

Openings 21



*An anthology of poems by
Open University Poets*

2004

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Introduction

OU Poets is a Poetry Society open to any student or staff member, past or present, of the Open University. At the time of going to press there are about 120 members from all over the UK, with some in Ireland and in mainland Europe.

Members of the society submit poems to a magazine, which is produced 5 times a year, each one having a different voluntary editor. The magazine is not a publication *per se* and is strictly produced by the members for the members. There is a section for comment and criticism of members' work.

At the end of the year, members are asked to vote for the 20 poems they most appreciated from the 5 magazines produced that year. Those with the most votes, allowing for no more than one poem per poet, appear in the following year's issue of *Openings*. The anthology is as broad-based as the society itself and reflects the varied backgrounds, interests and tastes of the members.

If you would like more information about OU Poets, please contact the Secretary: -

Steve Horsfall,
45 Masons Road,
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or go to <http://www.oupoets.org.uk>. (opinions on the webpage are not necessarily those of the society).

Alice Harrison

Judy

Evenings he is full of remorse,
cooks the sausages for supper,
walks the dog, explains away my
bruises, croons the baby to sleep,

so that the policeman who calls,
embarrassed and thinking *Domestic*,
is turned away. Besides someone
might take my loved, late miracle.

He comes to bed. In his humped and
hooked shadow I see my crooked
self. He weeps apologies, swears
never again. He'll change. He'll change.

Sweating, he wakes from dreams of ghosts,
gallows and hangman. He speaks his
shame and pleads with me to stay. I
comfort him, murmur forgiveness.

Next day beside the sea, cocky
with the sun and noise, he's pleased as
ever. Full of swagger and bounce
he crows, *That's the way to do it.*

Jim Lindop

The Melleran Tankas

Floating on my back,
sans lunettes, the sun's a bruise
on the sky's pale skin
and the walnut tree's singing
a yellowhammer's lament.

Hummingbird hawkmoth
sips at flimsy lavender,
unfazed by air-shifts,
or swelling, blistered scars
in the fast-eroding light.

Swallows judge the dip,
their slide towards the slack pool,
to neat perfection:
no sunned hoverfly survives
the impeccable pursuit.

The hoopoes forage
like clockwork pickaxes, stark
in their livery
against the brooding, smudged green
of the ranked *leylandii*.

Gunslinger lightning
swaggers across a stretched sky
shot with spandex thread.
Maelstrom winds, and ack-ack rain
rivet the heat to the earth.

Anne Allinson

Thanksgiving for Music

O Lord, we give our thanks to Thee
for music, heard and played and sung,
whose sounds transcend the mortal world
and open vistas far beyond
our limited imagining.

In timeless plainsong melody
monks and mystics chanted praise;
in every age, exile and pain,
lament and yearning, love and joy
have moved the human voice to sing.

On ancient reedpipe, psaltery,
oboe and trumpet, lute and lyre,
on wooden flute, viol and harp
musicians conjured magic tunes
from pulsing air, vibrating string.

Such is music's majesty
conceived in inspiration's fire,
that none can analyse its power
to rouse, delight, console and calm
and leave its beauty lingering.

With subtle change of harmony,
tempo, colour, key or mood,
splendour of organ, choral might
or pure and perfect solo song,
the heart is touched, the soul takes wing.

Reflection

To Oë

When I was young you were, for me,
a window to a world
of cuckoos calling, mad as May-cows,
May-cows mooing, loud as tractors,
tractors roaring, big as houses.

When I was young
you showed me how
to build a house
of sticks and straw
for me to play in through
the hay-thick summer.

When I was young
you showed me how
to write my nines,
“Just watch,” you said,
“It’s like a racing car
that zooms around the track
to win and – there! Goes home.”

Then summer ended
and I watched you light a fire.
You struck the match away from you,
(I noted that)
and held it up against
my dry grass play-house wall
alive with earwigs, spiders, ants and dust.

We both stood back.
I watched you, father,
as you watched my house
sprout flowers of flame
and disappear
in great white smoke balloons.
You showed no sorrow. So,
despite my inner tears
neither did I.

