



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Faculty of Humanities and Education
School of Education

TALK
THE POEM
Poetry Recitation Competition



**An Anthology of
British Poems**

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1. Daffodils

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,

They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company;
I gaze—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

by William Wordsworth

2. Sonnet composed upon Westminster bridge

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
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 the sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendor, 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!

by William Wordsworth

3. A sense of denial

Denial looks black, panelled, silver-edged
and gleaming. Car-washed in water
enough to quench a dying village's thirst,

a Hummer, petrol guzzling in a London traffic jam.
Its darkened windows seal out the day's cool breeze,
to keep in an Air-Con fool, a lone driver in his third car
the one that's just for fun! The tread of the rubber
tyres bouncing me back to trees tapped
of their strength to let us breathe.

Denial is the clicking of a million light switches
going on as the sun sets in the North (and scorches the South).
A single home lit by countless careless bulbs,
the hum of its appliances on stand-by. While
clicking fingers coat the keys of a Playstation,
and a car chase roars from the DVD on the plasma screen,
while someone else plugs into a symphony of jungalist beats.

Denial is the burning smell of toast,
a third round of single slices under a gas grill.
Or the blackened burnt out wreck of once Ogoni land.
Stepping out into the city's morning traffic fumes,
smog clogging a child's breath, inhaler at the ready.
Stopping to pick up the rich roast of coffee in a Starbucks mug,
and an over-sized, under-nourishing Big Mac for lunch.

Denial is tasteless, with a dash of MSG making all falsified
flavours more amplified. Even the blandness of the water-fat
injected chicken, with enough legs for everyone.
Coated in orange crumbs that were never bread.
Garnished with a mutated modified tomato, ever-fresh
and tasteless on the tongue, plumped in polystyrene buns.

by Dorothea Smartt

4. In the upper room

I frighten to shudder into the drum,
frighten fuh de rhythm riding m'body;
no way will I succumb,
let drum song shiver through m'ears
echo through me, mixing in m'hips.
Where the drums come from?
Not from dem sailors downstairs,
or d'hands of that innkeeper, or d'quayside,
outside. Is from m'inside, deep,
seeping from m'toes,
taking me home, to other feet pounding,
exalting in the beat.
Still I frighten, but I let my pelvis lean
into de drum. Where it gon take me?
I travel, I travel and d'drums keep on,
bringing sweat to d'side of m'neck.

by Dorothea Smartt

5. Shake My Future

shake my future push me past my complacency
my taken-for-granted my comfort zone
shake my future let me source the unimagined
be released from the sentence of the inevitable
take control, empower myself
past the dour predictions of the present
and change myself
shake my future challenge our 'first world's
capitalist consumerist criminal zone
of perpetual purchasing
shake my future past the edges of the known
world launch me out into the hinterlands
of the intuited imagined
beyond the droughts of apathy
and quench my thirst for something different
shake my future with alternative endings
curdle the milk of human kindness beyond
the patronizing rattle of charity cans
to preserve the poor and assuage my guilt
shake my future with a kaleidoscope of tunes
play some other melody and bliss me out
of ignorance let my mind expand with a question
and seeking the answers shake my future
shake my future shake my future
in a triangle of tangential tirades and beckon me
into a sandwich of yes we can and hope

by Dorothea Smartt

6. Stand on the highest pavement

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

by *T. S. Eliot*

7. On the sea

It keeps eternal whisperings around
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,
That scarcely will the very smallest shell
Be moved for days from where it sometime fell.
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.
Oh, ye! who have your eyeballs vexed and tired,
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye! whose ears are din'd with uproar rude,
Or fed too much with cloying melody---
Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth and brood,
Until ye start, as if the sea nymphs quired!

by John Keats

8. Happy Insensibility

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy Tree,
Thy branches ne'er remember
Their green felicity:
The north cannot undo them
With a sleety whistle through them,
Nor frozen thawings glue them
From budding at the prime.

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy Brook,
Thy bubblings ne'er remember
Apollo's summer look;
But with a sweet forgetting
They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never petting
About the frozen time.

Ah! would 'twere so with many
A gentle girl and boy!
But were there ever any
Writhed not at passéd joy?
To know the change and feel it,
When there is none to heal it
Nor numbéd sense to steal it –
Was never said in rhyme.

by John Keats

9. On fame

FAME, like a wayward girl, will still be coy
To those who woo her with too slavish knees,
But makes surrender to some thoughtless boy,
And dotes the more upon a heart at ease;
She is a Gipsy,—will not speak to those
Who have not learnt to be content without her;
A Jilt, whose ear was never whisper'd close,
Who thinks they scandal her who talk about her;
A very Gipsy is she, Nilus-born,
Sister-in-law to jealous Potiphar;
Ye love-sick Bards! repay her scorn for scorn;
Ye Artists lovelorn! madmen that ye are!
Make your best bow to her and bid adieu,
Then, if she likes it, she will follow you.

by John Keats

10. To solitude

O SOLITUDE! if I must with thee dwell,
Let it not be among the jumbled heap
Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep, --
Nature's observatory -- whence the dell,
Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,
May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep
'Mongst boughs pavilion'd, where the deer's swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell.
But though I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee,
Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,
Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,
Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be
Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

by John Keats

11. Musée des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking
dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

by W.H. Auden

12. The harvest moon

The flame-red moon, the harvest moon,
Rolls along the hills, gently bouncing,
A vast balloon,
Till it takes off, and sinks upward
To lie on the bottom of the sky, like a gold doubloon.
The harvest moon has come,
Booming softly through heaven, like a bassoon.
And the earth replies all night, like a deep drum.

