

William Blake

"And Did Those Feet..."
(Fragment from "Milton")

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the Holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land.

The Angel
From Songs of Experience

I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?
And that I was a maiden Queen
Guarded by an Angel mild:
Witless woe was ne'er beguiled!

And I wept both night and day,
And he wiped my tears away;
And I wept both day and night,
And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings, and fled;
Then the morn blushed rosy red.
I dried my tears, and armed my fears
With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again;
I was armed, he came in vain;
For the time of youth was fled,
And grey hairs were on my head.

The Garden of Love
From Songs of Experience

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen;
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.
William Blake
London

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

In ev'ry cry of every man,
In ev'ry Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

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

But most thro' midnight street I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new born Infant's tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

A Poison Tree
From Songs of Experience

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.

And I watered 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,

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 veiled the pole;
In the morning, glad, I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.



John Keats

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 pavillion'd, where the deer's swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove 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.

Poems (1817)

XII. On leaving some Friends at an early Hour

GIVE me a golden pen, and let me lean
On heap'd up flowers, in regions clear, and far;
Bring me a tablet whiter than a star,
Or hand of hymning angel, when 'tis seen
The silver strings of heavenly harp atween:
And let there glide by many a pearly car,
Pink robes, and wavy hair, and diamond jar,
And half discovered wings, and glances keen.
The while let music wander round my ears,
And as it reaches each delicious ending,
Let me write down a line of glorious tone,
And full of many wonders of the spheres:
For what a height my spirit is contending!
'Tis not content so soon to be alone.

Poems (1817)

XV. On the Grasshopper and Cricket

THE poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;

That is the Grasshopper's - he takes the lead
In summer luxury,- he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

December 30, 1816.

Poems (1817)

XVII. Happy is England! I could be content

HAPPY is England! I could be content
To see no other verdure than its own;
To feel no other breezes than are blown
Through its tall woods with high romances blent:
Yet do I sometimes feel a languishment
For skies Italian, and an inward groan
To sit upon an Alp as on a throne,
And half forget what world or worldling meant.
Happy is England, sweet her artless daughters;
Enough their simple loveliness for me,
Enough their whitest arms in silence clinging:
Yet do I often warmly burn to see
Beauties of deeper glance, and hear their singing,
And float with them about the summer waters.

Poems (1817)

XIV. Addressed to the Same

GREAT spirits now on earth are sojourning;
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:
And lo!- whose stedfastness would never take
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.

And other spirits there are standing apart
Upon the forehead of the age to come;
These, these will give the world another heart,
And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
Of mighty workings?-
Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.

Poems (1817)

On death

I.

Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.

II.

How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake.

When I have fears

WHEN I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love! - then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

Sonnet

OH! how I love, on a fair summer's eve,
When streams of light pour down the golden west,
And on the balmy zephyrs tranquil rest
The silver clouds, far - far away to leave

All meaner thoughts, and take a sweet reprieve
From little cares; to find, with easy quest,
A fragrant wild, with Nature's beauty drest,
And there into the delight my soul deceive.
There warm my breast with patriotic lore,
Musing on Milton's fate - on Sydney's bier -
Till their stern forms before my mind arise:
Perhaps on wing of Poesy upsoar,
Full often dropping a delicious tear,
When some melodious sorrow spells mine eyes.

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 mov'd for days from where it sometime fell,
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.
Oh ye! who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd,
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye! who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd,
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye! whose ears are dinn'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 quir'd!

The Poet

A FRAGMENT

WHERE'S the Poet? show him! show him,
Muses nine! that I may know him!
'Tis the man who with a man
Is an equal, be he King,
Or poorest of the beggar-clan,
Or any other wondrous thing
A man may be 'twixt ape and Plato;
'Tis the man who with a bird,
Wren or Eagle, finds his way to

All its instincts; he hath heard
The Lion's roaring, and can tell
What his horny throat expresseth,
And to him the Tiger's yell
Comes articulate and presseth
On his ear like mother-tongue.

