

Openings 25

The Poetry Society of the Open University



An anthology of poems by Open
University Poets

2008

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Annual Anthology of

OU Poets

2008

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Introduction

OU Poets is the Poetry Society of the Open University, it is open to any student or staff member, past or present. 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:

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Hilary Mellon

SILVER SHOES

We always used to talk a lot back then,
those nights we lay together by your fire.
The years have gone, I can't remember when
or why it was we parted. But desire
I felt for you still shines beneath my skin
as bright as silver bangles that I wear.
And your familiar smile makes me begin
to wish again for firelight, whilst the air
between us now is crackling like a flame
and your remembered tongue is touching mine.
Your arms are tight around me just the same
as when we lay together. Now the shine
spreads through me till I'm lit up like a fuse.
And suddenly I'm wearing silver shoes.

Previously published in *GIFT*,
an Anthology
produced by Gatehouse Press.

David Blaber

**Excerpts From
Epiphany at The Amigo**

05012007.1

She'd said I must fly
in for New Year's Eve, to help her
drown depression.

I promised instead to dine
with her on Twelfth Night. I'm here.

She's not, carousing,
I surmise, in Aquitaine,
warmly, *en famille*.

Is there a code for breaking
the *galette des Rois* alone?

I've grown used to her
absences, but never cared
for the empty chairs.

06012007.2

Voice message for me:
press 2 to repeat - a sigh,
7 to delete.

06012007.3

She asks whether age
has changed her. I close my eyes
to the wear and say
she remains impossible,
with no trace of impairment.

Should I not praise her
for being this once on time?
I say words fail me.

Rose Docherty

From his discreet mistress

I welcome you with naked skin,
I've drawn the curtains, locked the doors;
you'll never meet my friends and kin,
I won't meet yours.

You talk to me of wont', care,
your job and money, all you fear
for children I can never share.
You need my ear.

When in a public place we meet,
we chat, polite; to leave's a wrench.
I don't glance back or drag my feet,
it's almost French.

I never phone or write or call,
I'm in the shadows of your life;
I rarely speak to you at all.
You have a wife.

David Gildner

New Beginning

At the centre we are spinning
into the light away
from the darkness
from where it began,
not afraid of the stars
and time is the place
where the story will end.

To far to turn back
or hide the mistakes
so remember the cradle
and laugh at the ghosts
learn all the songs
to show you belong,
never forgetting
the sound of your voice.

Still true to the dream
that keeps us from waking
we return to the centre
from which we are spinning,
so laugh at the darkness
and find time to embrace
the beautiful stranger
who told the first lie.

Forget the dark secrets
that hides all the guilt,
just try to recall
the sepia shadows
that smile from the grave
to stop us falling away from
the centre from which we are spinning.

Keep dancing in step
without hearing the tune
or painting her picture
without wetting the brush,
return to the playground
without reading the book
or learning the plot,
just remember the poppies
and taste the first kiss
to return to the centre
from which we are spinning.
Now turn the key slowly
and pull the door shut.

Eleanor Broaders

First Sleep

Asleep in the crook of my elbow,
I stared at your perfect face,
Not daring to blink,
I don't want to miss a thing,
You slept, suspended in time
And space, radiating peace.
A blank slate not yet written on,
Yet holding threads of wisdom,
Stretching back to a time
Before time was measured.
On the cusp of past and future,
Not yet touched by life.
Only three hours old,
You slept on
And still I dared not blink,
Lest I should break the spell.
I held you in the crook of my elbow
And stared at perfection.

Lem Ibbotson

Modern Art

"Modern Art" just does in my head:
A pile of bricks; an unmade bed;
A canvas painted a single hue;
Daubings a two-year-old child could do.

"Modern Poetry", it seems, has no plan:
The writer cares not if the lines don't scan;
Marvellous metaphors, that's alright,
But scarcely ever a rhyme in sight.

As for "Modern Music", well,
Most of the pieces sound like hell,
If it's pop, then the drumming will drive me insane,
And a symphonic piece drills a hole in my brain.