So people can't sleep,
So they go out where elms and oak trees keep
A kneeling vigil, in a religious hush.
The harvest moon has come!

And all the moonlit cows and all the sheep
Stare up at her petrified, while she swells
Filling heaven, as if red hot, and sailing
Closer and closer like the end of the world.

Till the gold fields of stiff wheat
Cry 'We are ripe, reap us!' and the rivers
Sweat from the melting hills.

by Ted Hughes

13. Wind

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,
Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

Till day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous and emerald,
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as
The coal-house door. Once I looked up—
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap:
The wind flung a magpie away and a black-
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

Rang like some fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

by Ted Hughes

14. The thought fox

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.

by Ted Hughes

15. Among the rocks

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

by Robert Browning

16. Remember

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

by Christina Rossetti

17. Requiem

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

by Christina Rossetti

18. Originally

We came from our own country in a red room
which fell through the fields, our mother singing
our father's name to the turn of the wheels.
My brothers cried, one of them bawling, *Home,*
Home, as the miles rushed back to the city,
the street, the house, the vacant rooms
where we didn't live any more. I stared
at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,
leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue
where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.
Your accent wrong. Corners, which seem familiar,
leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boys
eating worms and shouting words you don't understand.
My parents' anxiety stirred like a loose tooth
in my head. *I want our own country,* I said.

But then you forget, or don't recall, or change,
and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only
a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue
shedding its skin like a snake, my voice
in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think
I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space
and the right place? Now, *Where do you come from?*
strangers ask. *Originally?* And I hesitate.

by Carol Ann Duffy

19. The oldest girl in the world

Children, I remember how I could hear
with my soft young ears
the tiny sounds of the air-
tinkles and chimes
like miniscule bells
ringing continually there;
clinks and chinks
like glasses of sparky gooseberry wine,
jolly and glinting and raised in the air.
Yes, I could hear like a bat! And how!
Can't hear a sniff of it now.

Truly, believe me, I could all the time see
every insect that crawled in a bush,
every bird that hid in a tree,
individually.
If I wanted to catch a caterpillar
to keep as a pet in a box
I had only to watch a cabbage
and there it would be,
crawling bendy and green towards me.
Yes, I could see with the eyes of a cat. Miaow!
Can't see a sniff of it now.

And my sense of taste was second to none.
By God, the amount I knew with my tongue!
The shrewd taste of a walnut's brain.
The taste of a train from a bridge.
Of a kiss. Of air chewy with midge.
Of fudge from a factory two miles away
from the house where I lived.
I'd stick out my tongue
to savour the sky in a droplet of rain.
Yes, I could taste like the fang of a snake. Wow!
Can't taste a sniff of it now.

On the scent, what couldn't I smell
with my delicate nose, my nostrils of pearl?
I could smell the world!
Snow. Soot. Soil.
Satsumas snug in their Christmas sock.
The ink of a pen.
The stink of an elephant's skin.
The blue broth of a swimming-pool. Dive in!
The showbizzy gasp of the wind.

Yes, I could smell like a copper's dog. Bow-wow!
Can't smell a sniff of it now.

As for my sense of touch
it was too much!
The cold of a snowball
felt through the vanishing heat of a mitt.
A peach like an apple wearing a vest.
The raffia dish of a bird's nest.
A hot chestnut
branding the palm at the heart of the fist.
The stab of the thorn on the rose. Long grass, its itch.
Yes, I could feel with the sensitive hand of a ghost.
Whooo!
Can't feel a sniff of it now.

Can't see a
Can't hear a
Can't taste a
Can't smell a
Can't feel a bit of it whiff of it niff of it
Can't get a sniff of it now.

by Carol Ann Duffy

20. The light gatherer

When you were small, your cupped palms
each held a candleworth under the skin,
enough light to begin,

and as you grew,
light gathered in you, two clear raindrops
in your eyes,

warm pearls, shy,
in the lobes of your ears, even always
the light of a smile after your tears.

Your kissed feet glowed in my one hand,
or I'd enter a room to see the corner you played in
lit like a stage set,

the crown of your bowed head spotlit.
When language came, it glittered like a river,
silver, clever with fish,

and you slept
with the whole moon held in your arms for a night-light
where I knelt watching.

Light gatherer. You fell from a star
into my lap, the soft lamp at the bedside
mirrored in you,

and now you shine like a snowgirl,
a buttercup under a chin, the wide blue yonder
you squeal at and fly in,

like a jewelled cave,
turquoise and diamond and gold, opening out
at the end of a tunnel of years.

by Carol Ann Duffy

21. The force that through the green fuse drives the flower

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.
And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.
And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

by Dylan Thomas

22. Dusting the phone

I am spending my time imagining the worst that could happen.
I know this is not a good idea, and that being in love, I could be
spending my time going over the best that has been happening.

The phone rings heralding some disaster. Sirens.
Or it doesn't ring which also means disaster. Sirens.
In which case, who would ring me to tell? Nobody knows.

The future is a long gloved hand. An empty cup.
A marriage. A full house. One night per week
in stranger's white sheets. Forget tomorrow,

You say, don't mention love. I try. It doesn't work.
I assault the postman for a letter. I look for flowers.
I go over and over our times together, re-read them.