As I grew up
I looked through you to see
so many things,
the way to drive a nail, a car, a bargain.
And years flew by.

Now it’s my turn to be a window.
But the only things that I can show you
are the way to use a mouse,
or save your files, or send your e-mails,
how to set the timer on your video,
now that the years have silvered you
and turned your window to
a mirror.

Nina Mattar

Pennies I gave the Beggar Boy

He looked at me
I dressed, he in rags.
He edged towards me
cautiously.
I rejected his poverty,
he was wanting
hand stretched,
eyes drenched
his tears betrayed
his pride, now too close.
I felt his need
pulsate inside me,
dropped pennies
into his hand.
A dry curious smile
flashed past his face,
he moved slowly, fretting
then disappeared
into the crowd.

Mary Shiells

To the Land of Beyond ...

Long long ago I discovered
the low door in the wall –
that glimpse into a secret world,
childhood's domain.

Few people can unbend
from their stiff and proper lives;
unable to crouch, to kneel
unable to find the key
or capture,
that stealing feeling of content.

At some unnameable
unexpected moment –
perhaps a glimpse of far-away meadows
or the roll and swish of sea on shingle –
the key turns, feeling returns
and we are whirled to distant pleasures,
the distant music of dreams.

Even now, at times –
still there
that hovering feeling of joy,
the low door in the wall.

david gildner

Song Book

You are the
Baker Street
Saxophone solo,
Van-Mo's brown-eyed girl
Jim's crawling king snake
My Indian summer,
You are Paul's boy in the bubble
The girl from New York City
Who calls herself a human trampoline.
You are Scott's Joanna, my Jackie
Vera's bluebirds Grace's Sally.
You are Bob's redemption song
My duppy conquer.
You are George's granddad's
Flannelette nightshirt
My little stick of Blackpool rock
You are my – play in a day
Bert Weedon Song Book.

Phil Craddock

Forty Years of Evolution

From out of the void
the alarm goes off.
Lifting my stone
I slime out of bed
slither into the bathroom
slide under the waterfall
and gradually develop a spine.

Aeons later
I emerge onto dry land.
Towelling myself down
I creep back to the bedroom
crawl into my skin
groom my coat
and descend to the forest floor to forage.

By the time I leave the house
I hope to be human.

Steve Horsfall

Talking Global Warming

I went down to St James' Infirmary,
the sun was blazing hot.
The skin cancer ward's got a thousand beds
full of people who ignored that spot.

You could say they're having a spot of bother.

I went down to the underground car park,
the attendant said "take a hike –
It's three feet deep in sea water" –
so I rode home on my bike.

Ozone layer? More of an "Oh no!" zone, later.

The ice caps shrink, the waters rise,
the Ozone hole keeps growing,
Those fossil fuel emissions keep
the hurricanes a-blowing.

Well, it certainly puts the wind up me.

We won't give up our 4x4s,
the jet planes keep on flying,
The tarmac keeps on spreading
and the forests keep on dying.

Got my holiday booked for next year – I'm going
to Watford-on-Sea ...

When the permafrost has melted
bugs will get to work as well,
Producing clouds of Methane,
the greenhouse gas from hell.

This is the way the world ends – not with a bang,
but a fart.

Stopping this nightmare happening
is up to you and me,
So I wrote to George Bush in the White House
in Washington D.C.

That's where he fights the forces of evilitude and
oppressionisation.

I Asked George if it's true that
D.C. stands for 'dirty city',
Told him I thought his attitude
to climate change was ... awful.

Sign up to Kyoto, George, or history'll dub ya
the 'Toxic Texan'.

This nightmare hasn't happened yet,
but climate change is real.
It's time for all of us to tell
our governments how we feel.

And change our own lives, too ...

The doing-nothing option leads
to doomsday – that's a price I call
too high, so ditch your car and get
a clean, green, healthy bicycle.

Are you ready, boots? Start pedalling!

