



# *Openings 26*

*The Poetry Society of the Open University*

An anthology of poems by Open University Poets 2009

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*The Poetry Society of the Open University*

Annual Anthology of

*OU Poets*

2009

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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.

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*Andrew W Pye*

### **Our Relationship**

Not chalk nor cheese, not flesh nor dust.  
It's less than love, but more than lust.

A fist of stone in velvet glove.  
It's more than lust, but less than love.

The devil drives, and needs they must.  
It's less than love, but more than lust.

A feather soars from flightless dove.  
It's more than lust, but less than love.

Not flesh nor fowl, not sheen nor rust.  
It's less than love, but more than lust.

It comes to push, it comes to shove.  
It's more than lust, but less than love.

It isn't fair - it isn't just.  
It's less than love, but more than lust.

*Susan Jarvis*

**Not Roses**

I ask him for a glimpse  
of tomorrow.  
His words left unspoken,  
he gives me his token of love  
or rejection.  
He offers me tulips.

A blood-red burst of promise,  
silent on sticky tongues -  
a mute chorus of scarlet.  
Black-hearted, they beat  
their dirge for dead spring.  
Fingers seek  
the bright golden ring  
of sunlight's refrain above  
crimped cellophane.  
Heads bend  
at the end of the hymn.

He offered me tulips.

*Lem Ibbotson*

### **The European Union**

A pretty little English girl  
Loved a young man called Fred  
But father banned him from the house  
And vowed they'd never wed.

Now she refused to give him up  
And shouted "it's not fair"  
So daddy sent her off to France  
To live as an au pair.

For several months she pined away,  
This sad and ill-used wench  
And all the time she sighed and moaned,  
But gradually in French.

And then she met un gars who wooed  
With passionate intent  
And when he praised her belle poitrine  
She knew just what he meant.

So Fred was all forgotten by  
This rather fickle miss  
Who settled down pour toujours in  
A state of Gallic bliss.

*Daphne Phillips*

### **Beaker Folk Burial**

Our warriors have pride of place,  
And of possession,  
Even in death;  
Where might they fight next?  
Face is all.

*One male over fifty with beaker and dagger.  
One male over forty with beaker.*

We know better  
Than to speak of the Chieftain's family,  
Even this long afterwards.  
Who knows  
What he hoped to lay to rest  
When he burned his son's wife?  
And then his son running amok...

*One male over forty with cremated remains  
of young adult female.  
One male over twenty with handled beaker.  
One unsexed infant with handled beaker.*

The tow-haired brothers took their wives -  
Would my man be that extravagant?  
We could ill-afford to lose four workers,  
When two were still healthy;  
A short harvest spells a long Winter,  
Even for so few.

*Two males over forty.  
Two females over forty.*

We expected the little ones to die, of course;  
They were pale,  
They were cold, yet sweated,  
They slipped away as we watched;  
That was the pattern.

*One male over five.  
Two unsexed infants.*

But we did not expect  
My man's brothers to die,  
So well-made and muscled were they.  
Now he struggles on,  
But it is not the same;  
His beakers are shapely,  
But they communicate nothing, except  
"His brothers died, you know".

*Two males over twenty.*

The tanner was a skilled man - -  
Look at these boots,  
Sewn by his wife, and softer than my feet.  
I would have liked a long pair for the Winter,  
But we had nothing left to trade  
At the right time,  
And now it is too late.

*One male over thirty with beaker.  
One female over thirty with beaker and copper awl.*

When it is our turn,  
What will they say of us?

*david gilder*

**Priest**

Heads slowly turn  
as he walks serenely  
through the square  
dressed in flowing black  
with long grey beard  
he commands respect,  
but the sound of the  
Crazy Frog ringtone  
from somewhere  
beneath the cassock  
somehow shatters the elusion.

*Julie Stamp*

### **Beachcombing**

He's here again, the old man on the beach,  
With shabby raincoat, gaiters, whistled tune;  
He mutters as he scans the shingle, each  
New treasure kept, or tossed into the spume.  
Against the tide, a tug spews forth black smoke,  
And ferries thrum their way into their berths:  
Like grand old Dames, they gracefully evoke  
An old-time dance, sure-footed, well rehearsed.  
A spur of students from a nearby coach  
Erupts, and oozes down the promenade,  
A blue-rinsed lady tuts and glares reproach,  
Then scoops up canine mess with disregard.

