

Poetry

A personal anthology

Selected by

Howard Brayton

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Introduction

The very many anthologies of poetry which I have read, invariably describe how and why the poems were selected, and also how they had been collated and ordered. My collection appears roughly in the order in which I remember first encountering them, or merely as I remembered them later, as I found them, or indeed as I *find* them. So, no other introduction is necessary. Just to add, that nursery rhymes, songs, hymns, anthems, psalms, and prayers, have played a big part in my life; they are all poems, and many are worthy of inclusion. But this is a selection, not a definitive list of my favourites.

My personal attempts at writing poetry have, to date, been somewhat meagre. However, they are included here; apart from *Cautionary Rhymes and Oxford Village Limericks*, which are published by Kindle, and *A Hymn of Intercession* which can be found at www.howardbayton.co.uk / Publications.

Howard Brayton

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Summoned by Bells John Betjeman 1906-1984

John Betjeman was Poet Laureate from 1972 until his death. For me he is a quintessential Englishman, with a wonderfully distinctive slow melodic voice. He loved the countryside and architecture. He was steeped in the Anglican tradition and waxed lyrical about churches. **Summoned by Bells** is his blank verse autobiography of his early life, which resonates with mine; bells at school, bells at college, bells at church. That's why it appears here, first.

Find his 1976 BBC film version on-line. Here is just a short extract from his school days, Chapter V11 at Marlborough school; very evocative.

Doom! Shivering doom! Inexorable bells
To early school, to chapel, school again;
Compulsory constipation, hurried meals
Bulked out with Whipped Cream Walnuts from the town.
At first there was the dread of breaking rules –
“Betjeman, you know that ne boys mustn't show
Their hair below the peak of college caps.”
Stand still and have your face slapped.” “Sorry Jones.”
The dread of beatings. Dread of being late!
And greatest dread of all, the dread of games!

When I was about four years old, I was taken to the pantomime in Huddersfield or Halifax. It was wartime and rationing was fierce, but I knew what a banana was; it was hard, short and brown – dried. I still remember the chorus of a song which was sung.

When Can I Have a Banana Again?

When can I have a banana again?

 tell me mother do.

When can I have a banana again

 like I used to do?

I'd have 'em for breakfast,

I'd have 'em for lunch,

I'd have 'em single,

Or all in a bunch.

When can I have a banana again?

Tell me mother do.

No anthology of poetry would be complete without the inclusion of **Edward Lear** (1812-1888). Two of his most endearing and enduring poems, which I remember from childhood, are here:

The Owl and the Pussycat

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

Pussy said to the Owl, "You elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?"
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-Tree grows
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?" Said the Piggy, "I will."
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

The Dong with the Luminous Nose

When awful darkness and silence reign
Over the great Gromboolian plain,
Through the long, long wintry nights;--
When the angry breakers roar
As they beat on the rocky shore;--
When Storm-clouds brood on the towering heights
Of the Hills of the Chunkly Bore:--

Then, through the vast and gloomy dark,
There moves what seems a fiery spark,
A lonely spark with silvery rays
Piercing the coal-black night,
A Meteor strange and bright:
Hither and thither the vision strays,
A single lurid light.

Slowly it wanders, pauses, creeps,
Anon it sparkles, flashes and leaps;
And ever as onward it gleaming goes
A light on the Bong-tree stems it throws.
And those who watch at that midnight hour
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as the wild light passes along,
'The Dong! the Dong!
'The wandering Dong through the forest goes!
'The Dong! the Dong!
'The Dong with a luminous Nose!'

Long years ago
The Dong was happy and gay,
Till he fell in love with a Jumbly Girl
Who came to those shores one day,
For the Jumblies came in a sieve, they did,
Landing at eve near the Zemmery Fidd
Where the Oblong Oysters grow,
And the rocks are smooth and grey.
And all the woods and the valleys rang
With the Chorus they daily and nightly sang,
'Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue
And they went to sea in a sieve.'

Happily, happily passed those days!
While the cheerful Jumblies staid;
They danced in circlets all night long,
To the plaintive pipe of the lively Dong,
In moonlight, shine, or shade.
For day and night he was always there
By the side of the Jumbly Girl so fair,
With her sky-blue hands, and her sea-green hair.