The Train

When we stopped there was silence.
We had cycled through the heat
tyres scraping on gravel-filled dips
and granite chips and dust and
breath rasping in our chests as
we pedalled onward, upward
and, it seemed, far from home.
Now the bikes leaned against the wall
and we stood on the peak
of the hump-backed bridge,
the sun streaming over our heads,
freckling faces and tingling
shining shoulders and arms,
while the trees in the distance
shimmered in the silver blue light.
And of course, there was sound.
We heard it again, but slowly,
as if it oozed from the earth;
the constant song of birds
and the bees' ceaseless hum
and grass rustling while insects ran
between the leaves. It was the
quiet sound of our still lives,
like soft pages turning in the enormity
of the stone floored church
and we knew the same sense of wonder,
until the rhythm hit and the steam
was seen and we ran to the side
and pressed our legs against the rough
warm bricks and stood tiptoe,
elbows heaving us above the parapet
to witness the train, invincible and awesome,
a machine that moved like a monster
with a man inside holding it fast and
driving it relentlessly under the bridge
and on, while carriages clattered
and we ran across to scramble again
for a view of the snaky back and smoke.
The air thundered, the ground shook
and it was gone -- but we had seen it
and we had been afraid and alone
and now we knew more than silence
and softness and sunshine.

Revisionism

Weep no more, Rachel,
For your slaughtered children,
Crushed and drowned in excrement
Upon a cattle-transport floor,
Crushed beneath frost-bitten feet
Before they reached the abattoir:
Rachel, weep no more.

Weep no more, Rachel,
For your husband, for your love,
A smudge of smoke
In an ash-pit sky:
Don't cry, Rachel, don't cry.

Weep no more, Rachel,
For your mother,
Starved, violated, burnt,
For your father,
Robbed, tortured, gassed,
For your brother,
Beaten, mutilated, shot,
Rachel, weep not.

Weep no more, Rachel:
Rachel, dry your eyes –
Forget your people gone to dust
And the God you can no longer trust;
Draw comfort from humility,
Let time erase your memory –
Forget the inconvenient past,
And sifting truth from lies:
Rachel, dry your eyes.

Forget the torturers grown fat and old,
Forget your vanished lover,
His ashes are dispersed and cold:
Why don't you find another?

Your losses have been recompensed,
And your story has been told,
Things are different today,
No-one slaughters innocents
And it never happened anyway:
The past is past and long since gone,
And it's tedious to dwell upon
What your tiresome tears are for:
Rachel, weep no more.

Endgame 4

Used to have it all planned,
just in case, you know.
Wait for the evening,
start of the ebb,
a stiff breeze from the west
and then sail away from the sunset –
a broad reach for the sea.

That would have been it –
the boat and a bottle of scotch,
calm hand on the tiller
past the pier for the last time
until the end of light,
then over the side
into the cold womb of forever.

The rest would be washed
across to Belgium,
flotsam on the North Sea tide.

But the right time,
wind and tide and sunset,
never came together
for me.

Then the knees went,
back weakened.
I sold the boat
and waited
with light fading
from my eyes.

Now, the choice is made,
I feel it growing in the bowel.

Carol Washer

Largo

The morning crawled by
waiting for something.

My daughter brought roses
and we sat on the bed
watching the rise and fall of her letting go.

After she left, the vacuum's wail downstairs
a note of discord
in an unaccompanied silence,
sounding the everyday ignorance
of an ongoing world.

Then only the quiet, cushioned breaths
in a colourless room,
the slow hush of an occasional car.

I am unable to move;
held by the weight of waiting,
the weight of slow time
in this one room,
the wait for what would come
only too soon.
And I feel old.

Linda Dobinson

Holding On

Love's just a game
We like to play
But deep inside we know it don't mean that much
You're not my knight
In shining armour
And I know that I am not your maiden fair.
But right or wrong we're holding on.

Maybe some day
You will leave me
Or it might be me who does the walking out
Who knows who knows,
And if we part
Will our time together count for much?
But for now we're holding on.

Then again
You're always there
I know that I can rely on you,
It may not be
A grand passion
But passion is a passing fashion
So we're holding on to what we've got.

Julius Smit

Shadow Play

Now, in the folding in of day
city lights take possession.
The metro slides through sheathed shadows

pushing out into the splay of light.
It streams its trained and tired minds,
and collects night warriors, bulging in denim.