Modern Love

AND what is love? It is a doll dress'd up
For idleness to cosset, nurse, and dandle;
A thing of soft misnomers, so divine
That silly youth doth think to make itself
Divine by loving, and so goes on
Yawning and doting a whole summer long,
Till Miss's comb is made a pearl tiara,
And common Wellingtons turn Romeo boots;
Then Cleopatra lives at number seven,
And Antony resides in Brunswick Square.
Fools! if some passions high have warm'd the world,
If Queens and Soldiers have play'd deep for hearts,
It is no reason why such agonies
Should be more common than the growth of weeds.
Fools! make me whole again that weighty pearl
The Queen of Egypt melted, and I'll say
That ye may love in spite of beaver hats.

The Human Seasons

FOUR Seasons fill the measure of the year;
There are four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
He has his Summer, when luxuriously
Spring's honey'd cud of youthful thought he loves
To ruminat, and by such dreaming high
Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
He furlerh close; contented so to look
On mists in idleness - to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

Sonnet to a lady seen for a few Moments at Vauxhall

Time's sea hath been five years at its slow ebb,
Long hours have to and fro let creep the sand,
Since I was tangled in thy beauty's web,
And snared by the unglowing of thine hand.
And yet I never look on midnight sky,
But I behold thine eyes' well memory'd light;
I cannot look upon the rose's dye,
But to thy cheek my soul doth take its flight.
I cannot look on any budding flower,
But my fond ear, in fancy at thy lips
And hearkening for a love-sound, doth devour
Its sweets in the wrong sense: - Thou dost eclipse
Every delight with sweet remembering,
And grief unto my darling joys dost bring.

WRITTEN ON TOP OF THE BEN NEVIS

Read me a lesson, Muse, and speak it loud
Upon the top of Nevis, blind in mist!
I look into the chasms, and a shroud
Vapurous doth hide them - just so much I wist
Mankind do know of hell; I look o'erhead,
And there is sullen mist, - even so much
Mankind can tell of heaven; mist is spread
Before the earth, beneath me, - even such,
Even so vague is man's sight of himself!
Here are the craggy stones beneath my feet, -
Thus much I know that, a poor witless elf,
I tread on them, - that all my eye doth meet
Is mist and crag, not only on this height,
But in the world of thought and mental might!

Thomas Hardy

<http://www.hardysociety.org/resources/commentaries-on-poems-for-students>

<http://thedimofdawn.com/>

The Voice

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

A Broken Appointment

You did not come,
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb.

Yet less for loss of your dear presence there
Than that I thus found lacking in your make
That high compassion which can overbear
Reluctance for pure loving kindness' sake
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,
You did not come.

You love me not,
And love alone can lend you loyalty;
--I know and knew it.
But, unto the store
Of human deeds divine in all but name,
Was it not worth a little hour or more
To add yet this: Once you, a woman, came
To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be
You love me not.



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She To Him

WHEN you shall see me lined by tool of Time,
My lauded beauties carried off from me,
My eyes no longer stars as in their prime,
My name forgot of Maiden Fair and Free;

When in your being heart concedes to mind,
And judgment, though you scarce its process know,
Recalls the excellencies I once enshrined,
And you are irked that they have withered so:

Remembering that with me lies not the blame,
That Sportsman Time but rears his brood to kill,
Knowing me in my soul the very same--
One who would die to spare you touch of ill!--
Will you not grant to old affection's claim
The hand of friendship down Life's sunless hill?

I said to Love,
"It is not now as in old days
When men adored thee and thy ways
All else above;
Named thee the Boy, the Bright, the One
Who spread a heaven beneath the sun,"
I said to Love.

I said to him,
"We now know more of thee than then;
We were but weak in judgment when,
With hearts abrim,
We clamoured thee that thou would'st please
Inflict on us thine agonies,"
I said to him.

I said to Love,
"Thou art not young, thou art not fair,
No faery darts, no cherub air,
Nor swan, nor dove
Are thine; but features pitiless,
And iron daggers of distress,"
I said to Love.

"Depart then, Love! . . .
- Man's race shall end, dost threaten thou?
The age to come the man of now
Know nothing of? -
We fear not such a threat from thee;
We are too old in apathy!
Mankind shall cease.--So let it be,"
I said to Love.