I comb the beach, entranced by all I see -  
For all that glistens may not golden be!

*Adrian Green*

**Frozen In**

Afraid of the ice  
crushing the wood,  
the old planks  
forced apart or  
being pressed into  
splinters by the  
push of winter.

Afraid of you  
turning away  
looking for  
springtime again.

*Bronwen Vizard*

## **Greyfriars**

I held a gathering of herbs that day  
When turning from our nearby field I saw  
The King's men armed with threatening pike and sword  
Challenge the helpless Prior at his gate.

So little, Henry's men could gain from us.  
No stack of coin or larder of rich meat.  
Only a silver cross and roofs rich lead  
Counted as spoils the day our beds of straw  
Were torn to shreds and when we humbly joined  
Those bands of homeless, poor and hungry men  
Who once were fed, and welcomed at our door.

Dreaming through time I saw stone part from stone.  
A mansion grew; the roofless Friary of God  
Recalled by broken pillars and cracked floor.  
Then, from neglect, the great house also wept,  
With shattered windows left to overlook  
The sad remains where chant and songs of praise  
Once rose to heaven in litany of prayer.

Alas, the ruins vanish from my sight.  
Concrete, glass and steel now tower to heaven,  
Corporate worth enshrined in structured block.  
New values, swinging speed of frantic life  
Dismiss our grey robed friars and simple ways.  
Our name, remembered by a busy road  
Is all that's left to conjure back lost days.

*Sherrian Guest*

**Peter**

I came with Peter  
Every Wednesday  
After school.  
I sat and watched  
As he launched the swing,  
Soaring against the sky,  
Flying with dragons.

*"Don't look now - he's here again."  
"He's always here when school comes out."  
"It's like he's waiting 'specially."*

He spun the peeling roundabout  
Sandals scuffing dusty ground,  
Propelling his chariot  
Round the Coliseum,  
Chasing the gladiators.

*"He watches the children."  
"Not so much the girls."  
"He stares at the boys."*

He climbed the worn smooth ladder  
To the dizzying heights of the slide,  
Surveying his kingdom  
From the summit  
Before the slippery descent.

*"He gives me the creeps."  
"He smiles at them sometimes."  
"But I've seen him cry."*

He excavated the sandpit  
Tossing crisp packets aside.  
His archaeological dig  
Exposing buried treasure  
From lost civilisations.

*"He touched a boy last week."  
"Someone ought to report him."  
"But the child tripped, running by."*

` One day he'll outgrow the playground'  
Or that's what I thought in those days.  
But I sit now and watch other children  
Through whispered clouds of suspicion,  
An innocent joy under threat  
In the place that I come to remember  
The times that I'll never forget.

Peter Adams, sixty-seven, was found dead  
On Wednesday.  
A widower, neighbours say he rarely went out  
After the death of his grandson,  
Also called Peter.

*Barbara Cumbers*

**Low tide**

Three hours ago there were breakers  
showing the rocks how to move. Now  
the water settles in cracks, in faults  
that step the wave-cut platform, the bones  
of the coast picked clean again.

The cliff is cold and shivering,  
stones trickle down continuously  
a rattling music like a child's stick  
on a rib-cage of railings. It is  
late winter, there are new faces

looking north into emptiness.  
In the quiet of the far-away sea  
dry rivers of stones spread fractured  
cliff across the beach. They flow  
and then stop, waiting for the tide.

*Michael Cope*

### **Before ASBOs**

The bright sun hid us spiralling wild and free  
straining taut and strong as barbed wire whorls,  
teetering on the fine line of control we  
grabbed at life, unzipped the world -  
keep out, keep in  
with wicked jags unstitching careless skin.

Kipped black we fired the hollow tree  
leaves squealing in the heat of youth sublime.  
Over chalk pit plummet, fearless monkeys  
swinging on a knotted thread of time  
off rickety sticks  
held dangerously in place with magic tricks,

slung stones to smash the pump house window panes  
catapulted bottles into razored slivers  
played splits with sheath knives and fearless games  
of bamboo arrows fletched with feathers  
from mellifluous birds  
blasted with a gun's uproarious words,

built secret camps and practised secret things  
exploded fizzing squibs in rotten stumps  
rodeoed our dreams with liquorice strings  
clambered tin roofs, belly-aching scrumps  
till we were green:-  
And all this by the adult world unseen.