*I've been hunting and waiting,
said Julian. Waiting and hunting.
I've plucked you from the faces*

*said Benedict. I didn't want to lose you
to the one night packs heaving
between the turnaround blocks.*

No words came from the city.
Only the muffled pumping roar
of traffic eager in its corridors.

*The city throbs through us
said Julian. Our hearts beat
to the accelerating signals.*

Their mouths hunger;
their tongues weave in warm tunnels,
connecting their heat of wanting.

Patricia McGuigan

Potiphar's Wife

You don't know my name. No one remembers;
it wasn't important in the wider tale.
But I never forgot his.
I savoured its strangeness, its beauty, the roundness
of the first syllable, my teeth
almost to my lip for its second.
His holy history paints me scarlet, a liar.
Well, maybe.
But that wasn't the whole story.
You see, I loved him – his dark eyes,
his hair that was his own, his untattooed skin,
his unperfumed cleanness,
the sound of his morning prayer to his living god.
And I wanted so much to hear him say my name.
I pestered him with little gifts.
I kissed the air he passed through.
I kept a fallen eyelash.
Each day I'd whisper love to him and watch him blush.
One day a beetle landed on his shoulder.
I went to brush it away, desperate to touch him.
He cried out like a maiden and ran,
leaving me holding his robe, the servants at the door.
In panic I reversed our roles and he was led away.
Ok, so I lied.
But I was punished too.
I lost him,
became another nameless whore.

Dave Etchell

Philip Larkin and Me

'Love and Death in Hull'
gave insights which biographies obscured.
Boyhood shyness, painful stammerer?
Laser edged lucidity on page.
Does one force the other to emerge?
Juggling his women – naughty boy,
cynical maturity? despair?
Fleshy pleasures – no entanglements
rejection fears so great he could not give?
Thus this miser of emotion lived
outside life just three percent alive.

But knowing, kindly eyes peer out
from later photographs
was that him?
Or just a mask,
with 'never-far-off-fucking' in his mind.
Where secret lusts just managed to emerge
for his bright bespectacled love birds.

Bouffanted and prim-provocative,
full of just pre-pill frustrations
boiling up in desire and denial.
Red lips pouting, awaiting the insertion
of a Woodbine or a Park Drive cigarette.
Bottoms flowed liquidly in tight skirts,
'cross your heart playtex bras' pushed out breasts
and shapely nyloned legs tottering on stilettos
made me think about sex at least every seven seconds.
I suffered his tortures
we were mere males in that maelstrom of contradictions
in which those temptresses invited yet said no.

Gaze with him through his high windows
showing nothing and nowhere and endless,
gloomily, brilliant, sardonic;
etching our pointless existence
in starkness and sadness and longing.

He stole my teens
from under a drizzling gloomy northern sky,
a world full of shovels, sardines and gentle smut;
coaches and cafés and chiffon scarves.
Plastic macs and furtively purchased durex.
Saturday Night and Sunday morning days,
hot eager groping at the local flicks.
Forgetting dreary mines or boring lathes,
holidays in Blackpool or Skegness,
fast foods then were hot dogs, fish and chips.
No Subalterns here or Hunter-Dunns,
but wild filled nights and wonderful day trips.

In middle age his poems dried and died.
Drinking, smoking heavily, afraid
dulling death's dark terrors in that fog,
no healthy walks or efforts in the gym.
His back was always to a moving wall
which pushed him imperceptibly through time
towards the gaping grave.
Wondering what all the days were for,
yet knowing that for him
they were little coffins
in which his life was buried
bit by bit.

Hilary Mellon

A Christmas Carol

with apologies to W B Yeats

This is no country for poor men
The rich in one another's arms
Plump partridges and golden rings
Fat cats in fancy restaurants

and the poor in windswept doorways
with skinny dogs on strings

Wedding at the Church of the Storms

Embedded in dunes between land and sea
where tiger waves feast on walls gone grey
this small church shudders
as each high tide
flings tongues of white.

Young men in smart coats
pace the path their faces lined
with the future. No bride yet,
only ladies in hats and high heels
stumble incongruous through sand.