A Broken Appointment

You did not come,
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb,—
Yet less for loss of your dear presence there
Than that I thus found lacking in your make
That high compassion which can overbear
Reluctance for pure lovingkindness' sake
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,
You did not come.

You love not me,
And love alone can lend you loyalty;
—I know and knew it. But, unto the store
Of human deeds divine in all but name,
Was it not worth a little hour or more
To add yet this: Once you, a woman, came
To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be
You love not me?

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!

"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 —
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 —
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,
Or help to half-a-crown."

The Masked Face

I found me in a great surging space,
At either end a door,
And I said: "What is this giddy place,
With no firm-fixéd floor,
That I knew not of before?"
"It is Life," said a mask-clad face.

I asked: "But how do I come here,
Who never wished to come;
Can the light and air be made more clear,
The floor more quiet some,
And the doors set wide? They numb
Fast-locked, and fill with fear."

The mask put on a bleak smile then,
And said, "O vassal-wight,
There once complained a goosequill pen
To the scribe of the Infinite
Of the words it had to write
Because they were past its ken."

The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,

Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

The Self-Unseeing

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!



Christina Rossetti

A Wintry Sonnet

A Robin said: The Spring will never come,
And I shall never care to build again.
A Rosebush said: These frosts are wearisome,
My sap will never stir for sun or rain.
The half Moon said: These nights are fogged and slow,
I neither care to wax nor care to wane.
The Ocean said: I thirst from long ago,
Because earth's rivers cannot fill the main.--
When Springtime came, red Robin built a nest,
And trilled a lover's song in sheer delight.
Grey hoarfrost vanished, and the Rose with might
Clothed her in leaves and buds of crimson core.
The dim Moon brightened. Ocean sunned his crest,
Dimpled his blue, yet thirsted evermore.

A Bird Song

It's a year almost that I have not seen her:
Oh, last summer green things were greener,
Brambles fewer, the blue sky bluer.

It's surely summer, for there's a swallow:
Come one swallow, his mate will follow,
The bird race quicken and wheel and thicken.

Oh happy swallow whose mate will follow
O'er height, o'er hollow! I'd be a swallow,
To build this weather one nest together.

A Triad

Three sang of love together: one with lips
Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,
Flushed to the yellow hair and finger-tips;
And one there sang who soft and smooth as snow
Bloomed like a tinted hyacinth at a show;
And one was blue with famine after love,
Who like a harpstring snapped rang harsh and low
The burden of what those were singing of.
One shamed herself in love; one temperately
Grew gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife;
One famished died for love. Thus two of three
Took death for love and won him after strife;

One droned in sweetness like a fattened bee:
All on the threshold, yet all short of life.

When I Am Dead, My Dearest

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.

A Birthday

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.

The First Day

I wish I could remember the first day,
First hour, first moment of your meeting me;

If bright or dim the season, it might be
Summer or winter for aught I can say.
So unrecorded did it slip away,
So blind was I to see and to foresee,
So dull to mark the budding of my tree
That would not blossom yet for many a May.
If only I could recollect it! Such
A day of days! I let it come and go
As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow.
It seemed to mean so little, meant so much!
If only now I could recall that touch,
First touch of hand in hand! - Did one but know!



W. H. Auden

The Novelist

Encased in talent like a uniform,
The rank of every poet is well known;
They can amaze us like a thunderstorm,
Or die so young, or live for years alone.
They can dash forward like hussars: but he
Must struggle out of his boyish gift and learn
How to be plain and awkward, how to be
One after whom none think it worth to turn.

For, to achieve his lightest wish, he must
Become the whole of boredom, subject to
Vulgar complaints like love, among the Just

Be just, among the Filthy filthy too,
And in his own weak person, if he can,
Must suffer dully all the wrongs of Man.

[Here War Is Simple](#)

Here war is simple like a monument:
A telephone is speaking to a man;
Flags on a map assert that troops were sent;
A boy brings milk in bowls. There is a plan

For living men in terror of their lives,
Who thirst at nine who were to thirst at noon,
And can be lost and are, and miss their wives,
And, unlike an idea, can die too soon.

But ideas can be true although men die,
And we can watch a thousand faces
Made active by one lie:

And maps can really point to places
Where life is evil now:
Nanking. Dachau.