Till the morning came of that hateful day
When the Jumblies sailed in their sieve away,
And the Dong was left on the cruel shore
Gazing, gazing for evermore,
Ever keeping his weary eyes on
That pea-green sail on the far horizon,
Singing the Jumbly Chorus still
As he sat all day on the grassy hill,
*'Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue
And they went to sea in a sieve.'*

But when the sun was low in the West,
The Dong arose and said;
'What little sense I once possessed
'Has quite gone out of my head!'
And since that day he wanders still
By lake or forest, marsh and hill,
Singing, *'O somewhere, in valley or plain
'Might I find my Jumbly Girl again!
'For ever I'll seek by lake and shore
'Till I find my Jumbly Girl once more!'*

Playing a pipe with silvery squeaks,
Since then his Jumbly Girl he seeks,
And because by night he could not see,
He gathered the bark of the Twangum Tree
On the flowery plain that grows.
And he wove him a wondrous Nose,--
A Nose as strange as a Nose could be!
Of vast proportions and painted red,
And tied with cords to the back of his head.
In a hollow rounded space it ended
With a luminous Lamp within suspended,
All fenced about
With a bandage stout
To prevent the wind from blowing it out;--
And with holes all round to send the light,
In gleaming rays on the dismal night.

And now each night, and all night long,
Over those plains still roams the Dong;
And above the wall of the Chimp and Snipe
You may hear the squeak of his plaintive pipe
While ever he seeks, but seeks in vain
To meet with his Jumbly Girl again;
Lonely and wild, all night he goes,
The Dong with a luminous Nose!
And all who watch at the midnight hour,
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as they trace the Meteor bright,
Moving along through the dreary night
*'This is the hour when forth he goes,
'The Dong with a luminous Nose!
'Yonder--over the plain he goes,
'He goes!
'He goes;
'The Dong with a luminous Nose!'*

The Lady of Shalott Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 -1892)

I first came across this at secondary school. At the time I managed to memorise just the first two verses. It's a beautiful allegorical love story of the conflict between art and life.

Part I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
 To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
 Flowing down to Camelot.
Four grey walls, and four grey towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
 The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
 Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
 The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
 Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers "'Tis the fairy
 Lady of Shalott."

Part II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
 To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
 The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
 Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
 Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
 Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
 The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights,
 And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed;
"I am half sick of shadows," said
 The Lady of Shalott.

Part III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
 She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
 The Lady of Shalott.

Part IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
 Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
 The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse -
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance -
With a glassy countenance
 Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right -
The leaves upon her falling light -
Thro' the noises of the night
 She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song.
 The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
 Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died
 The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
 Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame.
And round the prow they read her name,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
 All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace.
 The Lady of Shalott."

Although I'm a European and British, I am quintessentially English. So the following which I first heard as a child, remains so evocative.

Home Thought from Abroad Robert Browning (1812-1889)

O, to be in England
Now that April 's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossom'd pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That 's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

I must have been about 13 or so when I first hear this monologue We were staying in Whitby and my father's friend had a record of it with Stanley Holloway reciting. I now have I on my iPod. Find it on YouTunes.

The Lion and Albert Marriott Edgar (1880-1951)

There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool,
That's noted for fresh air and fun,
And Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom
Went there with young Albert, their son.

A grand little lad was young Albert
All dressed in his best; quite a swell
With a stick with an 'orse's 'ead 'andle
The finest that Woolworth's could sell.

They didn't think much to th
The waves, they were fiddlin' and small
There was no wrecks and nobody drown'd
Fact, nothing to laugh at, at all.

So, seeking for further amusement
They paid and went into the zoo
Where they'd lions and tigers and camels
And old ale and sandwiches too.

There were one great big lion called Wallace
His nose were all covered with scars
He lay in a somnolent posture
With the side of his face on the bars.

Now Albert had heard about lions
How they was ferocious and wild
To see Wallace lying so peaceful
Well, it didn't seem right to the child.

So straight 'way the brave little feller
Not showing a morsel of fear
Took his stick with its 'orse's 'ead 'andle
And shoved it in Wallace's ear.