This very second I am waiting on the phone.
Silver service. I polish it. I dress for it.
I'll give it extra in return for your call.

Infuriatingly, it sends me hoaxes, wrong numbers;
or worse, calls from boring people. Your voice
disappears into my lonely cotton sheets.

I am trapped in it. I can't move. I want you.
All the time. This is awful – only a photo.
Come on, damn you, ring me. Or else. What?

I don't know what.

by Jackie Kay

23. Divorce

I did not promise
to stay with you till death do us part, or
anything like that,
so part I must, and quickly. There are things
I cannot suffer
any longer: Mother, you never, ever said
a kind word
or a thank-you for all the tedious chores I have done;
Father, your breath
smells like a camel's and gives me the hump;
all you ever say is:
'Are you off in the cream puff, Lady Muck?'
In this day and age?
I would be better off in an orphanage.

I want a divorce.
There are parents in the world whose faces turn
up to the light
who speak in the soft murmur of rivers
and never shout.
There are parents who stroke their children's cheeks
in the dead of night
and sing in the colourful voices of rainbows,
red to blue.
These parents are not you. I never chose you.
You are rough and wild,
I don't want to be your child. All you do is shout
and that's not right.
I will file for divorce in the morning at first light.

by Jackie Kay

24. Late love

How they strut about, people in love,
how tall they grow, pleased with themselves,
their hair, glossy, their skin shining.
They don't remember who they have been.

How filmic they are just for this time.
How important they've become - secret, above
the order of things, the dreary mundane.
Every church bell ringing, a fresh sign.

How dull the lot that are not in love.
Their clothes shabby, their skin lustreless;
how clueless they are, hair a mess; how they trudge
up and down the streets in the rain,

remembering one kiss in a dark alley,
a touch in a changing room, if lucky, a lovely wait
for the phone to ring, maybe, baby.
The past with its rush of velvet, its secret hush

already miles away, dimming now, in the late day.

by Jackie Kay

25. Sound of sleat

I always looked out at the world,
And wondered if the world looked back at me,
Standing on the edge of something,
On my face- the wind from the cold sea.

Across the waters were mirrors to see
Faces that looked like me,
People caught between two places,
People crossing over the seas.

And it seemed from my croft
-With the old stones and the sheep,
And the sound of the songs in my sleep-
That the music of folk somewhere meets

On the edge of the place we would be.
I've lived through some hard times.
My face is lined; my body so frail.
I used to think I might be able –

When the river ran to meet the sea,
When the sun and moon shared the sky-
To look out as far as the eye could see,
And raise a glass to the girl looking back at me.

by Jackie Kay

26. Sonnets from the Portuguese XXIV

LET the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life—
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

27. How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

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.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love with a passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a 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.

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

28. Diving

The moment I tire
of difficult sand-grains
and giddy pebbles,
I roll with the punch
of a shrivelling wave
and am cosmonaut
out past the fringe
of a basalt ledge
in a moony sea-hall
spun beyond blue.
Faint but definite
heat of the universe

flutters my skin;
quick fish apply
as something to love,
what with their heads
of gong-dented gold;
plankton I push

an easy way through
would be dust or dew
in the world behind
if that mattered at all,
which is no longer true,
with its faces and cries.

by Andrew Motion

29. The patchwork bonnett

Across the room my silent love I throw,
Where you sit sewing in bed by candlelight,
Your young stern profile and industrious fingers
Displayed against the blind in a shadow-show,
To Dinda's grave delight.

The needle dips and pokes, the cheerful thread
Runs after, follow-my-leader down the seam:
The patchwork pieces cry for joy together,
O soon to sit as a crown on Dinda's head,
Fulfilment of their dream.

Snippets and odd ends folded by, forgotten,
With camphor on a top shelf, hard to find,
Now wake to this most happy resurrection,
To Dinda playing toss with a reel of cotton
And staring at the blind.

Dinda in sing-song stretching out one hand
Calls for the playthings; mother does not hear:
Her mind sails far away on a patchwork Ocean,
And all the world must wait till she touches land,
So Dinda cries in fear,

Then Mother turns, laughing like a young fairy,
And Dinda smiles to see her look so kind,
Calls out again for playthings, playthings, playthings;
And now the shadows make an Umbrian '*Mary
Adoring*', on the blind.

by Robert Graves

30. The spoilsport

My familiar ghost again
Comes to see what he can see,
Critic, son of Conscious Brain,
Spying on our privacy.

Slam the window, bolt the door,
Yet he'll enter in and stay;
In tomorrow's book he'll score
Indiscretions of today.

Whispered love and muttered fears,
How their echoes fly about!
None escape his watchful ears,
Every sigh might be a shout.

No kind words nor angry cries
Turn away this grim spoilsport;
No fine lady's pleading eyes,
Neither love, nor hate, nor ... port.

Critic wears no smile of fun,
Speaks no word of blame nor praise,
Counts our kisses one by one,
Notes each gesture, every phrase.

My familiar ghost again
Stands or squats where suits him best;
Critic, son of Conscious Brain,
Listens, watches, takes no rest.

by Robert Graves

31. Marigolds

With a fork drive Nature out,
She will ever yet return;
Hedge the flowerbed all about,
Pull or stab or cut or burn,
She will ever yet return.

Look: the constant marigold
Springs again from hidden roots.
Baffled gardener, you behold
New beginnings and new shoots
Spring again from hidden roots.
Pull or stab or cut or burn,
They will ever yet return.