Funeral Blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum

Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.



Robert Frost

Acceptance

When the spent sun throws up its rays on cloud
And goes down burning into the gulf below,
No voice in nature is heard to cry aloud
At what has happened. Birds, at least must know
It is the change to darkness in the sky.
Murmuring something quiet in her breast,
One bird begins to close a faded eye;
Or overtaken too far from his nest,
Hurrying low above the grove, some waif
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree.
At most he thinks or twitters softly, 'Safe!
Now let the night be dark for all of me.
Let the night be too dark for me to see
Into the future. Let what will be, be.'

The Oven Bird

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
He says the early petal-fall is past
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast;
And comes that other fall we name the fall.
He says the highway dust is over all.
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

1. The oven bird, a warbler, is also known as the "teacher" bird after its call.

Putting In The Seed

You come to fetch me from my work to-night
When supper's on the table, and we'll see
If I can leave off burying the white
Soft petals fallen from the apple tree.
(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,
Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea
And go along with you ere you lose sight

Of what you came for and become like me,
Slave to a springtime passion for the earth.
How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed
On through the watching for that early birth
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,

The sturdy seedling with arched body comes
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.



Wilfred Owen

The Kind Ghosts

She sleeps on soft, last breaths; but no ghost looms
Out of the stillness of her palace wall,
Her wall of boys on boys and dooms on dooms.

She dreams of golden gardens and sweet glooms,
Not marvelling why her roses never fall
Nor what red mouths were torn to make their blooms.

The shades keep down which well might roam her hall.
Quiet their blood lies in her crimson rooms
And she is not afraid of their footfall.

They move not from her tapestries, their pall,
Nor pace her terraces, their hecatombs,
Lest aught she be disturbed, or grieved at all.

Happiness

Ever again to breathe pure happiness,
So happy that we gave away our toy?
We smiled at nothings, needing no caress?
Have we not laughed too often since with Joy?
Have we not stolen too strange and sorrowful wrongs
For her hands' pardoning? The sun may cleanse,
And time, and starlight. Life will sing great songs,
And gods will show us pleasures more than men's.

Yet heaven looks smaller than the old doll's-home,
No nestling place is left in bluebell bloom,
And the wide arms of trees have lost their scope.
The former happiness is unreturning:
Boys' griefs are not so grievous as our yearning,
Boys have no sadness sadder than our hope.

The End

After the blast of lightning from the east,
The flourish of loud clouds, the Chariot throne,
After the drums of time have rolled and ceased
And from the bronze west long retreat is blown,

Shall Life renew these bodies? Of a truth
All death will he annul, all tears assuage?
Or fill these void veins full again with youth
And wash with an immortal water age?

When I do ask white Age, he saith not so, --
"My head hangs weighed with snow."
And when I hearken to the Earth she saith
My fiery heart sinks aching. It is death.
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified
Nor my titanic tears the seas be dried."

The Last Laugh

'Oh! Jesus Christ! I'm hit,' he said; and died.
Whether he vainly cursed or prayed indeed,
The Bullets chirped-In vain, vain, vain!
Machine-guns chuckled,-Tut-tut! Tut-tut!
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed,-'O Mother, -Mother, - Dad!
Then smiled at nothing, childlike, being dead.
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud
Leisurely gestured,-Fool!
And the splinters spat, and tittered.

'My Love!' one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,
Till slowly lowered, his whole faced kissed the mud.
And the Bayonets' long teeth grinned;
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;
And the Gas hissed.

Soldier's Dream

I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears;
And caused a permanent stoppage in all bolts;
And buckled with a smile Mausers and Colts;
And rusted every bayonet with His tears.

And there were no more bombs, of ours or Theirs,
Not even an old flint-lock, not even a pikel.
But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;
And when I woke he'd seen to our repairs.

The Next War

*War's a joke for me and you,
Wile we know such dreams are true.
- Siegfried Sassoon*

Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death,-
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,-
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.
We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,-
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe.
He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed
Shrapnel. We chorussed when he sang aloft,
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.

Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.
No soldier's paid to kick against His powers.
We laughed, -knowing that better men would come,
And greater wars: when each proud fighter brags
He wars on Death, for lives; not men, for flags.