Where are the Renoirs, or modern-day Turners?
Is there a Keats somewhere on the back burners?
Out of my mind I shall soon be quite driven:
Come back Mozart - all is forgiven!

Barbara Cumbers

A stag beetle lectures on flight

Listen, you wet behind antennae crawlers,
I've flown, I know - it isn't worth the cost.
We're big, we're heavy, armour-plated. Hauling
all that bulk up in the air, you've lost
your energy - you could be forced down where
you can't take off again, long grass for instance,
or even worse, hard concrete where some passing
giant torments you.

OK. Any questions?

*-Dispersal? Where to? Here's the only oak
around. - To show your strength? Don't make me laugh.
We lock antlers on the ground - you're weak
from flying, you're soon on your back. Don't ask
me what your wings are for, just keep them folded.
You've got to try? Don't say I haven't told you.*

Dave Etchell

Styx

There flows a sombre river
Which you, and all must pass
it has no steel suspension bridge,
Nor concrete underpass.

You may seek to avoid it
But all your hopes are vain,
Some day or night the call will come
And you may not remain.

A silver Obol in the past
Was paid the ferryman
Perhaps now you'll need death's credit-card
To cross its icy span.

The helmsman dressed in filthy rags
And stared with flame filled eyes;
Perhaps today he wears white slacks
And shades (not those): cool guys.

Wherever and whatever
Expect a one way trip,
There is no two way ticket
However big you tip.

Eileen Ward

Autumn

As I stroll through autumn woods,
in the palm of my hand,
almost sensual to the touch,
I hold
shiny, silky; satin-smooth
horse chestnut,
found lying on a bed of leaves.

Too soon it will shrivel,
lose its sheen,
harden,
like
some people's hearts and minds,
where kindness and love
have always been strangers.

Alistair Scott

A sort of archaeology

The black Egyptian cat-god, Bast,
sits on your window ledge, amongst the bottles,
and the bodies of the fat blue flies
that battered on the glass and died.

There was a time when fossicking
for bottles in Victorian rubbish pits
was something that we did. Seems strange now,
how we searched the thick, rich, granulated soil,

scrabbling through the clods and shards and
garbage from another era, cast off junk that
hid its small unbroken treasures
deep within its decomposing.

And what excitement when we found
a whole one! Drew it from its earthy socket,
round and white and milky as a cataracted eye
that guards, behind it, memories.

Then one day we found a perfect green phial.
As green as the deep, unchipped, unscratched,
hexagonal, ribbed hard. For poison?
The words NOT TO BE TAKEN embossed along one side.

We took it, anyway, and washed it clean and polished it
and placed it on your window-ledge
where the bodies of the flies now pile up
and Bast still sits, inscrutable.

Helen Harvey

Women on Wednesday

Another day down at the swimming pool,
it's midweek, it's quarter to ten...
and in from the car park a gabbling group comes:
time for 'Women on Wednesday' again.

*The girl on reception is pleasant-
if young and quite scantily clad,
she always exchanges a few friendly words,
though perhaps she could speak up a tad?*

The changing rooms fill with their natter
as they struggle from layers of clothes
and into the bargains they picked up in town:
outsized lycra in lemon and mauve.

*Taking exercise needs to be gentle -
Doctor's orders: get plenty of rest.
It simply won't do to be flailing about,
especially when so underdressed.*

They ease themselves into the water...
...gingerly, so they don't wet their hair;
then they loiter about, hanging onto the sides
as if not really sure why they're there.

*But the water is ever so chilly,
they could do with a little more heat;
and the ripples play havoc with balance,
had the staff thought of putting in seats?*

The timid ones stay in the shallows,
lightly swish as they swap some more news,
while the more energetic can gossip *and* wade,
making waves as they strike out in twos.

*And doing the breaststroke sounds vulgar,
but ladies should not do the crawl;
these lanes are too thin if you swim side by side,
at the deep end you can't stop at all!*

When even their wrinkles have wrinkled
and their exercised tongues need a rest,
the ladies head back to the cubicles
to get lotioned and potioned and dressed.