Gardener, cursing at the weed,
Ere you curse it further, say:
Who but you planted the seed
In my fertile heart, one day?
Ere you curse me further, say!
New beginnings and new shoots
Spring again from hidden roots.
Pull or stab or cut or burn,
Love must ever yet return.

by Robert Graves

32. Call, The

Out of the nothingness of sleep,
The slow dreams of Eternity,
There was a thunder on the deep:
I came, because you called to me.

I broke the Night's primeval bars,
I dared the old abysmal curse,
And flashed through ranks of frightened stars
Suddenly on the universe!

The eternal silences were broken;
Hell became Heaven as I passed.—
What shall I give you as a token,
A sign that we have met, at last?

I'll break and forge the stars anew,
Shatter the heavens with a song;
Immortal in my love for you,
Because I love you, very strong.

Your mouth shall mock the old and wise,
Your laugh shall fill the world with flame,
I'll write upon the shrinking skies
The scarlet splendour of your name,

Till Heaven cracks, and Hell thereunder
Dies in her ultimate mad fire,
And darkness falls, with scornful thunder,
On dreams of men and men's desire.

Then only in the empty spaces,
Death, walking very silently,
Shall fear the glory of our faces
Through all the dark infinity.

So, clothed about with perfect love,
The eternal end shall find us one,
Alone above the Night, above
The dust of the dead gods, alone.

by Rupert Brooke

33. In a garden

When the gardener has gone this garden
Looks wistful and seems waiting an event.
It is so spruce, a metaphor of Eden
And even more so since the gardener went,

Quietly godlike, but of course, he had
Not made me promise anything and I
Had no one tempting me to make the bad
Choice. Yet I still felt lost and wonder why.

Even the beech tree from next door which shares
Its shadow with me, seemed a kind of threat.
Everything was too neat, and someone cares

In the wrong way. I need not have stood long
Mocked by the smell of a mown lawn, and yet
I did. Sickness for Eden was so strong.

by Elizabeth Jennings

34. 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
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
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
Were shaken by my thinking of your name.

by Elizabeth Jennings

35. Friday

We nailed the hands long ago,
Wove the thorns, took up the scourge and shouted
For excitement's sake, we stood at the dusty edge
Of the pebbled path and watched the extreme of pain.

But one or two prayed, one or two
Were silent, shocked, stood back
And remembered remnants of words, a new vision,
The cross is up with its crying victim, the clouds
Cover the sun, we learn a new way to lose
What we did not know we had
Until this bleak and sacrificial day,
Until we turned from our bad
Past and knelt and cried out our dismay,
The dice still clicking, the voices dying away.

by Elizabeth Jennings

36. On the syllabus today: Blue skies

Today I awake sizzling with hope. I'm determined
to teach something that can't be undermined

I'm an elder of sorts—passing into the age of wisdom.
Today everything I say will emphasize viability

I will be emphatic but not orthodox. I will plough the land
of post-apocalyptic post-adolescence like a farmer or a priest

Inside the class-confessional, beside the mournful furrows
of the earth, we won't ask each other awkward questions

like what does rampage mean?
History will not simmer—we will not be surprised
Inside in the bald cupola of Virginia Tech's Green Zone
youth will look at me with eyes wide open

Beyond the classroom windows' polite geometry, things
tunnel up through the earth—renegade poppies

But today I will direct the eyes of youth upwards
I will point to the sky's bland immensity of blue

the only point of view elders dare pass on
to their vibrant vulnerable young

by Lucinda Roy

37. Disarmed

He is still those boys at night when his dreams
are laced with genocide. When day breaks
and the armless beggars wander down Big Waterloo Street
he vaguely recalls something distant and obscene.

Two years of school taught him the potency
of humiliation. Some days back he saw his real teacher, the Colonel,
speaking with a white man in a suit outside the bank.
He wanted to run over, fall at his feet,
beg the Big Man to take him back into the fold.

Weary of petty crime he's ripe for another thrill ride
on the blade of a machete. He says nothing out loud
to anyone: the Colonel taught him the value of patience.
He knows one day the call will come again and, when it does,
he'll be the first to sign up. He's not afraid
of death—his or other people's. He knows what they see:
a homeless Temne, a bobo, a dog.

Something bubbles inside his head. He lies
awake at night by the fetid open sewers
and listens to militias of rats on food raids.

Disarmed and dangerous, the child waits for democracy to spring a leak.

Temne—A tribe in West Africa
bobo—Krio term for a small boy

by Lucinda Roy

38. The river

In my first sleep
I came to the river
And looked down
Through the clear water -
Only in dream
Water so pure,
Laced and undulant
Lines of flow
On its rocky bed
Water of life
Streaming forever.

A house was there
Beside the river
And I, arrived,
An expected guest
About to explore
Old gardens and libraries -
But the car was waiting
To drive me away.

One last look
Into that bright stream -
Trout there were
And clear on the bottom
Monster form
Of the great crayfish
That crawls to the moon.
On its rocky bed
Living water
In whorls and ripples
Flowing unbended.

There was the car
To drive me away.
We crossed the river
Of living water -
I might not stay,
But must return
By the road too short
To the waiting day.

In my second dream
Pure I was and free
By the rapid stream,

My crystal house the sky,
The pure crystalline sky.

Into the stream I flung
A bottle of clear glass
That twirled and tossed and spun
In the water's race
Flashing the morning sun.