Dorothy Parker

A Dream Lies Dead

A dream lies dead here. May you softly go
Before this place, and turn away your eyes,
Nor seek to know the look of that which dies
Importuning Life for life. Walk not in woe,
But, for a little, let your step be slow.
And, of your mercy, be not sweetly wise
With words of hope and Spring and tenderer skies.
A dream lies dead; and this all mourners know:

Whenever one drifted petal leaves the tree-
Though white of bloom as it had been before
And proudly waitful of fecundity-
One little loveliness can be no more;
And so must Beauty bow her imperfect head
Because a dream has joined the wistful dead!

"Star Light, Star Bright--"

Star, that gives a gracious dole,
What am I to choose?
Oh, will it be a shriven soul,
Or little buckled shoes?

Shall I wish a wedding-ring,
Bright and thin and round,
Or plead you send me covering-
A newly spaded mound?

Gentle beam, shall I implore
Gold, or sailing-ships,
Or beg I hate forevermore
A pair of lying lips?

Swing you low or high away,
Burn you hot or dim;
My only wish I dare not say-
Lest you should grant me him.

One perfect rose

A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet -
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
'My fragile leaves,' it said, 'his heart enclose.'
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.

Frustration

If I had a shiny gun,
I could have a world of fun

Speeding bullets through the brains
Of the folk who give me pains;

Or had I some poison gas,
I could make the moments pass
Bumping off a number of
People whom I do not love.

But I have no lethal weapon-
Thus does Fate our pleasure step on!
So they still are quick and well
Who should be, by rights, in hell.

August

When my eyes are weeds,
And my lips are petals, spinning
Down the wind that has beginning
Where the crumpled beeches start
In a fringe of salty reeds;
When my arms are elder-bushes,
And the rangy lilac pushes
Upward, upward through my heart;

Summer, do your worst!
Light your tinsel moon, and call on
Your performing stars to fall on
Headlong through your paper sky;
Nevermore shall I be cursed
By a flushed and amorous slattern,
With her dusty laces' pattern
Trailing, as she straggles by.

Coda

There's little in taking or giving,
There's little in water or wine;
This living, this living, this living
Was never a project of mine.
Oh, hard is the struggle, and sparse is
The gain of the one at the top,
For art is a form of catharsis,
And love is a permanent flop,
And work is the province of cattle,
And rest's for a clam in a shell,

So I'm thinking of throwing the battle-
Would you kindly direct me to hell?

Afternoon

When I am old, and comforted,
And done with this desire,
With Memory to share my bed
And Peace to share my fire,

I'll comb my hair in scalloped bands
Beneath my laundered cap,
And watch my cool and fragile hands
Lie light upon my lap.

And I will have a sprigged gown
With lace to kiss my throat;
I'll draw my curtain to the town,
And hum a purring note.

And I'll forget the way of tears,
And rock, and stir my tea.
But oh, I wish those blessed years
Were further than they be!

But Not Forgotten

I think, no matter where you stray,
That I shall go with you a way.
Though you may wander sweeter lands,
You will not soon forget my hands,
Nor yet the way I held my head,
Nor all the tremulous things I said.
You still will see me, small and white
And smiling, in the secret night,
And feel my arms about you when
The day comes fluttering back again.
I think, no matter where you be,
You'll hold me in your memory
And keep my image, there without me,
By telling later loves about me.

Maya Angelou
Touched By An Angel
We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

The Lesson

I keep on dying again.
Veins collapse, opening like the
Small fists of sleeping
Children.
Memory of old tombs,
Rotting flesh and worms do
Not convince me against
The challenge. The years
And cold defeat live deep in
Lines along my face.
They dull my eyes, yet
I keep on dying,
Because I love to live.
Remembrance
Your hands easy
weight, teasing the bees

hived in my hair, your smile at the
slope of my cheek. On the
occasion, you press
above me, glowing, spouting
readiness, mystery rapes
my reason

When you have withdrawn
your self and the magic, when
only the smell of your
love lingers between
my breasts, then, only
then, can I greedily consume
your presence.