*So much liquid is rather a nuisance -
Swimwear's hard to get off in a rush;
and these tiles are a devil on bunions and corns,
They could do with soft mats or some such.*

Leaving patches of talc on the benches
and clouds of perfume in their wake,
the ladies head back to the car park and home
for more chat over coffee and cake.

COLIN BLUNDELL

Lunchtime

Just eating my sandwich, thinking of you
Thinking of eating you!
Trying to read a book but thinking of you.
Trying to get my head round
what we have done
and still thinking of you.

Your eyes widen with child-like delight
looking up at me. Asking
for another lollipop.
I'm not a lollipop machine I say.
I'm not a machine at all.
We laugh.
Now I think of you laughing.

You are in my head,
searching around the rooms
of my head, banging on each door.
I have to answer
I cannot ignore you.

You are in my heart
squeezing it,
draining it,
ripping it out and
stamping on it!
You are in my heart.

My sandwich has gone!
I don't remember eating it.
Stolen perhaps?
Did you take it?
I check
but my heart's still there!
Just.
Back to work and
thinking of you.

Daphne Phillips

Impaled

"I'm not being nosy, but..."

Here it comes again.
I tauten, thankful
That my face is averted;
I am having a Prometheus sort of day,
With Grief peck-pecking away
At my raw insides.

"I never understood, you know,
Why you two never got married."

Teeth clench, prevent
Barbed words from bursting out.

"I mean, you know,
Now that he's gone...
Sudden, wasn't it, you don't expect it at that age...
Anyway, I just wondered, you know...
Whether you wished now, you know..."

I round, good manners forgotten.
Unruly tongue
Lets fly a shock of darts.

"Wished what? That we'd had
A mock marriage like yours,
All style and no substance?
Sorry, we went for the real thing, you know,
Real soulmates, real bedmates,
Plenty of knock-down, drag-out sex.
Not your sort of thing, I know..."

Grief appraises her fleetingly,
But Stunned Disbelief has got there first,
Dropping jaw and popping eyes.

Grief flaps away for a wingstretch,
Giving me time for a well-earned smile.

Sally James

Stitched up.

I was cast on too soon
knitted into existence
my stitches were right
but the pattern was wrong.
Too many woolly strands
dangled in the air
I became knotted
purlled this way and then that
slipped stitches were passed over me.
I found that two knitted together
did not make a whole.
Now I am a cast off
waiting for someone to unwind me
knit me into someone new.

Su Laws Baccino

Pater

He was always there, hanging on a hook,
swinging on the back of my bedroom door;
in the form of a cap, a musty old cap,
a darker patch on the inside lining -
his mark, his sweat.

A pilot's cap, a dead pilot's cap;
for years always there, no matter where,
watching over me every night,
welcoming me at dawn.
His silent presence felt.

He was dead - at all times dead.
For fifty years somehow there
to remind me; and then one day I flipped.
I put him, and his cap, in a cardboard box;
sent them away to a museum.

Freed from this burden I began
to ask questions about a father,
my father, my dead father,
a father I never knew.

Sometimes I hear a tap on the door,

Evelyn Leite

Finale

Prepare to draw the curtains
on my act. The play is ending.
My split-spleen tones bring tears
to my audience ... they care
in some strange blood-related way;
they share my scene. Pause
in my silence... like a sigh
releasing a breath of prayer.
Share wonder and fear. I must
confront, but not hear the applause
with mortal exultation,
not communicate by touch...
but what is touch when senses
multiply in ashen cells? when
ebbing memories rest in peace,
or is it peace that reaches through
the misty mire? peace-that blesses
each encore? ...then, when
these curtains close, I pray
Exit but don't shut the door.

Stewart Earl Emmott

LOVE FADES AWAY

Love fades away
Like a print in melting snow:
Something that once was so clear -
 so pure and well defined, (refined)
Becomes imperfect and turns
 into a lingering sadness -
 (In) Trying to assuage its grief.