Down that swift river
I saw it borne away,
My empty crystal form,
Exultant saw it caught
Into the current's spin,
The flashing water's run.

by Kathleen Raine

39. Lament

Where are those dazzling hills touched by the sun,
Those crags in childhood that I used to climb?
Hidden, hidden under mist is yonder mountain,
Hidden is the heart.

A day of cloud, a lifetime falls between,
Gone are the heather moors and the pure stream,
Gone are the rocky places and the green,
Hidden, hidden under sorrow is yonder mountain,
Hidden, hidden.

O storm and gale of tears, whose blinding screen
Makes weather of grief, snow's drifting curtain
Palls th'immortal heights once seen.
Hidden, hidden is the heart,
Hidden, hidden is the heart.

by Kathleen Raine

40. Confessions

Wanting to know all
I overlooked each particle
Containing the whole
Unknowable.

Intent on one great love, perfect,
Requited and forever,
I missed love's everywhere
Small presence, thousand-guised.

And lifelong have been reading
Book after book, searching
For wisdom, but bringing
Only my own understanding.

Forgive me, forgiver,
Whether you be infinite omniscient
Or some unnoticed other
My existence has hurt.

Being what I am
What could I do but wrong?
Yet love can bring
To heart healing
To chaos meaning.

by Kathleen Raine

41. The chimney sweeper

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry ” ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!’”
So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I said,
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

by William Blake

42. If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man my son!

by Rudyard Kipling

43. When earth's last picture is painted

When Earth's last picture is painted
And the tubes are twisted and dried
When the oldest colors have faded
And the youngest critic has died
We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it
Lie down for an aeon or two
'Till the Master of all good workmen
Shall put us to work anew

And those that were good shall be happy
They'll sit in a golden chair
They'll splash at a ten league canvas
With brushes of comet's hair
They'll find real saints to draw from
Magdalene, Peter, and Paul
They'll work for an age at a sitting
And never be tired at all.

And only the Master shall praise us.
And only the Master shall blame.
And no one will work for the money.
No one will work for the fame.
But each for the joy of the working,
And each, in his separate star,
Will draw the thing as he sees it.
For the God of things as they are!

by Rudyard Kipling

44. The old stoic

Riches I hold in light esteem,
And Love I laugh to scorn;
And lust of fame was but a dream
That vanish'd with the morn:

And, if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty!'

Yea, as my swift days near their goal,
'Tis all that I implore:
In life and death a chainless soul,
With courage to endure.

by Emily Brontë

45. Summoned by bells

Walking from school is a consummate art:
Which route to follow to avoid the gangs,
Which paths to find that lead, circuitous,
To leafy squirrel haunts and plopping ponds,
For dreams of Archibald and Tiger Tim;
Which hiding place is safe, and when it is;
What time to leave to dodge the enemy.
I only once was trapped. I knew the trap -
I heard it in their tones: "Walk back with us."
I knew they weren't my friends; but that soft voice
Wheedled me from my route to cold Swain's Lane.
There in a holly bush they threw me down,
Pulled off my shorts, and laughed and ran away;
And, as I struggled up, I saw grey brick,
The cemetery railings and the tomb.

by John Betjeman

46. Dover beach

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

by Matthew Arnold

47. The wind

I saw you toss the kites on high
And blow the birds about the sky;
And all around I heard you pass,
Like ladies' skirts across the grass—
 O wind, a-blowing all day long,
 O wind, that sings so loud a song!

I saw the different things you did,
But always you yourself you hid.
I felt you push, I heard you call,
I could not see yourself at all—
 O wind, a-blowing all day long,
 O wind, that sings so loud a song!

O you that are so strong and cold,
O blower, are you young or old?
Are you a beast of field and tree,
Or just a stronger child than me?
 O wind, a-blowing all day long,
 O wind, that sings so loud a song!

by Robert Louis Stevenson

48. A farewell

Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,
Thy tribute wave deliver:
No more by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

Flow, softly flow, by lawn and lea,
A rivulet then a river;
No where by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

But here will sigh thine alder tree,
And here thine aspen shiver;
And here by thee will hum the bee,
For ever and for ever.

A thousand suns will stream on thee,
A thousand moons will quiver;
But not by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

by Alfred Tennyson

49. The tenor man

Pottering around the stage,
a hyperactive ancient in his own backyard -
independent of the band it seems.

Disrhythmic shuffling of ashtray,
beer, a pack of cigarettes,
adjusting microphones,

then in the middle eight
he draws, exhales, and catches breath,
stoops forward to the mouthpiece

and blows,
a tumbling counterpoint,
scales soaring from his horn.

The melody flows

until the break,
and then he shoulders arms,
a truce between the music and his ailing lungs.

Between choruses he sits apart
to light another cigarette,
a sideman counting out the bars
until he rises for the coda -
this Lazarus of swing.

by Adrian Green

50. Linger by the doorway of the woods

I was picking blackberries when I thought of the strange girl at the mental hospital. Beautiful she was – quietly beautiful. Yes – and apparently nothing the matter with her – except that she was scared to go outside, and scared to go indoors. And so she just sat there in a chair by the entrance door – she was there when I went in with the

library trolley : she was there when I came out. But that was thirty years ago. Odd

that I should have thought of her just then.

by Ian Emberson

51. **Admired**

Strange how deep under her skin he is.
She only knows him through his distant admiration
across darkened dance-floors and concert halls.

His desire waterfalls down her spine,
unnerves her, his heart's poetry
troubles her through his hungry eyes.