*Rosa Thomas*

**Time**

The sea breaks on the shingle still  
below the house where I was born.  
Closer to the clifftop now  
as erosion takes its toll,  
it stands defying fate.

It stands defying fate,  
as erosion takes its toll.  
Closer to the clifftop now.  
Below the house where I was born,  
the sea breaks on the shingle still.

*Ian Campbell*

**Shake your pillows free of dreams**

An empty room,  
I change your bed  
and all at once it seems,  
I chase the slumber from your sheets,  
coax the thoughts from off the walls,  
the ceiling and the wooden floor  
and shake your pillows free of dreams.

Symbolic acts or practical?  
I have no need to know,  
where all of your anxieties hide,  
and all your pleasures go.

So empty now,  
so short of life,  
this room is incomplete,  
I shake your pillow free of dreams,  
praise memories from cupboard space,  
the ceiling and the books askew  
and chase the slumber from your sheets.

*Eleanor Broaders*

### **In the Lamplight**

You looked so fine to me last night,  
Standing beneath the hazy light  
Of a streetlamp in the drizzled rain  
I saw you in your youth again.

In corduroy jacket and warm pullover  
Your record bag slung over your shoulder  
Blue jeans in their faded phase,  
I saw you in your younger days.

Strange what shadows show  
To a heart that's full and all aglow,  
When time slips away to be reborn  
And souls take on their truest form.

Now always when I think of you  
I'll see you dressed in jeans of blue,  
Lamplight glistening on damp hair  
In youthful vigour standing there.

*Dave Etchell*

**The vanished**

They have vanished like old Winter's leaves  
Or eddies in swift streams,  
Dissolved like April's early mists;  
Lost: fragile as moonbeams.

Those who I knew and held so dear -  
Drowned in time's endless tides.  
So many from my yesteryear -  
Gone, where the dark wind rides.

Now Autumn's beauty burns, insane;  
To sear those memories  
Of lost loves which I can't regain  
In a dream which never dies.

*Cate Cody*

## **Early**

She opens the door  
Clad softly fresh and white  
A turban wraps her hair  
Steam slithers into night

He stands embarrassed  
Stammers, 'I'm early, I should go'

Yes, he should.

He doesn't look at her  
Pretends not to notice  
Stockings

He touches them lightly  
While she brushes her teeth  
Pang, he thinks of her ...  
But it's only brief

She smiles seduction;  
Radiates the room  
'Oh, sorry' - sees the underwear  
Blushes full bloom

I better get dressed  
Have a drink  
Help yourself...

...to the bar...  
*not to me...'*

He peels away her towel  
They watch it fall

Lightly he licks her neck

*Chris Bushill*

**Another Smile**

Early morning,  
by my side,  
her head is on the pillow.  
Her arm reaches across me,  
her hair gently brushes my cheek.  
She smiles softly into my waking eyes.  
I return her smile and,  
with my arm, reach out to her,  
lovingly caress her tousled hair.

Each morning,  
with that Judas touch,  
my heart turns a little more to stone.  
Each morning  
that smile,  
that smile that is not yours,  
freezes another corner of my heart.

*Katherine Rawlings*

### **The Orchard**

The orange trees, the orange blossom,  
The lemons, medlars and the apricots,  
The noon high sun glowing waxen  
On yellows, golds; the buzzy windfall rots,  
Sharp citrus smells in this ripe season,  
The freckled heat addicted to my skin,  
The peel, the pith, warm sweet sensations  
Tease nose, tease tongue, wheedling, tingling in  
To sensualness that flows to thumbs, to toes,  
A chorus of cicadas celebrating  
The plentitude of fruit, the juice that flows,  
The breeze that rustles leaves vibrating  
Around my neck and wrists as I take five,  
To drench my throat with orange pulp; alive!

*Al Campbell*

**Minnesota Woodpecker**

Driving through  
those desolate  
sparse spread woods  
I hadn't really seen  
so much as sensed  
its flight conclude-  
A wet dish rag thrown  
flying in the wind  
A sideways twitch  
yet straight with  
flaps like this  
and that and slaps and  
sticks against  
a power pole  
Hung gripped  
by suction?