Al Campbell

Heron Bridge

At first it seemed unreal
so still a sculpture
A shock of disbelief
that yes—this is a real bird
Cool grey - near blue
& ragged
individual feathers
hardly forming a wing
More an umbrella - torn
half heartedly covering
its fragile body
Then - it moves
one brownish leg
precisely - one step
elegant - stops
Then another - knee backwards
head cocked - stops again
I do too - stopped cold
Also a sculpture
Its thin swan neck
curving a question mark
to long stiletto beak
Preceding blackest
most piercing eye
Sharp look out for frogs
or ripple of small fish

Lending an elegance
to an - otherwise
matter of fact
slightly humped foot bridge
spanning Burry Pill
below Briarley
Framing a composition
of mood ... complete
as willow pattern china
Even to pollarded ash
spiky thin branches
splayed - graceful
Blue white in morning damps
Slender grey heron
lifts languid wings
becoming a whole
new shape - and flies
to some more distant
private haunt
on the flood plains
of Cwm Ivy

Mariana Zavati

THE COLOUR OF WASPS

Grandpa woke up at dawn
At first light, between the bees
Confused smells of memory
The sky was the colour of wasps

Ion put on the mask
He danced all day with the bees
The season was cool and no rain
The sky was the colour of wasps

Shades of the afternoon...
Off with the mask
Masses of dancing bees
The sky was the colour of wasps

Ion was chasing the steps...
Masses of dancing bees
A chasing ball a twister in a storm
The sky was the colour of wasps

On the grand steps of the house
With the Italian facade
He slept ... his bold head tight to the edge
The sky was the colour of wasps

Wrapped by the bees, tight, not to be cold
The sky was the colour of wasps
The large front doors sculptures in oak
The sky was the colour of wasps

DJ Haines.

Stream merging to river.

If your coldness took all our
reflections, kept them,
poured over them,
then you may still hold them
for us to browse any time
we re-form in our dreams.

Can we remember
who we were,
your reflections?

Your flowing mirrors saw clearly
the light so unique and maybe
in those days of magic each drop
of rain peered in before it fell
to the earth, to your shore,
to join your memories.

Alice Harrison

SORTING THE BUTTON BOX

Buttons of every colour and size
from big warm coats to trouser flies.

Blue, green, yellow - rainbow piles,
from Sunday-best to final-rest,
a lifetime's collection of fashions and styles.

Buttons that were meant to reveal
hairy chests or heaving breasts;
buttons that were made to conceal.

Buttons that popped off gluttons;
buttons for those dressed as lambs or muttons.

Glad buttons from party-dresses,
cocktail-dresses, little-black-dresses,
dress-shirts, dressing-up-clothes, ball-gowns,
Christening-gowns, trendy siblings' hand-me-downs.
Sad buttons from a wedding-dress that was never worn
and for a baby that was never born.

Power buttons, flower buttons, I'll-be-ready-in-an hour buttons;
pearly buttons, whirly buttons, don't-want-to-be-too-early buttons;
sedate buttons, first-date buttons, mustn't-be-too-late buttons.

Buttons that button-through for the buttoned-up,
buttons to button-hole the buttoned-down; .
buttons that were told to Button it!
and have kept it buttoned ever since.

Buttons that jingle, buttons that clink,
blowsy blouse buttons, jaunty jacket buttons,
buttons you twiddle while you think.

Buttons that tease, buttons that please;
buttons that keep you warm and away from harm.

So many buttons they fill you with awe
but not one to match the colour and size you're looking for.

Tony French

What do you think?

Give me a glimpse into your brain...
not shrink-wrapped thoughts
harvested from Sunday supplements,
not even words, however balanced
and composed,
but feelings, half-lost memories,
the very chemistry of thought
that cracks like lightning
through the crowded junctions
of your mind.

Allow these seeds of thought to taste
my dew, before your flowers bloom
and cast those wind-blown petals
of your mind in random patterns
on our consciousness.

