black key
 wid a white key
 30 is a half-caste symphony/

Explain yusef
 wha yu mean
 Ah listening to yu wid de keen
 half of mih ear
 35 Ah lookin at yu wid de keen
 half of mih eye
 and when I'm introduced to yu
 I'm sure you'll understand
 why I offer yu half-a-hand
 40 an when I sleep at night
 I close half-a-eye
 consequently when I dream
 I dream half-a-dream
 an when moon begin to glow
 45 I half-caste human being
 cast half-a-shadow
 but yu must come back tomorrow
 wid de whole of yu eye
 an de whole of yu ear
 50 an de whole of yu mind

an I will tell yu
 de other half
 of my story

John Agard

Conflict



Exposure

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...

Low, drooping flares confuse our memories of the salient...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

5 But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,

Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.

Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

10 What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...

We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army

Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,

15 But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.

Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,

With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,

20 But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces –

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-
dazed,

Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.

25 Is it that we are dying?



Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: The house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed, –
30 We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
35 For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying party, picks and shovels in the shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
40 But nothing happens.

Wilfred Owen





The Charge of the Light Brigade

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
5 'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
10 Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
15 Their's but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
20 Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
25 Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,



30 Charging an army, while
 All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
35 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
 Shatter'd and sunder'd
Then they rode back, but not
 Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
40 Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
45 They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

50 When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
 All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
55 Noble six hundred!

Alfred, Lord Tennyson



Catrin

I can remember you, child,
As I stood in a hot, white
Room at the window watching
The people and cars taking
5 Turn at the traffic lights.
I can remember you, our first
Fierce confrontation, the tight
Red rope of love which we both
Fought over. It was a square
10 Environmental blank, disinfected
Of paintings or toys. I wrote
All over the walls with my
Words, coloured the clean squares
With the wild, tender circles
15 Of our struggle to become
Separate. We want, we shouted,
To be two, to be ourselves.

Neither won nor lost the struggle
In the glass tank clouded with feelings
20 Which changed us both. Still I am fighting
You off, as you stand there
With your straight, strong, long
Brown hair and your rosy,
Defiant glare, bringing up
25 From the heart's pool that old rope,
Tightening about my life,
Trailing love and conflict,
As you ask may you skate
In the dark, for one more hour.

Gillian Clarke



War Photographer

The reassurance of the frame is flexible
– you can think that just outside it
people eat, sleep, love normally
while I seek out the tragic, the absurd,
5 to make a subject.

Or if the picture's such as lifts the heart
the firmness of the edges can convince you
this is how things are

– as when at Ascot once

10 I took a pair of peach, sun-gilded girls
rolling, silk-crumpled, on the grass
in champagne giggles

– as last week, when I followed a small girl
staggering down some devastated street,

15 hip thrust out under a baby's weight.
She saw me seeing her; my finger pressed.

At the corner, the first bomb of the morning
shattered the stones.

Instinct prevailing, she dropped her burden
20 and, mouth too small for her dark scream,
began to run...

The picture showed the little mother
the almost-smile. Their caption read
'Even in hell the human spirit
25 triumphs over all.'

But hell, like heaven, is untidy,
its boundaries
arbitrary as a blood stain on a wall.

Carole Satyamurti



Belfast Confetti

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining
exclamation marks,

Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the
explosion.

Itself - an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst
of rapid fire...

I was trying to complete a sentence in my head but it kept
stuttering,

5 All the alleyways and side streets blocked with stops and
colons.

I know this labyrinth so well - Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman,
Odessa Street -

Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea
Street. Dead end again.

A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-
talkies. What is

My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A
fusillade of question-marks.