She finds herself looking out for him,
wonders how much she likes to be admired,
how much she's learning to admire?

by Juliet Wilson

52. Where shall we go?

Waiting for her in the usual bar
He finds she's late again.
Impatience frets at him,
But not the fearful, half-sweet pain he knew
So long ago.

That cherished perturbation is replaced
By styptic irritation
And, under that, a cold
Dark current of dejection moves
That this is so.

There was a time when all her failings were
Delights he marvelled at:
It seemed her clumsiness,
Forgetfulness and wild non-sequiturs
Could never grow

Wearisome, nor would he ever tire
Of doting on those small
Blemishes that proved
Her beauty as the blackbird's gloss affirms
The bridal snow.

The clock above the bar records her theft
Of time he cannot spare;
Then suddenly she's here.
He stands to welcome and accuse her with
A grey 'Hello'.

And sees, for one sly instant, in her eyes
His own aggrieved dislike
Wince back at him before
Her smile draws blinds. 'Sorry I'm late,' she says.
'Where shall we go?'

by Vernon Scannell

53. They did not expect this

They did not expect this. Being neither wise nor brave
And wearing only the beauty of youth's season
They took the first turning quite unquestioningly
And walked quickly without looking back even once.

It was of course the wrong turning. First they were nagged
By a small wind that tugged at their clothing like a dog;
Then the rain began and there was no shelter anywhere,
Only the street and the rows of houses stern as soldiers.

Though the blood chilled, the endearing word burnt the tongue.
There were no parks or gardens or public houses:
Midnight settled and the rain paused leaving the city
Enormous and still like a great sleeping seal.

At last they found accommodation in a cold
Furnished room where they quickly learnt to believe in ghosts;
They had their hope stuffed and put on the mantelpiece
But found, after a while, that they did not notice it.

While she spends many hours looking in the bottoms of teacups
He reads much about association football
And waits for the marvellous envelope to fall:
Their eyes are strangers and they rarely speak.
They did not expect this.

by Vernon Scannell

54. Symptoms

Although you have given me a stomach upset,
Weak knees, a lurching heart, a fuzzy brain,
A high-pitched laugh, a monumental phone bill,
A feeling of unworthiness, sharp pain
When you are somewhere else, a guilty conscience,
A longing, and a dread of what's in store,
A pulse rate for the Guinness Book of Records -
Life now is better than it was before.

Although you have given me a raging temper,
Insomnia, a rising sense of panic,
A hopeless challenge, bouts of introspection,
Raw, bitten nails, a voice that's strangely manic,
A selfish streak, a fear of isolation,
A silly smile, lips that are chapped and sore,
A running joke, a risk, an inspiration –
Life now is better than it was before.

Although you have given me a premonition,
Chattering teeth, a goal, a lot to lose,
A granted wish, mixed motives, superstitions,
Hang-ups and headaches, fear of awful news,
A bubble in my throat, a dare to swallow,
A crack of light under a closing door,
The crude, fantastic prospect of forever –
Life now is better that it was before.

by Sophie Hannah

55. Your dad did what?

Where they have been, if they have been away,
or what they've done at home, if they have not -
you make them write about the holiday.

One writes My Dad did.
What? Your Dad did what?

That's not a sentence.
Never mind the bell.

We stay behind until the work is done.

You count their words (you who can count and spell);
all the assignments are complete bar one

and though this boy seems bright, that one is his.

He says he's finished, doesn't want to add
anything, hands it in just as it is.

No change.
My Dad did.
What? What did his Dad?

You find the 'E' you gave him as you sort
through reams of what this girl did, what that lad did,
and read the line again, just one 'e' short:
This holiday was horrible.
My Dad did.

by Sophie Hannah

56. Independence...

Listen...
thud-thud
Can you hear it?
thud-thud
It's the beat of my heart.
thud-thud
I shall live on.
thud-thud
My tortured soul
is not willing to rest.
thud-thud-thud
This war has just begun.
I've learned how to laugh
in the face of evil now.
thud-thud-thud
You can no longer hurt me,
as long as I follow
the beat of my heart.
thud-thud-thud
Another day beckons.
Another day of torment.
thud-thud
No!
Not this day
or
any other day.
thud-thud
You may have won
the battles,
but today
I declare Victory.
thud-thud

Listen...
thud-thud
Do you hear that?

thud-thud
It's the beat of my heart.
thud-thud
And I live on.
thud-thud
Thud!

by Claire Nixon

57. Slavery: A Poem (ll. 69-98)

For no fictitious ills these numbers flow,
But living anguish, and substantial woe;
No individual griefs my bosom melt,
For millions feel what Oroonoko felt:
Fired by no single wrongs, the countless host
I mourn, by rapine dragged from Afric's coast.

Perish the illiberal thought which wold debase
The native genius of the sable race!
Perish the proud philosophy, which sought
To rob them of the powers of equal thought!
Does then the immortal principle within
Change with the casual colour of a skin?
Does matter govern spirit? or is mind
Degraded by the form to which 'tis joined?

No: they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,
And souls to act, with firm, though erring, zeal;
For they have keen affections, kind desires,
Love strong as death, and active patriot fires;
All the rude energy, the fervid flame,
Of high-souled passion, and ingenuous shame:
Strong, but luxuriant virtues boldly shoot
From the wild vigour of a savage root.