Tell me with eyes that laugh, a touch,
like raindrops on my hand -
whisper of dreams you've yet to dream
or paths to walk among the forest
of your thoughts.

Together we'll explore ideas that rise
as purest moisture from a hillside spring,
we'll dip our fingers, wet our lips,
and taste the mingled richness of our minds,
as knowledge grows -
we'll play as children in a sea of miracles,
and on this day, our senses washed,
our lives will give a rhythm to the waves
and we shall cry as newly born,
our pulses wed.

CATE CODY

Instrumental to me

Play me as your instrument;
Strum strong chords down my arms
Blow soft breaths across my spine
And use my thighs as the keys
To tip-toe with your fingers

Pluck, pluck at my heart with your
Pulse to its beating rhythms
And I'll use my voice to vote
Marrying the sounds I hear

Orchestra of ecstasy
Hits hard the bass of my soul
I beg just once more, encore

Andrew W Pye

INCOMPATIBLE

We're out of kilter, not in sync.
We're on thin ice on life's ice-rink.

We've grown apart, we're not in tune.
On shifting sand on life's sand-dune.

I'm a quarter to two.
You're a quarter past three.
I'm a quarter to you.
You're a quarter past me.

Our race is run, we're on last legs.
Our goose has laid its wooden eggs.

We're out of sorts, in painful rut.
Like lemon juice on paper-cut.

I'm a quarter to nine.
You're a quarter past eight.
I'm a quarter past fine.
You're a quarter to hate.

We're not in true, we're not in chime.
Our two hearts beat, but not in time.

We're out of whack, not quite cricket.
Standing stuck on sticky wicket.

We're not in key, nor on the beat.
We sing two songs from life's hymn sheet.

Bronwen Vizard

ARMISTICE DAY - 1933

Mark time on the pedals, Headmaster,
draw wheezy notes from the keys.
The children are gathering round you
in spite of the cold misty breeze.

Today is the day we remember
a war that was to end wars.
We are outside our school in Hirwaun St.
hoping street folk will open their doors.

As our thin voices rise in petition
our elders begin to crowd close,
hungry men without work, anxious women,
finding comfort, some smidgen of hope.

We call on our God to protect us
and ignore the quiet drum beat of death
now echoing in powerful places,
creeping closer with resolute stealth.

We enjoy our prayer of remembrance
bright change from our classroom chores.
The street waves goodbye in thanksgiving
as we trundle the organ indoors.

Jim Lindop

American Music

Not the European schtick of Copland,
Ives, nor crew-cut Ivy-Leaguers' songs -
the music that's another hybrid child,
the rackets chameleon that's changed
its random swatch of colours willy-nilly.

The 'wrong-side-of-the-blanket' brat
of spiritual chants and hymns and work songs,
of stinking ship's hold woes, of mourning,
of mayhem from the backstreet halls,
of dens and orphanages of New Orleans;

gutbucketed, pickled and jugged, then horned
and slide-tromboned and clarinetted, boxed
and barrelhoused along the Mississippi
with hard-picked cotton bales and crates
and gunny-sacks to Memphis and St Louis.

Pure notes were bent and arced against the grain
and hassled northward with the need for work,
up to Chicago's railheads, spewed across
the stockyards, the uptown stoops and streets,
the backbeat irresistible, the downhome blues,

- delivering the bastard, -jazz, screwmusic
and its myriad mulatto and quadroon
hip offspring, who invaded foxtrotland,
its wheeling progeny a-scattering, and a-scattering
the glitzy ballroom dancers to the fringes;

and the prissy string ensembles
and the military two-steppers -
all looked the other way.

Rosa Thomas

The Angel and the Businessman.

Weary, the businessman lay on his bed.
An angel came to him. and said,
"You have ten more years to live."
"Only ten years!" the business man cried,
"So little time! So little time!"
"Plenty of time," the angel replied.
"Time to plant an orchard and pick the fruit;
Learn to play the piano or flute;
Climb a mountain; write a book;
Learn another language, make a new friend
Spend time with your sons before they are men."