Wendy Cope

Sporty People

I took her for my kind of person
And it was something of a shock
When my new friend revealed
That, once upon a time,
She was a Junior County Tennis Champion.

How could that happen?
How could I accidentally
Make friends with a tennis champion?
How could a tennis champion

Make friends with me?

She wasn't stupid. She read books.
She had never been mean to me
For being bad at games.
I decided to forgive
Her unfortunate past.

Sporty people can be OK -
Of course they can.
Later on, I met poets
Who played football. It's still hard
To get my head round that.

Another Valentine

Today we are obliged to be romantic
And think of yet another valentine.
We know the rules and we are both pedantic:
Today's the day we have to be romantic.
Our love is old and sure, not new and frantic.
You know I'm yours and I know you are mine.
And saying that has made me feel romantic,
My dearest love, my darling valentine.

Present

On the flyleaf
of my confirmation present:
'To Wendy with love
from Nanna. Psalm 98.'

I looked it up, eventually -
Cantate Domino

I knew the first two verses
and skimmed the rest.

Thirty-five years afterwards,
at evensong on Day 19
the choir sings Nanna's psalm.
At last, I pay attention

to the words she chose.
O sing unto the Lord
a new song. Nanna,
it is just what I wanted.

Some More Light Verse

You have to try. You see the shrink.
You learn a lot. You read. You think.
You struggle to improve your looks.
You meet some men. You write some books.
You eat good food. You give up junk.
You do not smoke. You don't get drunk.
You take up yoga, walk and swim.
And nothing works. The outlook's grim.
You don't know what to do. You cry.
You're running out of things to try.

You blow your nose. You see the shrink.
You walk. You give up food and drink.
You fall in love. You make a plan.
You struggle to improve your man.
And nothing works. The outlooks grim.
You go to yoga, cry and swim.
You eat and drink. You give up looks.
You struggle to improve your books.
You cannot see the point. You sigh.
You do not smoke. You have to try.



Tony Harrison

Turns - Poem by Tony Harrison

I thought it made me look more 'working class'
(as if a bit of chequered cloth could bridge that gap!)
I did a turn in it before the glass.
My mother said: It suits you, your dad's cap.
(She preferred me to wear suits and part my hair:
You're every bit as good as that lot are!)

All the pension queue came out to stare.
Dad was sprawled beside the postbox (still VR) ,
his cap turned inside up beside his head,
smudged H A H in purple Indian ink
and Brylcreem slicks displayed so folks might think
he wanted charity for dropping dead.

He never begged. For now! Death's reticence
crowns his life, and me, I'm opening my trap
to busk the class that broke him for the pence
that splash like brackish tears into our cap.

National Trust

Bottomless pits. There's on in Castleton,
and stout upholders of our law and order
one day thought its depth worth wagering on
and borrowed a convict hush-hush from his warder
and winched him down; and back, flayed, grey, mad, dumb.

Not even a good flogging made him holler!

O gentlemen, a better way to plumb
the depths of Britain's dangling a scholar,
say, here at the booming shaft at Towanroath,
now National Trust, a place where they got tin,
those gentlemen who silenced the men's oath
and killed the language that they swore it in.

The dumb go down in history and disappear
and not one gentleman's been brought to book:

Mes den hep tavas a-gollas y dyr

(Cornish-)

'the tongueless man gets his land took.'

Long Distance I

Your bed's got two wrong sides. You life's all grouse.

I let your phone-call take its dismal course:

Ah can't stand it no more, this empty house!

Carrots choke us wi'out your mam's white sauce!

Them sweets you brought me, you can have 'em back.

Ah'm diabetic now. Got all the facts.

(The diabetes comes hard on the track
of two coronaries and cataracts.)

Ah've allus liked things sweet! But now ah push
food down mi throat! Ah'd sooner do wi'out.

And t'only reason now for beer 's to flush
(so t'dietician said) mi kidneys out.

When I come round, they'll be laid out, the sweets,
Lifesavers, my father's New World treats,
still in the big brown bag, and only bought
rushing through JFK as a last thought.

Marked With D.