There is something un-Christian here.
Even the priest, dressed as a druid
in long white robes
fastened by a pyjama cord
is suitably pagan.

Still the bride hasn't come.
Still the young men hurry
back and forth as if
a storm were predicted and they
were the guardian-bailers of a leaky boat.

When at last she stands
late and laughing
beneath the flat arch of the south porch
beside the wind-teased tamarisk,
she is without stateliness or attendants.

Her black hair is slipping from its grips.
The stiff uniform of tradition is missing.
In its place are cream satin and trailing
coffee silk as if she were a fairy-tale
lost in a modern shopping mall.

A child laughs in a frilled dress
and unmatching anorak – fresh
as the sea's deep-ink blue.
And for this moment the tiger ocean is tied back
by the ribbon of the moon's light pull.

John Starbuck

M seeks F

Desperate for-a-shag gentleman
Is looking for a woman with wit,
Who's breast-bouncingly intelligent,
With a firm well-rounded-arse sense of humour
Who likes legs-up-to-here walking,
Gardening of-the-Lady-C-kind
And disturbingly-erotic cinema.
She'd be into scrotum-tightening good food
And let's-do-it-all-afternoon good times.
Photo of-the-intimate-kind preferred,
Any your-place-or-mine region.

Rodney Wood

Mrs. Hill

Dogs are asleep all over town – B H Fairchild

Walt sat in his chair, hands folded
across his lap.

After his wife died
he continued to live at home but
no longer bought books, newspapers or cut
his shoulder length hair.

A couple of
steps and he's in the kitchen where
he can stroke the things his wife
touched but the steel feels so cold.
He likes to imagine he loved her
in all the ways it was possible
from the lust fuelled to the pure.
The night she died they sat by
the fireplace sharing chocolates until she started to
bleed as though a knife had entered her.

Nick Baker

There were Ghosts on the Hill

There were ghosts on the hill
The day I walked that winding path,
When the warm sun
Broke the clouds and bathed me.

There were ghosts in the woodland
When I first came to the place
Where the bats of night play
And the winter sun was torn with grey clouds.

There were ghosts in the beam of sunlight
Which came upon me
The day I first found the sea urchin,
Long buried in its chalk tomb.

There were ghosts by the field
The day the raindrops sparkled
When the shower passed
And winter gloried in the youth of the year.

There were ghosts in the breeze
On that sunlit hill of bracken and gorse,
When the universe seemed at peace
And new green of spring leaf danced.

There were ghosts in the blue horizon
When the woodland breeze smelt of new life
And the light of the day
Was a being of itself.

Years have passed and I came to see
If the ghosts were still on the hill.
The hill remains
But the wood and hill keep their secret now.

Beryl Myers

Easter Children, 1940

They skipped down country lanes
through the fields of Easter time
to pick the golden celandines,
the daisies and the daffodils.
They filled their baskets
and their minds,

a million miles from thoughts of war,
which threatened all the world, but theirs,
ignorant in youth and joy
they brought their offerings to the church
to fill the aisles
with innocence of shining flowers.

Gardens filled with vegetables
save the children who might starve.
Flowers are laid on soldiers graves
so many miles from home.

Waterfalls of buttercups and dandelions
flow from the font.
Daisies crammed in jam-jars stand
at the feet of solemn saints
whose halos shine but not so bright
as children's smiles or sunlit celandines.

Scent of wild flowers fills the air
a million miles from reek of war.

Ian Campbell

That I Might Hear From You

The bed will empty
and the armchair too
and suddenly I'll see no more of you
outside of photographs,
old letters full of future plans
now abruptly circumscribed.

But I shall live in hope
that I might hear from you
that you'll find ways I'll comprehend:
a walk in dreams through scenes of yesterday,
familiar scent,
the scant content
that lasts no more than night.

The garden bench will
seat just one not two
and suddenly I'll know no more of you
save random memories,
conversations with acquaintances,
loved ones and strangers.

But I shall still believe
that I might hear from you,
that you'll find ways I'll understand:
a vapour kiss upon a window pane
or whispered words
and trees that stir
upon a windless night.