After nine years, he lay on his bed.
The angel came to him and said,
"You have one year more to live."
"Only twelve months," the happy man sighed,
"So little time! So little time!"
"Plenty of time," the angel replied.
"Time to plant some wildflower seeds;
Feed the birds; do a hundred good deeds;
See the pyramids or the Great Wall,
Save a young person who might otherwise fall;
Write to friends you haven't seen for years;
Listen to your daughter and wipe her tears."

At the year's end, he lay on his bed.
The angel came to him and said,
"You have twenty four hours to live."
"Plenty of time," the wise man replied,
"Time to read the poem that speaks to me;
Listen to my favourite symphony;
Relate to my grandson one more tale
Walk outside in sun, rain or gale
See one more sunset, smell a rose
And tell those I love that I'll love them still
when I pass to the other side of the hill."

Shafi Ahmed

THE LOGICAL DERIVATION

Forests dwindled with climatic change.
Man became a hunter on the plains.
But he carried with him a memento
from his `Garden of Eden', for magical
Safety!

Wearing of tree-leaves and barks
as talisman were essential;
but the arm pit and crotch areas
were often uncovered, because jointing
there were difficult. Women covered
also their faces, so the attention
of strangers were kept at bay.

The effect of these coverings on human
body, over evolutionary aeons, caused
loss of body hair. Then Man's next
leap into civilization required
the remaining hairy parts to be specially
covered; to banish all beastly memory!

And that's how paradise was lost.
And we fell from grace to the present.
Now we wear elaborate head gears and clothes
and merely touch wood for divine protection.

stacey lane

Where Does Reality Belong?

In the cracks between my thoughts,
I glimpse another world
like a rogue camera's snapshot scenes
of lives I've never known, folk I've never met,
and conversations heard, mid-flow, mundane
but not concerned with me.
Then I latch my mind to watch, or listen in,
and try to steer them to expected ends.
In the instant they are gone,
wraiths in a locked cupboard once more,
and with them all memory of what I had perceived.

In the half-way state from sleep to wakefulness
I'm a different, passive, Me,
reading someone else's life, a novel or biography.
The writing's so much better than my own.
It's fluent, gripping, wise.
I plan to profit by the tale well told.
By now I'm wide awake, but do not write it down
and soon it's lost for good.

Phil Craddock

Making Music

Enter calmly. It's difficult I know
seeing her there across the room.
The stomach jumps. Control it.
Down a drink if one is available.

When you're ready, stride straight over.
Take a glance, but only a glance.
You know what you'd see if you deliberately stared -
the fabulous curves, the smooth waist and belly.

But now the huge white grin is in view
and this is what draws you, gives you the thrill.
Reach out your hand for the very first touch.
Place fingers carefully. It's important to start off
on exactly the right note and to strike the right chord.
Press firmly. How willingly does she yield?
And how does she respond? Listen closely.
You won't get far if you're not really listening.

React to each phrase, each little inflection.
Leave a space, then mirror and compliment.
Hold yourself upright, but comfortably so.
Remain attentive, but don't get intense.

And remember to keep an appropriate tone.
Enquire, but don't push her anywhere too strange.
She may well be capable of doing what you ask
but will soon let you know if your assumptions are wrong.

Become aware that others are listening
and watching your performance. Invite them in.
Hear the trickling laughter? The breathy undertone?
The flirting remark? You're creating them.

Look around. Smile. Perhaps give a wink.
Let her lash out with a big angry hit.
Then soothe her again with the softest caresses.
Just don't ever call it 'playing'.

Jan Green

Sarah

I don't do doom and gloom-

I would give all I'd ever
owned to feel well for just a
day, but memories are reality,
we're children weaving
daisy chains to dress
our dandy-clock hair.

Sitting in my room my
dog discerns my feeble health.
Troubled eyes show grief
as he snuffles my hands
goodbye.

The weeds inside my head,
are squeezing my life
away. The invasive shoots
have missed my lungs - so
one last smoke, as I don't
do doom and gloom.