Nor weak their sense of honour's proud control,
For pride is virtue in a pagan soul;
A sense of worth, a conscience of desert,
A high, unbroken haughtiness of heart:
That self-same stuff which erst proud empires swayed,
Of which the conquerers of the world were made.
Capricious fate of man! that very pride
In Afric scourged, in Rome defied.

By Hannah More

58. My papa's waltz

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
The waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging you your shirt.

By Theodore Roethke

59. Wedding

From time to time our love is like a sail
and when the sail begins to alternate
from tack to tack, it's like a swallowtail
and when the swallow files, it's like a coat;
and if the coat is yours, it has a tear
like a wide mouth and when the mouth begins
to draw the wind, it's like a trumpeter
and when the trumpet blows, it blows like millions...
and this, my love, when millions come and go
beyond the need of us, is like a trick;
and when the trick begins, it's like a toe
tip-toeing on a rope, which is like luck;
and when the luck begins, it's like a wedding,
which is like love, which is like everything.

By Alice Oswald

60. Checking out me history

Dem tell me
Dem tell me
Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history
Blind me to my own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat
dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat
But Touissant L'Ouverture
no dem never tell me bout dat

Toussaint
a slave
with vision
lick back
Napoleon
battalion
and first Black
Republic born
Toussaint de thorn
to de French
Toussaint de beacon
of de Haitian Revolution

Dem tell me bout de man who discover de balloon
and de cow who jump over de moon
Dem tell me bout de dish run away with de spoon
but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

Nanny
see-far woman
of mountain dream
fire-woman struggle
hopeful stream
to freedom river

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo
but dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492
but what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp
and how Robin Hood used to camp

Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul
but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

From Jamaica
she travel far
to the Crimean War
she volunteer to go
and even when de British said no
she still brave the Russian snow
a healing star
among the wounded
a yellow sunrise
to the dying

Dem tell me
Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me
But now I checking out me own history
I carving out me identity

by John Agard

61. Toussaint L'Ouverture acknowledges Wordsworth's Sonnet 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture'

I have never walked on Westminster Bridge
or had a close-up view of daffodils.
My childhood's roots are the Haitian hills
where runaway slaves made a freedom pledge
and scarlet poinciannas flaunt their scent.
I have never walked on Westminster Bridge
or speak, like you, with Cumbrian accent.
My tongue bridges Europe to Dahomey.
Yet how sweet is the smell of liberty
When human beings share a common garment.
So thanks, brother, for your sonnet's tribute.
May it resound when the Thanes' text stays mute.
And what better ground than a city's bridge
for my unchained ghost to trumpet love's decree.

By John Agard

62. The Black lace fan my mother gave me

It was the first gift he ever gave her,
buying it for five francs in the Galeries
in prewar Paris. It was stifling.
A starless drought made the nights stormy.

They stayed in the city for summer.
They met in cafés. She was always early.
He was late. That evening he was later.
They wrapped the fan. He looked at his watch.

She looked down the Boulevard des Capucines.
She ordered more coffee. She stood up.
The streets were emptying. The heat was killing.
She thought the distance smelled of rain and lightning.

These are wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand,
darkly picked, stitched boldly, quickly.
The rest is tortoiseshell and has the reticent,
clear patience of its elements. It is

a worn-out, underwater bullion and it keeps,
even now, an inference of its violation.
The lace is overcast as if the weather
it opened for and offset had entered it.

The past is an empty café terrace
An airless dusk before thunder. A man running.
And no way to know what happened then –
none at all – unless, of course, you improvise:

the blackbird on this first sultry morning,
in summer, finding buds, worms, fruit,
feels the heat. Suddenly she puts out her wing –
the whole, the full, flirtatious span of it.

By Eavan Boland

63. A verandah ceremony

This is where the kitten died
This is where the kitten died
In the yard below, unfenced
The wild dogs came as if on horses,
Or a Lords Resistance Army
With machetes, with spears and rifles
The wild dogs came all claws and barking.
This is where the kitten died.

This newnew kitten three weeks old
Must avoid a kitten's fate
Must clear the house of lizards
Bugs and insects and not stray
Beyond the safety gate where the dogs
All tooth and claw still lie in wait

Where the dogs still lie in wait.

by E.A. Markham

64. Blackout

Blackout is endemic to the land.
People have grown sixth sense
and sonic ways, like bats,
emerging out of shadows
into the light of their own flesh.

But the car headlamps coming towards us
make it seem we're in some third world movie,
throwing up potholes and houses exaggeratedly,
the fresh white painted and grey ramshackle
blending into snug relief.

And inside, the children are still hovering,
hopeful moths around the flickerless Box
immune to the cloying stench of toilets
that can't be flushed. The children,
all waiting on electric-spell to come
and trigger a movie, the one featuring America,
played out endlessly in their heads.

While back outside, coconut vendors decapitate
the night, husky heads cutlashed off
in the medieval glow of bottle lamps.

And everywhere there are flittings
and things coming into being,
in a night where football is an act of faith –
A group of young girls huddled in a questionable
doorway;
The sudden dim horizontal of an alleyway;
And the occasional generator-lit big house,
obscenely bright –
hurting the soft iris of darkness
in the worn-out movie, slow reeling

Under the endless cinema of the skies.

by Grace Nichols

65. Cat-rap

Lying on the sofa
all curled and meek
but in my furry-fuzzy head
there's a rapping beat.
Gonna rap while I'm napping
and looking sweet
gonna rap while I'm padding
on the balls of my feet

Gonna rap on my head
gonna rap on my tail
gonna rap on my
you know where.
So wave your paws in the air
like you just don't care
with nine lives to spare
gimme five right here.
Well, they say that we cats
are killed by curiosity,

but does the moggie mind?
No, I've got suavity.
When I get to heaven
gonna rap with Macavity,
gonna find his hidden paw
and clear up that mystery.