You could see the lion didn't like it
For giving a kind of a roll
He pulled Albert inside the cage with 'im
And swallowed the little lad 'ole

Then Pa, who had seen the occurrence
And didn't know what to do next
Said 'Mother! Yon lions 'et Albert'
And Mother said 'Well, I am vexed!'

Then Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom
Quite rightly, when all's said and done
Complained to the Animal Keeper
That the lion had eaten their son.

The keeper was quite nice about it
He said, 'What a nasty mishap
Are you sure it's your boy he's eaten?'
Pa said, 'Am I sure? There's his cap!'

The manager had to be sent for
He came and he said 'What's to do?'
Pa said 'Yon lion's 'et Albert
And 'im in his Sunday clothes, too.'

Then Mother said, 'Right's right, young feller
I think it's a shame and a sin
For a lion to go and eat Albert
And after we've paid to come in.'

The manager wanted no trouble
He took out his purse right away
Saying, 'How much to settle the matter?'
And Pa said, 'What do you usually pay?'

But Mother had turned a bit awkward
When she thought where her Albert had gone
She said, 'No! someone's got to be summonsed!'
So that was decided upon.

Then off they went to the Police Station
In front of the Magistrate chap
They told 'im what happened to Albert
And proved it by showing his cap.

The Magistrate gave his opinion
That no one was really to blame
And he said that he hoped the Ramsbottoms
Would have further sons to their name.

At that Mother got proper blazing
'And thank you, sir, kindly,' said she
'What waste all our lives raising children
To feed ruddy lions? Not me!'

I think it was in 1957, my father was hosting a two-week stay at Mamhead Park, a Methodist holiday home. On the Friday of each week there was an impromptu concert given by the guests. On the first Friday a man stood up and sang so badly I laughed. My father was less than pleased and when I said I could do better, he took me to a local music shop and bought me two songs, Sea Fever and Glorious Devon. These became very special for me, helping me a couple of years later, to a singing scholarship to the Birmingham School of Music.

Sea Fever John Masefield (1878-1967) Poet Lauriat 1930-1967
Music: John Ireland (1879-1962)

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

Glorious Devon Harold Boulton (1859-1935)
Music: Edward German (1862-1936)

Coombe and Tor, green meadow and lane,
Birds on the waving bough.
Beetling cliffs by the surging main,
Rich red loam for the plough.
Devon's the fount of the bravest blood
That braces England's breed,
Her maidens fair as the apple bud,
And her men are men indeed.

When Adam and Eve were dispossess'd
Of the Garden hard by Heaven,
They planted another one down in the West,
'Twas Devon, 'twas Devon, glorious Devon.

Spirits to old-world heroes wake,
By river and cove and hoe;
Grenville, Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake
And a thousand more we know.
To every hand the wide world o'er
Some slips of the old stock roam,
Loyal friends in peace, dread foes in war
With hearts still true to home.

Old England's counties by the sea
From east to west are seven;
But the gem of that fair galaxy
Is Devon, is Devon, glorious Devon.

Dorset, Somerset, Cornwall, Wales,
May envy the likes of we;
For the flower of the West, the first, the best,
The pick of the bunch us be;
Squab pie, junket and cider brew,
Richest cream of the cow'
What 'ud Old England without 'em do?
And where 'ud 'un be to now?

As crumpy as a lump of lead
Be a loaf without good leaven,
And the yeast Mother England do use for her bread
Be Devon, be Devon, glorious Devon.

The first songs my singing teacher introduced me to, was *Songs of Travel* from which I have selected two songs.

The Vagabond Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)
Music: R Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above,
And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river –
There's the life for a man like me,
There's the life for ever.

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.
Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

Or let autumn fall on me
Where afield I linger,
Silencing the bird on tree,
Biting the blue finger.
White as meal the frosty field –
Warm the fireside haven –
Not to autumn will I yield,
Not to winter even!

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.
Wealth I ask not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I ask, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

Bright is the Ring of Words Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)
Music: R Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them,
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them,
Still they are carolled and said—
On wings they are carried—
After the singer is dead
And the maker buried.

Low as the singer lies
In the field of heather,
Songs of his fashion bring
The swains together.
And when the west is red
With the sunset embers,
The lover lingers and sings
And the maid remembers.