My spirit will not break
Though pain crescendos
through my soul.

Upping the dose
I slide into a twilight
world where there is
no doom and gloom.

My life is staged within
these walls. Celebrate
life, but Death Is my friend.
Folks beckon and smile
from the other side. My journey
started I'll soon be there, for
there is no doom and gloom

Black horses with plumes
to pull my hearse. No scrawny
hymns commit to fire. I'm
just a whisper away, so
have a drink, have a laugh,
remember me with love for
there is no doom and gloom.

Anthony Stainer

TRAWLERSMEN.

What is it that has netted
these men, what have they
swallowed for dawn-early breakfast,
to make them grit their lives
in clamped teeth and take to
seas high as mountains
complete with crags, cold as
glaciers and as cruel - without
intent - but which swallows
boats and men like basking
sharks eating krill? Indifferent.

Is it a romantic machismo;
pitting a masculine mental
strength against an element
mindless as dung or cracked
mountain boulders? Who knows.
Do not ask these men, they are
inarticulate - by intent, because
why should they explain that
which is not explainable, we
all live as we have to live -
within the bounds of our
unexplainable bounds, often not
obtainable. Some lives are
gambled, without dice but with blood,
guts, skin, bone, scraped scales
versus money, wealth, warm homes and
children with cheeks red like apples.
Odds, of course, always lying with
the wildcard sea and its ferocious
winds; beautiful boats, beautiful skies
not withstanding.
Maybe, after all, it is just something
in the spirit, in the soul (if
spirit and soul there are) both
slippery as fish to catch - nets
not available.

Nina Mattar.

Nonsuch Park

Time to spare
my mind lingers
as I tread familiar
path we knew.

The tranquil sun
and the gentle breeze
revive past memories.

I hear my footsteps
a reflection of the
emptiness of the moment.

But at the park, nature
provided the solace
I needed and the fleeting
happiness of a
remembered past.

Miriam Patrick

Faubourg D'Amiens 2006

We came to Arras in early Spring, bringing the details of his burial in our bag. His stone was where they promised it would be, counted row by row out from the bays and arches of a monstrous, white, engraved memorial.

And I stood there, eighty nine years on, going through the rituals I had observed in places such as this at other times, head-bowed half-sheepish, but not indifferent to loss, for all I learned his name just five years past, assimilating it amidst the gradual

building of a family tree. My father's uncle, though he of course, was gone ten years before my father came onto the scene. Son of John Evans, decorator, of Dawley, Salop. His own trade back at home, unknown to me. Out here his great resource,

obedience and the willingness to fight beside his fellow men. I place the poppy and the little cross, marked RIP, against the stone and wonder suddenly, if his mother ever stood here in this place. My own son, back at home, is twenty six years old, as he was then.

Adrian Green

Fisherman's Wife

Waiting for her lover at dawn,
she scans the sea for a hint of mast,
her ash pale face and frame
set to the eastern horizon.

The wind whips her dyed-dark-once-red hair,
tells her nothing but the savagery of waves;
throws storm-littered driftwood,
seaweed and plastic high onto the shore.

On the beach, lines etched with salt,
she stands imagining the swell and suck of water
pounding fury on the pitched-into-darkness rolling hull,
hoping for hope, and that the sea
will not disgorge fragments she will recognise.

A widow now, unmarried by the sea,
looking for comfort in the breeze
and stirring life in her womb.

Nancy Charley

The Camper's Prayer

May the toilet be clean and free when I need one,
May the shower be hot and the door-lock hold tight,
May the plot be level and soft for the tent pegs,
May the sun shine, the sun shine, from morning to night.

But if I must suffer the wind and the rain
May my guy-ropes stay firm and no water intrude
Into clothes, sleeping bags, in fact the entire tent,
May I stay dry and warm, have some clear interludes

For me to rush to the toilet whenever I'm bursting,
May my children stay happy, playing umpteen card games
Of Snap, Uno or Pontoon, please prevent any bickering
Or taunting or teasing or calling rude names.