Ciaran Carson





The Class Game

- How can you tell what class I'm from?
I can talk posh like some
With an 'Olly in me mouth
Down me nose, wear an 'at not a scarf
- 5 With me second-hand clothes.
So why do you always wince when you hear
Me say 'Tara' to me 'Ma' instead of 'Bye Mummy
 dear'?
- How can you tell what class I'm from?
'Cos we live in a corpy, not like some
- 10 In a pretty little semi, out Wirral way
And commute into Liverpool by train each day?
Or did I drop my unemployment card
Sitting on your patio (We have a yard)?
How can you tell what class I'm from?
- 15 Have I a label on me head, and another on me bum?
Or is it because my hands are stained with toil?
Instead of soft lily-white with perfume and oil?
Don't I crook me little finger when I drink me tea
Say toilet instead of bog when I want to pee?
- 20 Why do you care what class I'm from?
Does it stick in your gullet like a sour plum?
Well, mate! A cleaner is me mother
A docker is me brother
Bread pudding is wet nelly
- 25 And me stomach is me belly
And I'm proud of the class that I come from.

Mary Casey

Conflict



Poppies

Three days before Armistice Sunday
and poppies had already been placed
on individual war graves. Before you left,
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
5 spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's
10 upturned collar, steeled the softening
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
across the tip of your nose, play at
being Eskimos like we did when
you were little. I resisted the impulse
15 to run my fingers through the gelled
blackthorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
20 it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated.
After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.
25 Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
and this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.
30 On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.
The dove pulled freely against the sky,
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear
35 your playground voice catching on the wind.

Jane Weir





No Problem

I am not de problem
But I bear de brunt
Of silly playground taunts
An racist stunts,
5 I am not de problem
I am born academic
But dey got me on de run
Now I am branded athletic
I am not de problem
10 If yu give I a chance
I can teach yu of Timbuktu
I can do more dan dance,
I am not de problem
I greet yu wid a smile
15 Yu put me in a pigeon hole
But I am versatile

These conditions may affect me
As I get older,
An I am positively sure
20 I have no chips on me shoulders,
Black is not de problem
Mother country get it right
An juss fe de record,
Sum of me best friends are white.

Benjamin Zephaniah



What Were They Like?

- 1) Did the people of Viet Nam
use lanterns of stone?
- 2) Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?
- 5 3) Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
- 4) Did they use bone and ivory,
jade and silver, for ornament?
- 5) Had they an epic poem?
- 6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

- 10 1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
It is not remembered whether in gardens
stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
- 2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
but after their children were killed
15 there were no more buds)
- 3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
- 4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
All the bones were charred.
- 5) It is not remembered. Remember,
- 20 most were peasants; their life
was in rice and bamboo.
When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
maybe fathers told their sons old tales.
- 25 When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream.
- 6) There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.
It was reported that their singing resembled
30 the flight of moths in moonlight.
Who can say? It is silent now.

Denise Levertov

time and place

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To Autumn

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
5 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
10 Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
15 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twin'd flowers;
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
20 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Aye, where are they?
Think not of them, — thou hast thy music too,
25 While barr'd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing, and now with treble soft
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

John Keats



Composed upon Westminster Bridge,
September 3, 1802

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
5 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
10 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth



London

I wander thro' each charter'd street
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

5 In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants' cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear:

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
10 Every black'ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls;

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
15 Blasts the new-born Infants' tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

William Blake



I started Early – Took my Dog

I started Early – Took my Dog –
And visited the Sea –
The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me –

5 And Frigates – in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands –
Presuming Me to be a Mouse –
Aground – upon the Sands –

But no Man moved Me – till the Tide
10 Went past my simple Shoe –
And past my Apron – and my Belt
And past my Bodice – too –

And made as He would eat me up –
As wholly as a Dew
15 Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve –
And then – I started – too –

And He – He followed – close behind –
I felt his Silver Heel
Upon my Ankle – Then my Shoes
20 Would overflow with Pearl –

Until We met the Solid Town –
No One He seemed to know –
And bowing – with a Mighty look –
At me – The Sea withdrew –

Emily Dickinson

Where the Picnic was

Where we made the fire
In the summer time
Of branch and briar
On the hill to the sea,
5 I slowly climb
Through winter mire,
And scan and trace
The forsaken place
Quite readily.