Not uncertain-

Was that a bird  
I saw?

*Sue Spiers*

## **Hygiene**

Scrub my face  
Scour tooth and nail and heel  
Wash  
Each niche and splash  
Soapy water over body  
So I'm crisp and Clean.  
Immerse me in wholesome  
Bathroom place

Freshly bathed  
Made pure and fit for God.  
Dress.  
Immaculate  
White cotton and delicate silk  
Soft against skin.  
Brush  
Gleaming hair in braid and  
Go get laid.

*David Blaber*

## **Autobiography**

Friends writing theirs urge  
me to start on my memoirs,  
for posterity,  
forgetting I am childless  
and still bound to discretions.

At most I might state  
my name and number, or one  
among the many  
now defining me, choosing  
with due care the most opaque,

like that of a dead  
account, or a membership  
lapsed, or a standing  
order to restore worn stones  
in some foreign diocese.

*Carys Bray*

### **My Drawer of Dreams**

I sometimes open up my drawer of dreams  
and as I sift through fragments resting there  
a quantity of rising, argent streams  
diaphanously sparkle in the air.  
These are the wishes I have left behind,  
all half formed thoughts and partly furnished plans,  
then underneath frivolity I find  
some deeply coloured gems which heat my hands.  
These dreams were struck by fearsome tides and smoothed  
refined through furnace-hot experience.  
Were shaped and altered, reassessed, improved  
precisely moulded to magnificence.  
You are the brightest gem within my drawer  
the truest dream inside my secret store.

*Phil Craddock*

## **Fiona**

Out of a deep green Kodachrome lawn  
a pretty little face, surprised by the camera  
attempts a smile, achieves a frown  
and, after the fleetest touch to the hair  
shyly moves off frame.

Later, the whole girl, dainty in boots  
kicks a ball then gamely tries  
to tackle it back off two boys, brothers.  
A girl? Not likely! Better to bury  
all trace of sibling rivalry.

Images trapped for twenty-five years  
on 8mm, then mastered to tape  
but left unplayed for fifteen more.  
I remember a reciprocated trip we took  
to her house. Her mother and ours

were old school friends and regularly wrote.  
Greeting us, Auntie Margaret chuckled:  
"Fiona built that wall of dominoes  
right 'round Grandpa's chair, and when  
the door bell rang she demolished it!"

I stared. A thin, bare sapling stared back.  
In one correspondence, our mothers shared  
a secret wish that perhaps one day  
Fiona would become the perfect match  
for either John or Philip.

On a forty-inch LCD TV screen  
through grain and grime of cine film  
and quivering veil of video transfer  
now fixed fast to DVD  
I gaze at my Neverland

*Sally James*

### **Music from the stars**

In my mind, a melody, I heard it  
when a star fell in my bedroom  
I picked it up and polished it  
put it away for that frosty day  
when ice pings on starched glass  
and snow twirls on a cold wind.

I threw it the air, that sharp snatch  
of a raw note, I let it bounce off  
an old oak, slither along a white pond  
no one knew it was there  
it was the glisten of a berry  
that brought it to life  
the stab of a thorn  
that made a hole in the air  
let music flow straight to the heart  
beat in time like an old drum  
play our own familiar tune.

It can come from swaying grass  
blossom on a spring day  
leaves are only crochets on trees  
I have heard them sing  
in the fall they become a requiem  
a melody that lingers in the earth  
watch the cold branches  
search for lost keys with forked fingers  
catch stars in the hallowed night.

*Paul Kennedy*

### **My Father's Son**

Today all my dreams are ended  
and they lay among the waste,  
like a father's empty bottles  
and the child he could not face.

Today lying knees are bended  
empty tears without a case,  
like this plaintiff's empty office  
what wrong does death erase?

Today both our ways are wended  
to this shunned and final place,  
to a drunkard's longed for solace  
and a bastard's search for grace.

At five I looked into his mirror, and took his rusty razor,  
to pale downy cheeks, and I wore his proud army blazer,  
and his golden whiskey reeks as he reigned his reign of terror,  
then disappeared for weeks 'til he came again like labour pains descending,  
to punish her for Eve. Now I take the blade once more, but cannot  
take my leave. With another day impending, I look into this  
mirror and avert his heartless eyes - forgive us  
all dear mothers - for we are our father's boys.