When the chilled dough of his flesh went in an oven
not unlike those he fuelled all his life,
I thought of his cataracts ablaze with Heaven
and radiant with the sight of his dead wife,
light streaming from his mouth to shape her name,
'not Florence and not Flo but always Florrie.'
I thought how his cold tongue burst into flame
but only literally, which makes me sorry,
sorry for his sake there's no Heaven to reach.
I get it all from Earth my daily bread
but he hungered for release from mortal speech
that kept him down, the tongue that weighed like lead.
The baker's man that no one will see rise
and England made to feel like some dull oaf
is smoke, enough to sting one person's eyes
and ash (not unlike flour) for one small loaf.

Long Distance li

Though my mother was already two years dead
Dad kept her slippers warming by the gas,
put hot water bottles her side of the bed
and still went to renew her transport pass.

You couldn't just drop in. You had to phone.
He'd put you off an hour to give him time
to clear away her things and look alone
as though his still raw love were such a crime.

He couldn't risk my blight of disbelief
though sure that very soon he'd hear her key
scrape in the rusted lock and end his grief.
He knew she'd just popped out to get the tea.

I believe life ends with death, and that is all.
You haven't both gone shopping; just the same,
in my new black leather phone book there's your name
and the disconnected number I still call.



Jo Shapcott

Hairless

Can the bald lie? The nature of the skin says not:
it's newborn-pale, erection-tender stuff,
every thought visible,—pure knowledge,
mind in action—shining through the skull.
I saw one, a woman, hairless absolute, cleaning.
She mopped the green floor, dusted bookshelves,
all cloth and concentration, Queen of the moon.
You can tell, with the bald, that the air
speaks to them differently, touches their heads
with exquisite expression. As she danced
her laundry dance with the motes, everything
she ever knew skittered under her scalp.
It was clear just from the texture of her head,
she was about to raise her arms to the sky;
I covered my ears as she prepared to sing, roar,
to let the big win resonate in the little room.

Procedure

This tea, this cup of tea, made of leaves,
made of the leaves of herbs and absolute
almond blossom, this tea, is the interpreter
of almond, liquid touchstone which lets us
scent its true taste at last and with a bump
in my case, takes me back to the yellow time
of trouble with bloodtests, and cellular
madness, and my presence required
on the slab for surgery, and all that mess
I don't want to comb through here because
it seems, honestly, a trifle now that steam
and scent and strength and steep and infusion
say thank you thank you thank you for the then, and now

Era

The twenty-second day of March two thousand and three
I left home shortly after eight thirty
on foot towards the City. I said goodbye
to the outside of my body: I was going in.
The magpies were squabbling in the park.
The little fountain splashed chemical bubbles
over its lip. Traffic swarmed and swam
round Vauxhall Cross, like crazy fish, with teeth.

And anything could be real in a country
where Red Kites were spreading east and now
we had February swallows. Planes for Heathrow
roared not far enough overhead, shedding
jet trails which pointed over there: those other
places where all the frontiers end with a question.

“Of Mutability”

Too many of the best cells in my body
are itching, feeling jagged, turning raw
in this spring chill. It’s two thousand and four
and I don’t know a soul who doesn’t feel small
among the numbers. Razor small.

Look down these days to see your feet
mistrust the pavement and your blood tests
turn the doctor’s expression grave.
Look up to catch eclipses, gold leaf, comets,
angels, chandeliers, out of the corner of your eye,
join them if you like, learn astrophysics, or
learn folksong, human sacrifice, mortality,
flying, fishing, sex without touching much.
Don’t trouble, though, to head anywhere but the sky.



Sophie Hannah

Long For This World - Poem by Sophie Hannah

I settle for less than snow,
try to go gracefully like seasons go

which will regain their ground -
ditch, hill and field - when a new year comes round.

Now I know everything:
how winter leaves without resenting spring,

lives in a safe time frame,
gives up so much but knows he can reclaim

all titles that are his,
fall out for months and still be what he is.

I settle for less than snow:
high only once, then no way up from low,

then to be swept from drives.
Ten words I throw into your changing lives

fly like ten snowballs hurled:
I hope to be, and will, long for this world.

The During Months - Poem by Sophie Hannah

Like summer in some countries and like rain
in mine, for nuns like God, for drunks like beer,
like food for chefs, for invalids like pain,
You've occupied a large part of the year.