10 Now a cold wind blows,
And the grass is grey,
But the spot still shows
As a burnt circle – aye,
And stick-ends, charred,
15 Still strew the sward
Whereon I stand,
Last relic of the band
Who came that day!

Yes, I am here
20 Just as last year,
And the sea breathes brine
From its strange straight line
Up hither, the same
As when we four came.

25 – But two have wandered far
From this grassy rise
Into urban roar
Where no picnics are,
And one – has shut her eyes
30 For evermore.

Thomas Hardy



Adlestrop

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

5 The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
10 And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
15 Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Edward Thomas

Home Thoughts from Abroad

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
5 That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
10 And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
15 Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
20 —Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

Robert Browning



First Flight

Plane moves. I don't like the feel of it.
In a car I'd suspect low tyre pressure.

A sudden swiftness, earth slithers
Off at an angle. The experienced solidly

5 *This is rather a short hop for me*

Read *Guardians*, discuss secretaries,
Business lunches. I crane for the last of dear

I'm doing it just to say I've done it

10 Familiar England, motorways, reservoir,
Building sites. Nimble tiny-disc, a sun

Tell us when we get to water

Runs up the porthole and vanishes.
Under us the broad meringue kingdom

The next lot of water'll be the Med

15 Of cumulus, bearing the crinkled tangerine stain
That light spreads on an evening sea at home.

*You don't need an overcoat, but
It's the sort of place where you need
A pullover. Know what I mean?*

20 We have come too high for history.
Where we are now deals only with tomorrow,
Confounds the forecasters, dismisses clocks.

*My last trip was Beijing. Know where that is?
Beijing. Peking, you'd say. Three weeks there, I was.*
25 *Peking is wrong. If you've been there
You call it Beijing, like me. Go on, say it.*

Mackerel wigs dispense the justice of air.
At this height nothing lives. Too cold. Too near the sun.

Stewart Island

'But look at all this beauty'
said the hotel manager's wife
when asked how she could bear to
live there. True: there was a fine bay,
5 all hills and atmosphere; white
sand, and bush down to the sea's edge;
oyster-boats, too, and Maori
fishermen with Scottish names (she
ran off with one that autumn).
10 As for me, I walked on the beach;
it was too cold to swim. My
seven-year-old collected shells
and was bitten by sandflies;
my four-year-old paddled, until
15 a mad seagull jetted down
to jab its claws and beak into
his head. I had already
decided to leave the country.

Fleur Adcock



Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan

They sent me a salwar kameez
peacock-blue,
and another
glistening like an orange split open,
5 embossed slippers, gold and black
points curling.
Candy-striped glass bangles
snapped, drew blood.
Like at school, fashions changed
10 in Pakistan –
the salwar bottoms were broad and stiff,
then narrow.
My aunts chose an apple-green sari,
silver-bordered
15 for my teens.

I tried each satin-silken top –
was alien in the sitting-room.
I could never be as lovely
as those clothes –
20 I longed
for denim and corduroy.
My costume clung to me
and I was aflame,
I couldn't rise up out of its fire,
25 half-English,
unlike Aunt Jamila.

I wanted my parents' camel-skin lamp –
switching it on in my bedroom,
to consider the cruelty
30 and the transformation
from camel to shade,
marvel at the colours
like stained glass.

My mother cherished her jewellery –

35 Indian gold, dangling, filigree.
But it was stolen from our car.
The presents were radiant in my wardrobe.
My aunts requested cardigans
from Marks and Spencers.

40 My salwar kameez
didn't impress the schoolfriend
who sat on my bed, asked to see
my weekend clothes.
But often I admired the mirror-work,
45 tried to glimpse myself
in the miniature
glass circles, recall the story
how the three of us
sailed to England.

50 Prickly heat had me screaming on the way.
I ended up in a cot
in my English grandmother's dining-room,
found myself alone,
playing with a tin boat.