May the youth on the site be pleasant and tolerant,
Not given to shouting in the middle of the night;
If not, may my baby wake up early morning
And rouse the whole campsite with her crying might.

May that baby not get sick or have diarrhoea,
May the nappies, the clothes, baby food all last out,
May I not poison my children with poor camp food cooking,
May the holiday pass without me having to shout

At my husband's ineptitude in such situations,
Give me grace to endure so nobody need know
Our whole family history as we let rip at each other,
Just make us the model family on show.

If you give me these blessings, I promise to thank you,
And share with my friends my complete gratitude,
Entertain them with photos and endless great stories,
And teach them the camping beatitudes:

*You are blessed if you're poor, for then you go camping,
You are blessed if you mourn the rain ruining your tent,
You are blessed if you're meek then you'll tolerate the snoring
Of your camp neighbours, they're, of course, heaven sent.*

*You are blessed if you're hungry, you'll love one-pot concoctions
You are blessed if you're merciful, then your children will survive
The trials of a fortnight's family camping,
Might even have some positive stories for their lives*

*You are blessed if you're pure and don't understand toilet graffiti,
You are blessed as a peacemaker, though don't try to intervene
In the quarrels of your neighbours, no matter how heated
Their performance, practice intercession in a corner, unseen!*

*Finally, you are blessed if you suffer persecution
For owning last year's tent, and failing to complete
Its erection in five minutes or under,
Know you've sourced holiday stories for the camping elite.*

Peter Godfrey

The Blaby Council Refuse Tip

Here is a world of disbelief
A cold Hades in the rain
Where hooded men come briefly
And leave again reminding us
Of Plague Men long ago
Carrying off the suppurating dead.
This is the Tip.
There are many
Just the same.
From bright beginnings the new things
Come to end their days
Begun in hope and expectation
To end in spoiled despair.
Shabby machines that once washed
Persil white huddle together
In their asymmetrical cemetery
Beside where fridges cower,
Cold comfort now destroyed.
And dead vacuum cleaners,
Some with plugs unkindly amputated,
Have breathed their last.
And there - a pile of blinded Telesets
Next to the soundless music players
Struck dumb, surprised at this awful
Fete accompli.
A red Stetson party hat defiled.
Some mattresses from whence all
Romance fled.

More visitors arrive,
Mourners come with carpets, sinks
Sunk into a nest of hunched
Wire hangers no longer
Lending their support to anything.
Some broken cupboards.
Oh this is a sad and terrible place!
Even the grimy puddles seem to be
Reservoirs of fallen tears.
The Tip. Last resting place
Of all our deconstructed jetsam.
All began as cheerful hopes
But were merely the future
Of our despairs and now
Not wanted on the voyage.

Ian Campbell

Sussex and no Sioux were there

As I remember it was Sussex
and no Sioux were there,
no Crazy Horse, no Sitting Bull,
atop those gentle hills,
but I believed it just the same,
that farmer's field a rolling plain,
and I believe it still,
a long time since I thought it.

As I remember we were out of
bounds,
crawled through a hedge
on someone else's land.
We strode,
our gun belts heavy-hung,
and I wished I had a horse
(a piebald stallion of course)
and I wish it still,
a long time since I thought it.

As I remember,
we found secrets in the trees
and hidden camps,
where burnt-out fires
smouldered in the ashes still,
and I wondered if the march of
time
could take a boy's dreams from
his mind,
and I wonder still
a long time since I first did.

Colin Rennie

Sock

For three days after she left
I could still smell her scent,
Then under the bed,
I found a sock,
I put it in my pocket
And walked with it to work.

Susan Jarvis

Marmalade

This ten past seven pot of heaven,
This sun shred spread on buttered bread,
Is a treasured measure of citrus pleasure
That floats the mind in orange hue
To the deepest depths of dark Peru,
Where dwells the brown and nameless bear
Whose hat conceals a further share
Of tangy golden bright delight
To sate the morning appetite.

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