But she said Jesus was ascended  
blood and tears upon His face,  
at His feet there prayed a mother  
for His Godforsaken race.

Today her knees were bended  
wasted years upon her face,  
for He broke another promise  
still we could not take her place.

Today our screams were ended  
yet she lay among the waste,  
with my father's broken bottles  
and the love he could not face.

*Hilary Mellon*

### **The Three Graces**

It was during my time of darkness  
that I stood in your positions -  
naked and without drapery

The artist arranged me carefully  
grounded me in the 21st century  
with props of some significance -

a glass of blood red wine  
a firm unblemished apple  
and a scarf of rainbow silk

The latter of these he knotted at my throat  
And then he shot me digitally -  
altered me - mounted me - framed me

nailed me to the wall and waited  
Knowing that sooner or later  
I would make a complete exhibition of myself

*Jim Lindop*

## **Waiting For Ghosts**

Windburn flecks the hedge, like old blood through a bandage;  
the grass has dived into the earth, sloughed off its skin;  
etiolated, newer shoots bow like mourners;  
buzzards plunge into the sun; lizards crack the stone;  
our lengthened cat dreams in her cradle of shade;  
the air tangs like bad wine or red-hot rusting steel,  
from the road's edge blooms the oily stink of hot spall.  
The mossed church wall is chanting beneath my fingers  
old Latin prayers for rain, so our crops may prosper,  
so our thirsty shoots may tauten like newly forged spears,  
so the honeysuckle may breathe satiety  
and the buzzards bathe in a gymnasium of clouds.

What to do in such a heat, but invoke our ghosts?  
We sit unstirring, swathed in the bind of the sun  
under the wisteria-crept awning and talk:  
how ghosts may be conjured from their sad miasma:  
- through music? Or just a fly-whisk swished at shadows?  
The music works. Think of a song. A name connects.  
*"O Roma non fai la stupida stasera, "*  
say, or *"Bewitched, bothered and bewildered. "*  
We swirl our Gigondas; we muse upon our ghosts.  
As the sun manoeuvres and blazons the old church  
and evensong straddles the boughs of the stressed trees,  
shadows as welcome as unbidden smiles edge nearer.

*Peter Godfrey*

## **Visiting Laugharne Boat House**

There is a not quite nothing silence  
Where the tired tender sunshine clips  
Foam heads, silver edging to the lap tongue  
Bonny bay waves of Afon Taf, an armpit shelter  
Where the arms of Autumn begin to hug away  
Summertime from Dylan's bent bay  
And the skelter seascape to the flat falloff distance.  
There is a not quite nothing silence  
It is culled by the calling haunting curlew  
Sad voicing over the plodgy pie muds,  
The gull mewed muds for daily customs search  
Where the little waves caress away the trails  
Of the waiting statue heron in motionless ambush.  
It is still the same as the poet wrote for his birthday.  
Telling of those steeple stemmed silhouetted sentinels  
Against the liquid light bathing Towy Bay.  
We have stepped along amongst the invisible footfalls  
So clearly defined by reputation of the great Thomas.  
We have peered holding up saluting hands to brows,  
Looking through the dusty windeye to this place  
Of rich writing; the hermit hut home of the mid-husband  
Birthing Milk Wood's dallying denizens disturbing  
The bible-black hearted not quite respectables  
Disturbed by sin and vestal visions of Polly Garter  
Enjoying the conjunctions of the horizontal dual delights  
With gentlemen inhabitants in a Play for Voices.  
We listened once, you and I, to that Welsh expose  
In the long ago before the boathouse went into aspic  
Museumed so that we may all remember him.

His very room where the thirties wireless cabinet  
Talks poems at visitors and a tortoiseshell cat  
Slumbering in her post-prandial window warmth,  
Knows nothing of the piled old papers and cares less.  
A Welsh cream tea, al fresco, a postcard and descent  
To amble the sun bleached shore of stranded flotsams.  
Look back at the white walled not any more bathhouse  
Listen quiet to the curlew breaking the solid silence.  
The heron stands, still passing away unclocked time  
This a memory place. It is both beautiful and sorrow-sad  
Behind the dark trees high hanging above and our  
Imaginations magiced and bespelled Under Milk Wood

*Helen Harvey*

**A Piece of Me**

You come for dinner  
and I hand you my heart  
on a plate.