The during months to those before and since
would make a ratio of ten to two,
counting the ones spent trying to convince
myself there was a beating heart in you

when diagrams were all you'd let me see.
Hearts should be made of either blood or stone,
of both, like mine. There's still December free -
the month in which I'll save this year, alone.

Occupational Hazard - Poem by Sophie Hannah

He has slept with accountants and brokers,
With a cowgirl (well, someone from Healds).
He has slept with non-smokers and smokers
In commercial and cultural fields.

He has slept with book-keepers, book-binders,
Slept with auditors, florists, PAs
Child psychologists, even child minders,
With directors of firms and of plays.

He has slept with the stupid and clever.
He has slept with the rich and the poor
But he sadly admits that he's never
Slept with a poet before.

Real poets are rare, he confesses,
While it's easy to find a cashier.
So I give him some poets' addresses
And consider a change of career.

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.

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.



Owen Sheers

On Going

There were instruments, as there always are,
To measure, record and monitor,
windows into the soul's temperature.
But you were disconnected from these.
and lay instead an ancient child,
fragile on your side,
your breath working at the skin of your cheek
like a blustery wind at a blind.
There was only one measurement
I needed anyway, which you gave,
triggered by the connection of my kiss
against your paper temple
and registered in the flicker of your open eyes,
in their half-second of recorded understanding
before they disengaged and you slipped back
into the sleep of their slow-closing.

Mametz Wood

For years afterwards the farmers found them -
the wasted young, turning up under their plough blades
as they tended the land back into itself.
A chit of bone, the china plate of a shoulder blade,
the relic of a finger, the blown
and broken bird's egg of a skull,
all mimicked now in flint, breaking blue in white
across this field where they were told to walk, not run,
towards the wood and its nesting machine guns.
And even now the earth stands sentinel,
reaching back into itself for reminders of what happened
like a wound working a foreign body to the surface of the skin.
This morning, twenty men buried in one long grave,
a broken mosaic of bone linked arm in arm,
their skeletons paused mid dance-macabre
in boots that outlasted them,
their socketed heads tilted back at an angle
and their jaws, those that have them, dropped open.
As if the notes they had sung
have only now, with this unearthing,
slipped from their absent tongues.

Brian Patten

Mr Ifonly

Mr Ifonly sat down and he sighed,
I could have done more if only I had tried
If only I had followed my true intent
If only I had done the things that I meant
If only I had done the things that I could
And not simply done the things that I should
If only a day had lasted a year
And I had not lived in constant fear
Mr Ifonly sat down and he cried:
I could really have lived if only I had tried!
Now life has past me by and its such a crime,
Said Mr Ifonly who had run out of time
Remembering Snow
I did not sleep last night.
The falling snow was beautiful and white.
I dressed, sneaked down the stairs
And opened wide the door.
I had not seen such snow before.
Our grubby little street had gone;
The world was brand-new, and everywhere
There was a pureness in the air.
I felt such peace. Watching every flake
I felt more and more awake.
I thought I'd learned all there was to know
About the trillion million different kinds
Of swirling frosty falling flakes of snow.
But that was not so.
I had not known how vividly it lit
The world with such a peaceful glow.
Upstairs my mother slept.
I could not drag myself away from that sight
To call her down and have her share
That mute miracle of snow.
It seemed to fall for me alone.
How beautiful our grubby little street had grown!

Minister For Exams

When I was a child I sat an exam.

This test was so simple
There was no way i could fail.

Q1. Describe the taste of the Moon.

It tastes like Creation I wrote,
it has the flavour of starlight.

Q2. What colour is Love?

Love is the colour of the water a man
lost in the desert finds, I wrote.

Q3. Why do snowflakes melt?

I wrote, they melt because they fall
on to the warm tongue of God.

There were other questions.
They were as simple.

I described the grief of Adam
when he was expelled from Eden.
I wrote down the exact weight of
an elephant's dream

Yet today, many years later,
For my living I sweep the streets
or clean out the toilets of the fat
hotels.

Why? Because constantly I failed
my exams.
Why? Well, let me set a test.

Q1. How large is a child's
imagination?

Q2. How shallow is the soul of the
Minister for exams?





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