Other songs with great words, became part of my solo repertoire around the same time.

I sang the bass solos in Vaughan-Williams 'Hodie' at Christmas 1963 at college, and in Chichester Cathedral.

This is one of the bass solos.

The Oxen Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)
Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

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

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

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

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

George Herbert was highly gifted, cultured, privileged, an academic and a CoE clergyman ... he was a mystic. Many of his poems have been set to music by composers including Finzi and Vaughan-Williams; many will be recognised as hymns. From *Five Mysical Songs*, written for baritone and choir;

Easter George Herbert (1593-1633)
Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
 Without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise
 With him mayst rise:
That, as his death calcined¹ thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part
 With all thy art.
The crosse taught all wood to resound his name,
 Who bore the same.
His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key
Is best to celebrate this most high day.

Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song
 Pleasant and long:
Or, since all musick is but three parts² vied
 And multiplied,
O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,
And make up our defects with his sweet art.

I Got Me Flowers George Herbert (1593-1633)
Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

I got me flowers to straw thy way;
I got me boughs off many a tree:
But thou wast up by break of day,
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The Sunne arising in the East,
Though he give light, & th' East perfume;
If they should offer to contest

With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?
We count three hundred, but we misse:
There is but one, and that one ever.

Love Bade Me Welcome George Herbert (1593-1633)

Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

The Call George Herbert (1593-1633)

Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

Antiphon George Herbert (1593-1633)
Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!

The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly:
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!

The church with Psalms must shout.
No door can keep them out:
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!

In Terra Pax Robert Bridges (1844-1930)
Music: Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

A frosty Christmas eve
When the stars were shining
Fared I forth alone,
Where westward falls the hill
And from many a village
In the water'd valley,
Distant music reached me
Peals of bells [aringing]¹
The constellated sounds,
Ran sprinkling on earth's floor
As the dark vault above,

With stars was spangled o'er.

Then sped my thoughts to keep,
That first Christmas of all
When the shepherds watching
By their folds ere the dawn
Heard music in the fields
And marveling could not tell
Whether it were angels
Or the bright stars singing.

Now blessed be the tow'rs,
That crown England so fair,
That stand up strong in prayer,
Unto God for our souls:
Blessed be their founders,
[(said I) an']² our country folk
Who are ringing for Christ
In the belfries to-night
With arms lifted to clutch
The rattling ropes that race
Into the dark above
And the mad romping din.

But to me heard afar
It was [starry]³ music.
Angels' song, comforting
As the comfort of Christ
When He spake tenderly,
To His sorrowful flock:
The old words came to me,
By the riches of time
Mellow'd and transfigured,
As I stood on the hill
Heark'ning in the aspect
Of th' eternal silence.

Dies Natalis Thomas Traherne (1636-1674)
Music: Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

This is a cantata on the birth of Christ written in five sections. Here are the final three.

The Rapture

Sweet Infancy!
O heavenly fire! O sacred Light!
How fair and bright!
How great am I
Whom the whole world doth magnify!

O heavenly Joy!
O great and sacred brightness
Which I possess!
So great a joy
Who did into my arms convey?

From God above
Being sent, the gift doth me inflame,
To praise his name.
The stars do move,
The sun doth shine, to show his love.

O how divine
Am I! To all this sacred wealth
This life and health
Who raised? Who mine
Did make the same? What hand divine!

Wonder

How like an angel I came down!
How bright are all things a here!
When first among his works I did appear
O how their glory did me crown!
The world resembled his eternity
In which my soul did walk;
And everything that I did see
Did with me talk.

The skies in their magnificence
The lovely, lively air,
O how divine, how soft, how sweet, how fair!
The stars did entertain my sense;
And all the works of God so bright and pure,
So rich and great, did seem,
As if they ever must endure
In my esteem.

A native health and innocence
Within my bones did grow,
And while my God did all his glories show,
I felt a vigour in my sense
That was all spirit: within I did flow
With seas of life, like wine:
I nothing but the world did know
But 't'was Divine.

Salutation

These little limbs, these eyes and hands which I here find,
This panting heart wherewith my life begins;
Where have ye been? Behind what curtain were ye from me hid so long?
Where was, in what abyss, my new made tongue?