It wasn't my intention  
to be so consumed,  
but your face as you listened  
melted me;  
your eyes, your arms,  
the fire in your belly  
stirred me, seared me.

Now there you sit, with my heart  
uncomfortably close to your knife and fork,  
exposed,  
an easy target for a prick,  
a stabbing,  
a careless tongue.

But you know though I have been battered  
and I am tender,  
I am not raw.  
I will burn

so with gentle fingers you lift me  
whole and uncut, to your lips.  
I am so nervous

my heart is in your mouth.<sup>40</sup>

*Colin Rennie*

**Bleeding**

It was well past  
The darkest hour of the day  
When her eyes razed me  
and I collapsed in a humble heap  
My head split open  
Thoughts spilled out on the pavement  
an old man  
with a walking stick  
looked down,  
shook his head  
and stepped round

*Mariana Zavati*

### **At Daybreak**

let us dance at daybreak  
when fish spear the river  
along sudden driftwood

let us dance at daybreak  
when fresh tears escape  
from the gum tree

let us dance at daybreak  
when light begins to row in its canoe  
and shadows hop on the ochre soil

let us dance at daybreak  
when the old woman counts shells  
and shadows slither to the water hole

*Leslie Scrase*

## **Reading and Writing**

"You read poetry?" people ask  
as they look upon the books upon my shelves  
and then because I do they think me strange.

Why do I read page after page of ancient verse  
of little relevance today  
or works incomprehensible from modern pens

Sometimes I read repeatedly  
and come no nearer to the author's thought  
than when I first began - yet still read on.

Perhaps I read because I like to write  
and he who wants to write  
must learn to read.

Perhaps it is that sometimes,  
caught in the magic nutshell of a poet's thought  
there is the inspiration all men seek.

And certainly it is because  
I love the melody of words -  
the music of the language that is ours.

*Di de Woolfson*

### **Early Onset**

Daily. The wrong kind of snow  
falls inside your head  
shrouding the landscape  
of your mind numbing  
wit and wisdom alike.

Frosted. Your mind's eye  
waters at the cruelty  
of this early onset  
winter stripped bare  
of promising spring.

Exposed. You huddle  
into the lee of silence  
bequeathing a blizzard  
of good intentions  
in your wake.

Absent. We talk around  
your waning dignity  
generating by default  
a centrifugal void  
hungry for despair.

Patient. Three times daily  
doses of bereavement  
swallowed whole  
with a mouthful of  
tepid tap water.

Carer. Easier said than  
harnessed to the living  
yoke taking the strain  
against the slow  
descending trek..

Lost. I search you out  
hunting with hounds  
though your footprints have  
no distinction not even  
your best foot can be tracked.

Fight. Coming unexpected  
on the wolves of fear disguised  
as sheep we take up sticks of  
song and laughter, drive them  
howling out of mind.

*Denis Ahern*

## **Elegy**

The ceiling was browned by tobacco smoke,  
The windows dull. Their meagre light  
Framed the few drinkers as they spoke,  
Only gossip, spiritless, trite.  
Among them my father, shoulders still broad,  
Smile still quick, engaging. Heavy years  
Of work, drink, illness hardly showed.  
A handshake for his son - no sign of tears.  
His generation, of course never would.  
Two pints ordered, in the mirror behind the bar  
I saw he was taller than me where we stood  
Patiently, father and son, undemonstrative so far.

And after years of little contact, so it stayed,  
This meeting. No back-slapping joys,  
Just comfort, no feelings on parade,  
Just that little throat-clearing noise  
Before he spoke. He smiled and said,  
"Our first drink together." He raised  
His glass and I mine, the beer's head  
A layer of cream. We talked, thought and gazed,  
Mostly the latter two, that's how drinkers are;  
Unmindful of how time, and lives, go fast.  
Our first drink together in that quiet bar,  
Our first, and - little we knew - our last.

*Mary J Baxter*

### **Ball Games**

I was a clumsy child  
Others could throw and catch  
My throws were wide and wild  
And my hands were no match  
For a high or low flying ball.  
When leader chose a team  
I was the last they would call  
As I stood, lost in a dream,  
For I was a clumsy child.