55 I pictured my birthplace
from fifties' photographs.
When I was older
there was conflict, a fractured land
throbbing through newsprint.

60 Sometimes I saw Lahore –
my aunts in shaded rooms,
screened from male visitors,
sorting presents,
wrapping them in tissue.

65 Or there were beggars, sweeper-girls
and I was there –
of no fixed nationality,
staring through fretwork
at the Shalimar Gardens.

Hurricane Hits England, by Grace Nichols

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Nothing's Changed

Small round hard stones click
under my heels,
seeding grasses thrust
bearded seeds
5 into trouser cuffs, cans,
trodden on, crunch
in tall, purple-flowering,
amiable weeds.

District Six.
10 No board says it is:
but my feet know,
and my hands,
and the skin about my bones,
and the soft labouring of my lungs,
15 and the hot, white, inwards turning
anger of my eyes.

Brash with glass,
name flaring like a flag,
it squats
20 in the grass and weeds,
incipient Port Jackson trees:
new, up-market, haute cuisine,
guard at the gatepost,
whites only inn.

25 No sign says it is:
but we know where we belong.

I press my nose
to the clear panes, know,
before I see them, there will be
30 crushed ice white glass,
linen falls,
the single rose.

Down the road,
working man's cafe sells
35 bunny chows.
Take it with you, eat
it at a plastic table's top,
wipe your fingers on your jeans,
spit a little on the floor:
40 it's in the bone.

I back from the glass,
boy again,
leaving small mean O
of small mean mouth.
45 Hands burn
for a stone, a bomb,
to shiver down the glass.
Nothing's changed.

Tatamkhulu Afrika

Postcard from a Travel Snob

I do not wish that anyone were here.
This place is not a holiday resort
with karaoke nights and pints of beer
for drunken tourist types – perish the thought.

5 This is a peaceful place, untouched by man –
not like your seaside-town-consumer-hell.
I'm sleeping in a local farmer's van –
it's great. There's not a guest house or hotel

within a hundred miles. Nobody speaks
10 English (apart from me, and rest assured,
I'm not your sun-and-sangria-two-weeks-
small-minded-package-philistine-abroad).

When you're as multi-cultural as me,
your friends become wine connoisseurs, not drunks.

15 I'm not a British tourist in the sea;
I am an anthropologist in trunks.

Sophie Hannah





In Romney Marsh

As I went down to Dymchurch Wall,
I heard the South sing o'er the land
I saw the yellow sunlight fall
On knolls where Norman churches stand.

5 And ringing shrilly, taut and lithe,
Within the wind a core of sound,
The wire from Romney town to Hythe
Along its airy journey wound.

A veil of purple vapour flowed
10 And trailed its fringe along the Straits;
The upper air like sapphire glowed:
And roses filled Heaven's central gates.

Masts in the offing wagged their tops;
The swinging waves pealed on the shore;
15 The saffron beach, all diamond drops
And beads of surge, prolonged the roar.

As I came up from Dymchurch Wall,
I saw above the Downs' low crest
The crimson brands of sunset fall,
20 Flicker and fade from out the West.

Night sank: like flakes of silver fire
The stars in one great shower came down;
Shrill blew the wind; and shrill the wire
Rang out from Hythe to Romney town.

25 The darkly shining salt sea drops
Streamed as the waves clashed on the shore;
The beach, with all its organ stops
Pealing again, prolonged the roar.

John Davidson





Absence

I visited the place where we last met.
Nothing was changed, the gardens were well-tended,
The fountains sprayed their usual steady jet;
There was no sign that anything had ended
5 And nothing to instruct me to forget.

The thoughtless birds that shook out of the trees,
Singing an ecstasy I could not share,
Played cunning in my thoughts. Surely in these
Pleasures there could not be a pain to bear
10 Or any discord shake the level breeze.

It was because the place was just the same
That made your absence seem a savage force,
For under all the gentleness there came
An earthquake tremor: fountain, birds and grass
15 Were shaken by my thinking of your name.

Elizabeth Jennings

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