When silent I so many thousand thousand years
Beneath the dust did in a chaos lie, how could I smiles, or tears,
Or lips, or hands, or eyes, or ears perceive?
Welcome, ye treasures which I now receive.

From dust from I rise and out of nothing now awake,
These brighter regions which salute my eyes,
A gift from God I take, the earth, the seas, the light, the lofty skies,
The sun and stars are mine: if these I prize.

A stranger here, strange things doth meet, strange glory see,
Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear,
Strange, all, and new to me: But that they mine should be who nothing was,
That strangest is of all; yet brought to pass.

Where 'er You Walk Alexander Pope (1688-1744)
Music: G F Handel (1685-1759)

Where 'er you walk
Cool gales shall fan the glade
Trees where you sit
shall crowd into a shade
Trees where you sit
shall crowd into a shade

Where 'er you tread
the blushing flowers shall rise
and all things flourish
and all things flourish
Where'er you turn your eyes

Where 'er you walk
Cool gales shall fan the glade
Trees where you sit
shall crowd into a shade
Trees where you sit
shall crowd into a shade.

Edward Elgar wrote **Sea Pictures** in 1894. It is a setting of the five poems below, by various authors, and associated most closely with the mezzo soprano Janet Baker (1933-) Visit YouTube

I. Sea Slumber Song Roden Noel (1834-1894)
Music: Edward Elgar (1957-1934)

Sea-birds are asleep,
The world forgets to weep,
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song
On the shadowy sand
Of this elfin land;

“I, the Mother mild,
Hush thee, oh my child,
Forget the voices wild!
Hush thee, oh my child,

Hush thee.

Isles in elfin light
Dream, the rocks and caves,
Lulled by whispering waves,
Veil their marbles
Veil their marbles bright.
Foam glimmers faintly
faintly white
Upon the shelly sand
Of this elfin land;

Sea-sound, like violins,
To slumber woos and wins,
I murmur my soft slumber-song, my slumber song
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.

Ocean's shadowy might
Breathes good night,
Good night...
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.
Good night... Good night... Good night... Good night... Good night... Good night.

II. In Haven (Capri) Caroline Alice Elgar (1848-1920) wife of composer
Music: Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Closely let me hold thy hand,
Storms are sweeping sea and land;
Love alone will stand.

Closely cling, for waves beat fast,
Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast;
Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say:
Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;
Love alone will stay.

III. Sabbath Morning at Sea Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)
Music: Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

The ship went on with solemn face;
To meet the darkness on the deep,

The solemn ship went onward.
I bowed down weary in the place;
for parting tears and present sleep
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!
The waters around me, turbulent,
The skies, impassive o'er me,
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
As glorified by even the intent
Of holding the day glory!

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day.
The sea sings round me while ye roll afar
The hymn, unaltered,
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
And bless me deeper in your soul
Because your voice has faltered.

And though this sabbath comes to me
Without the stolèd minister,
And chanting congregation,
God's Spirit shall give comfort.
He who brooded soft on waters drear,
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,
Where keep the saints, with harp and song,
An endless endless sabbath morning,
And on that sea commixed with fire,
Oft drop their eyelids raised too long
To the full Godhead's burning.

IV Where Corals Lie Richard Garnett (1835-1906)
Music: Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

The deeps have music soft and low
When winds awake the airy spry,
It lures me, lures me on to go
And see the land where corals lie.

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep, and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
But far the rapid fancies fly
The rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the lands where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the land where corals lie.

V The Swimmer Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833-1870)
Music: Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

With short, sharp violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam,
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.

Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
The rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
Waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward,
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, gray coast and a seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men –
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie,
They have lain embedded these long years ten.

Love! Love! when we wandered here together,
Hand in hand! Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer, the shores were firmer –
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.

So, girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
And strong winds treading the swift waves under
The flying rollers with frothy feet.

One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on
The sky line, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death-stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun
That strikes through his stormy winding sheet.

O brave white horses! you gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty rains;
O brave white horses! you gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty rains;

Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, on your high-arched manes.
I would ride as never man has ridden
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden;

I would ride as never man has ridden
To gulfs foreshadow'd through strifes forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.
No love,
Where no love, no love wanes.