I thought I will show them one day  
My hands would never miss  
Then they would all want to play  
And it would be perfect bliss.  
Yet I stayed in that world of my own  
Deep in a book that enthralled  
My thoughts of joining in flow n  
And I did not hear when they called  
For I was a clumsy child.

*Trace Ross*

## **Uzi**

Uzi rattle,  
Uzi rattle,  
Rattle like the bones of the dead,  
Time shall tell,  
And wend her way,  
To say,  
Who was right,  
And who was wrong,  
And who could have done more,  
And who could have done less.

Uzi rattle,  
Uzi rattle,  
Rattle like the bones of the dead,  
Bones of the innocent,  
In Bethlehem,  
In Jerusalem,  
Killed in indignity.

Uzi rattle,  
Uzi rattle,  
Rattle like the bones of the dead,  
wasted talents,  
Humbling of the proud,  
Terror in the towns,  
Of the Holy Land,  
Shall not go amiss,  
Or unheard,  
How long will it take for you to see?  
Uzi.

*Note: an Uzi is an Israeli submachine gun  
named after Uziel Gal, the Israeli army  
officer who designed it.*

*Alice Harrison*

### **Reality If**

If you can lose your head when all about you  
Are keeping theirs and looking scared of you;  
If you can eff and blind and scream and shout you  
May find you're the one the public wants to view.  
If you can hug someone and then keep talking  
Behind their backs about what you perceive  
As their falseness and then don't stop squawking  
About being your "true self" you believe;

If you can eat revolting creepy-crawlies  
While others hold their noses in disgust;  
If you can tell someone that all-in-all she's  
Looking good even though her make-up's mussed;  
If you can swing from trees or wade through mud  
Or light fires while wearing a bikini  
Or lounge about and refuse to peel a spud  
Knowing that the viewers love a meanie;

If you can dance on ice or belt out a song  
And say *I want this more than anything*  
Or argue that you're right when you are wrong;  
If you can decorate your rooms with bling  
Or swap your job or spouse or learn to cook;  
If you can do things that you didn't oughter  
You'll be able to change your life, your look  
And - which is more - you'll be a Star, my daughter!

*Barrie Williams*

### **The Chalice**

My birth erstwhile was Ephraim,  
My home ancient Arimathie.  
From youthful years I wandered far,  
Even to world's wide boundary  
Trading in tin born of earth's bowels  
On coasts of the Casserides.  
And there, when a new bearded boy  
I took my kinsman, born a King  
And crafted as a carpenter.  
There on the awe-girt Isle of Avalon  
The old, grave High Priest of the Oak  
Made holy hospitality,  
For present parting gave a cup,  
A goblet wrought of finest gold  
Its shape fine fluted manifold,  
Two handled - brought, they say, from Troy.  
This in the sunlight shone so bright  
That eyes could scarce endure to see.  
He closed it in an oaken case -  
'This to your nephew now I yield,  
The King who is to come - 'tis His  
By antique laws of ancestry'.

Twice seven Suns circled o'erhead -  
He traversed towns of Palestine  
Crying 'The Kingdom is at hand'  
He healed the halt, gave sight to blind,  
Calmed conscience, fed the poor with bread.  
Dozen disciples - dodgy lot -  
Hied to my home one Pascal tide  
In Salem city, ample house.  
There in a first floor room they met,  
At supper wrought some sacred rite  
Of bread made flesh, of wine made blood,  
Using the golden cup, the Grail.  
I did not join them then, but John,  
His bosom friend, told all the truth.  
They got them to Gethsemane,  
But leaving, He, the youthful Lord,  
Gave to my hands the Holy Grail.  
'My cup of suffering is complete.  
Take now this treasure. In God's time  
Be guardian bearer far from hence,  
And there in hallowed Avalon  
Let rest till comes the Golden Age  
When to the righteous it shall be revealed'.

*Rose Docherty*

### **This November**

I held your hand, believed our love still sweet,  
you smiled and kissed but plotted to betray.  
The ground is taken from beneath my feet  
and all I trusted mocked and thrown away.  
The rain drives hard against the glass between  
the world beyond and falling tears inside,  
no longer can I hope for might have been,  
but patch my broken life with rags of pride.  
This verse you read, this book I wrote for you,  
will tell the world the truth it cannot see,  
behind the veil of lies you told, I knew  
that only on the page could I be free.  
My voice is silent but my pen is strong,  
the ink is black to shout that you are wrong.