Nap it up
scratch it up
the knack is free
fur it up
purr it up
yes that's me.

The meanest cat-rapper you'll ever see.
Number one of the street-sound galaxy.

by Grace Nichols

66. For forest

Forest could keep secrets
Forest could keep secrets

Forest tune in every day
to watersound and birdsound
Forest letting her hair down
to the teeming creeping of her forest-ground

But Forest don't broadcast her business
no Forest cover her business down
from sky and fast-eye sun
and when night come
and darkness wrap her like a gown
Forest is a bad dream woman

Forest dreaming about mountain
and when earth was young
Forest dreaming of the caress of gold
Forest roosting with mysterious eldorado

and when howler monkey
wake her up with howl
Forest just stretch and stir
to a new day of sound

but coming back to secrets
Forest could keep secrets
Forest could keep secrets
And we must keep Forest

by Grace Nichols

67. I like to stay up

I like to stay up
and listen
when big people talking
jumbie stories

I does feel
so tingly and excited
inside me

But when my mother say
“Girl, time for bed”

The is when
I does feel a dread

Then is when
I does jump into me bed

Then is when
I does cover up
from me feet to me head

Then is when
I does wish I didn't listen
to no stupid jumbie story

Then is when
I does wish I read
me book instead

(“Jumbie” is a Guyanese word for “ghost”.)

by Grace Nichols

68. Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

by Wilfred Owen

69. Josephine Baker finds herself

She picked me up
like a slow-burning fuse. I was down
that girls' club used to run in Brixton,
on acid for fuel. Lipstic lesbians, ,
techno so hardcore it's spewing out Audis.
She samples my heartbeat and mixes it with
vodka on the rocks. I'm her light-skinned, negative,
twenty-something, short black wavy-bobbed diva.
She purrs La Garçonne, fancy a drink? I say
Yes. She's crossing the Star Bar like it's a catwalk. So sleek!
A string of pearls, her flapper dress
studded with low-cut diamonds
through my skin, straight to my heart.
Twenties chic! She works
me up and down. I worship
the way she looks.

The way she looks
me up and down. I worship
twenties chic. She works
through my skin, straight to my heart
studded with low-cut diamonds.
A string of pearls her flapper dress.
Yes! She's crossing the Star Bar like it's a catwalk so sleek
she purrs, la garçonne! Fancy a drink? I say.
Twenty-something, short, Black, wavy-bobbed diva:
Vodka on the rocks, I'm her light-skinned negative.
She samples my heartbeat and mixes it with
techno so hardcore it's spewing out Audis
on acid for fuel. Lipstick Lesbians,
that girls' club used to run in Brixton
like a slow-burning fuse. I was down.
She picked me up.

by Patience Agbabi

70. The posh mums are boxing in the square

roughing each other up in a nice way
This is not the world into which I was born
so I'm changing it
I'm sinking deep into the past and dressing my own mum
in their blue spandexes
svelte black stripes from hip to hem
and husbands with better dispositions toward kindness
or at least I'm giving her new lungs
I'm giving her a best friend with no problems and both of them pads
some gloves to go at each other with in a nice way
I'm making it a warm day for them but also
I'm making it rain
the two of them dapping it out in long shadows
I'm watching her from the trees grow
strength in her thighs my mum
grow strength in her glutes my mum
her back taught upright
her knees
and watching her grow no bad thing in her stomach no tumour
her feet do not hurt to touch my mum she is hopping
sinews are happening
wiry arms developing their full reach
no bad thing explodes

sweat and not gradual death I'm cheering
no thing in her stomach no alcohol
no cigarettes with their crotonaldehyde let my dad keep those
no removal of her womb
– and I'm cheering her on in better condition
cheering she is learning to fight for her own body
in spandex her new life
and though there is no beef between them
if her friend is gaining the upper hand
I will call out from the trees
her name
Christine!
and when she turns as turn she must
my mum in the nicest possible way
can slug her right in the gut

by Wayne Holloway-Smith

71. What if

If you can keep your money when governments about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust your neighbour when they trust not you
And they be very nosy too;
If you can await the warm delights of summer
Then summer comes and goes with sun not seen,
And pay so much for drinking water
Knowing that the water is unclean.

If you seek peace in times of war creation,
And you can see that oil merchants are to blame,
If you can meet a pimp or politician,
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you cannot bear dis-united nations
And you think this new world order is a trick,
If you've ever tried to build good race relations,
And watch bad policing mess your work up quick.

If you can make one heap of all your savings
And risk buying a small house and plot,
Then sit back and watch the economy inflating
Then have to deal with the negative equity you've got;
If you can force your mind and body to continue
When all the social services have gone,
If you struggle on when there is nothing in you,

Except the knowledge that justice can be wrong.
If you can speak the truth to common people
Or walk with Kings and Queens and live no lie,
If you can see how power can be evil
And know that every censor is a spy;
If you can fill an unforgiving lifetime
With years of working hard to make ends meet,
You may not be wealthy but I am sure you will find
That you can hold your head high as you walk the streets.

by Benjamin Zephaniah

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