Peter Godfrey

A Few Words to Jack Godfrey

We shall never really
Know each other. Never
Man to Man. Which is a pity.
But we must accept
That Grandsons
Are so much younger
Than those strange
Old men – their Granddads.
You're posted to fly out
Beyond my future, knowing
So little of the flight
Path I built for you
Long ago in the past.
But that's the way of things.
You will puzzle for solutions
To which I know the answers
But cannot teach you
Much out there in front
Of my lagging steps.
So be it then.
Make of it what you will.
No advice.
Do not seek purposes;
Reasons for it all.
It happens and unislanded
You will echo from
Others' untimely actions
And they to yours.
A series of accidents:
Sometimes good, often bad.
But an Adventure!
Enjoy it – it'll make you laugh
Quite often.

J A Bosworth

Bright Waterfalls

Here lies one whose name was writ in water

Epitaph: Tomb of John Keats

Though water seems an unsubstantial thing
Having no shape that may be called its own,
(Unlike some monument of carven stone),
It is, in nature, mightiest: the king
Of forces which determine life and form.

So he who claimed his name was writ therein
Spoke truer than he thought! There has not been
Another poet, since his time, whose charm
Could open magic casements in the souls
Of those who love pure beauty, or delight
In memorable lines. His words run bright
Across the years, like sunstruck waterfalls
Whose rainbowed spectacles enthral all those who see
The ageless splendours of their moving majesty.

Merryn Williams

Midnight in an Empty Study

for my father-in-law, Professor William Spooner Hemp, FRAS

Out of the workshop, out of the dusty forties,
you stroll, a young man with curly tousled hair,
pipe stuck between your teeth, and drop-dead gorgeous.
You structured bridges. Kept planes in the air.

Behind you stretched a line of skilled mechanics,
coopers, the men who built the early Fords.
'Hydroelasticity' - 'Aerodynamics' -
incomprehensible! My tools are words

so poor and weak. I've cleared your bookshelves, closely
shadowed by that young man I never knew.
Perhaps he'll wander in, amused to find me
at your desk, writing poems about you.

Midnight, tobacco scent rises from the furrowed
pages of your classics, Eddington and Jeans.
This gap is wider than between two cultures.
I sob, who never understood machines.

Jani Etherington

Fall of the Innocent

My Mother said
I should not go
Near the Magic Garden,
So...
I climbed a tree
So I could see
Exactly what she was hiding from me...
I saw a Garden big and wide with happy people there inside
And Love and Peace were planted high,
And I...
Knew that *they* had got it Right!
Though Mother said
I should not go
I knew she's got it Wrong
And so...
I climbed the Magic Garden wall
To take a closer look,
And call
The happy people there inside
And see the Garden big and wide
But Mum came out
And it was her angry shout,
That's all...
That made me

Fall!

Sally James

Migration

My house is full of feathers
He took a long time flapping his wings
My last chick to leave the nest
Once I thought to give him a push
Then thought the cat may get him
In the end he went
Flew away of his own accord
Migrated to another land
Where there is more ice than sun
More snow than rain
Where the sun shines at midnight
And lights dance on icicles
It wasn't the going away that bothered me
It was the gaps in the day
The one dinner plate on the table.

Rosa Thomas

A Cornishman in California

Here I stand, alone, unknown,
under a hard and glittering sky.
Hour after hour, the sun shines on
and I long for the cloud-smudged skies,
the merging mists and shifting shades
of my native land.

Here I stand, unknown, alone,
on the shore of a sea which is blue, ever blue.
Regular ripples caress the white sand,
and I am aching to hear once more
the boom and the roar of breakers crashing
'gainst shingle and cliff.

Here I stand, alone, unknown.
Unknowing, too, of any history
this bland and hollow land may hold.
Ghosts of giants and heroes people the tors and inhabit
the moors of the place where I was born,
and the spirits of saints hover
round the holy wells.

Death, be merciful, and come not near
to seek me here, as I toil in field or mine
and faraway mouths cry out to be fed.
I will welcome you when you come
with the setting sun behind Michael's Isle
in rugged Mount's Bay. Unceasing,
will I work and pray, just to return there some day.

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