*Roy Rowe*

## **Night and Day**

Good night!

Good night!

Alarmingly more lights go on.

The woofers hit the heights, though

Nothing like Cole Porter's song.

A car door slams; and then another.

A toot! and then a second, for his mother.

A front door bangs.

Then all is dead.

Awake! The long zed slowly straightens out,

Then coils around me like a snake,

Her warm breath on my nape.

The nightingale left earlier.

Competition proved too strong, I guess

The tawny hooter spreads its span,

Floats and turns and swoops

With deadly haste on to a mouse.

The badger, snout a twitch, snuffles out

To quest for worms beneath the lawn:

These silent searchers celebrate till dawn.

Human nightjars have small regard

For we early morning risers.

Who grope, like moles, for kitchen switches

Afraid to put the kettle on in case it breaks

The peace. Resisting the urge to tune in to

Test match from down under.

Waiting for the milkman's clink.

*R. A. Nash*

### **Crimson Tied**

The feathers lay twitching and discarded in the milky morning light,  
Crimson and vermillion they float languidly across the pale, wooden floor,  
Like fragile, intricate veins that had begun to bleed in the night,  
They spread and flutter caught in the soft draught from the door.

Hours before, they were draped casually across one creamy shoulder,  
Dropping to float dreamily around the sheath of ruby material,  
But that was last night and now the world has grown colder,  
Dress and feathers lay drowsily asleep in a heap in the hall.

Then urgently they are crushed under black, patent shoes,  
Shoes that squash them like red feather fossils into the grain,  
Shoes, whose owner flees from a scene he didn't choose,  
A scene of revelry turned foul and beauty slain.

Now, the feathers begin to unfold like baby fingers,  
Before shivering across the hall from the slamming of the door,  
Shuddering to rest against the bedroom in a triumphant, feathery linger,  
Then gently drowning in the red treacle seeping lazily across the floor.

*Anthony Stainer*

### **Cultivated Roundabout**

These daffodils,  
    So forceful - pushing - pushing,  
like marathon runners, bunched,  
    pounding up and out -  
making a rout of it, flaring  
    like yellow lanterns  
lighting up the way, then a  
    sudden frost puts them out  
of it, punishing them for going  
    over the top, peaking too early?  
Frost's bullets wipe-them  
    into instant leafmould,  
(shouldn't have been so bold, so  
    soon). The roundabout garden  
returns to black winter and  
    images of the Somme, Le Cateau,  
Peronne come into mind.  
    Roundabout garden needs  
new flowers - pastels, not hurtful  
    reds which - en masse - look  
like buckets of blood.

*Peter Bullen*

## **Rainbow End**

The summer storm excited him. He had to get outside;  
to breathe the rain-rinsed air, walk wet grass under foot  
and face the sun's hot stare.

He slipped easily out of bed. He was feeling fine.  
Ignored by other patients,  
he passed the nurses' station unobserved.  
Down the stairs and past the crowded coffee bar  
there were no challenging looks not even by the people  
feeding fivers into parking fee machines beside the  
exit doors.

Outside he was exultant. He had been right to come.  
After the fetid fug inside, the fresh air stung his nose  
with its after-rain smell of wet pewter. In the heat,  
the damp paving stones felt warm under his bare feet  
while wet walls and asphalt road steamed softly in  
the sun.

He turned the corner of the hospital wing  
to walk on the rain-laced grass.  
What he saw stopped him: made him gasp.  
He had come upon the exact spot where a rainbow,  
arching down,  
was shimmering its shafts of colours in patterns on the ground.  
He had reached it: the unreachable.  
He had reached the rainbow's end.

Oblivious of his own nakedness, he skipped into its rays  
revelling in the chameleon changes to his rice-white skin:  
red, blue, yellow, violet, indigo, orange, green.

He laughed with joy.

He looked aloft,

along the tinted crescent of delight.

He was radiant in its centre,

Technicolor bright.

He had to share his secret and made to move away.

But as he left the light he stepped into darkness:

and the darkness comprehended him,

...completely.

In the ward, the Filipina nurse crossed herself

and gently pulled the sheet over the old man's

silver head.



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