Art Thou Troubled? W G Rothery ()
Music: G F Handel (1685-1759)

This was originally a soprano aria from Handel's opera *Rodelinda*, which was a dismal failure. However, a year after the opera closed, W.G. Rothery wrote a poem called "Art Thou Troubled". These lyrics were later set to Handel's music and the piece has been known in its English form ever since.

Rothery also wrote The lyrics for Londonderry Air, Nymphs and Shepherds and The bells of Aberdovey, but his dates remain elusive.

Art thou troubled?
Music will calm thee,
Art thou weary?
Rest shall be thine.
Music, source of all gladness,

Heals thy sadness at her shrine,
Music ever divine,
Music calleth with voice divine.
When the welcome spring is smiling,
All the earth with flowers beguiling,
After winter's dreary rain,
Sweetest music doth attend her,
Heavenly harmonies doth lend her,
Chanting praises in her train.

Art thou troubled?
Music will calm thee,
Art thou weary?
Rest shall be thine.
Music, source of all gladness,
Heals thy sadness at her shrine,
Music ever divine,
Music calleth with voice divine.

Passing By Robert Herrick (1592-1674)
Music: Edward Purcell (1659-1695)

There is a lady sweet and kind
Was never face so pleased my mind,
I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die!

Her gestures, motions and her smile
Her wit, her voice, my heart beguile;
Beguile my heart, I know not why
And yet I love her till I die!

Cupid is winged, and doth range
Her country; so my heart doth change.
But change the earth, or change the sky
Yet will I love her till I die!

Down By the Salley Gardens W B Yates (1865-1939)

Music: Herbert Hughes (1882-1937)

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

Five Eyes Walter de la Mare (1873-1956)

Music: Cecil Armstrong Gibbs (1889-1960)

Excellent and exacting in pronunciation, enunciation and diction.

In Hans' old Mill his three black cats
Watch the bins for the thieving rats.
Whisker and claw, they crouch in the night,
Their five eyes smouldering green and bright:
Squeaks from the flour sacks, squeaks from where
The cold wind stirs on the empty stair,
Squeaking and scampering, everywhere.
Then down they pounce, now in, now out,
At whisking tail, and sniffing snout;
While lean old Hans he snores away
Till peep of light at break of day;
Then up he climbs to his creaking mill,
Out come his cats all grey with meal -
Jeckel, and Jessup, and one-eyed Jill.

The 1960s were the years of Flower Power, of the Pill, Rock and Roll, Protests.
The next three poems / songs encapsulate the time for me.

Bridge Over Troubled Waters Paul Simon (1941-)
Music: Simon & Garfunkle

When you're weary, feeling small
When tears are in your eyes, well I will dry them all
I'm on your side, when times get rough
And friends just can't be found

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

When you're down and out
When you're on the streets, yes
When evening falls so hard
Well, I will comfort you, well, I will comfort you

I'll take your part when darkness comes
And pain is all around

Just like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

Sail on silver girl, won't you sail on by?
Your time has come to shine
All your dreams are on their way, now
dreams are on their way, now

See how they shine
Like silver on the water shines
If you need a friend
I'm sailing right behind

Just like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind

We Shall Overcome Pete Seeger (1919-2014)

We shall overcome, we shall overcome,
We shall overcome someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

The Lord will see us through, The Lord will see us through,
The Lord will see us through someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

We're on to victory, We're on to victory,
We're on to victory someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We're on to victory someday.

We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We'll walk hand in hand someday.

We are not afraid, we are not afraid,
We are not afraid today;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We are not afraid today.

The truth shall make us free, the truth shall make us free,
The truth shall make us free someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
The truth shall make us free someday.

We shall live in peace, we shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall live in peace someday.

Little Boxes Malvina Reynolds (1900-1978)

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same,
There's a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

And the people in the houses
All went to the university
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same
And there's doctors and lawyers
And business executives
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school,
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same.

And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family
In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same,
There's a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

The Ballad of Bethnal Green Paddy Roberts (1910-1975)

I tell the tale of a jealous male
And a maid of sweet sixteen
She was blonde and dumb
And she lived with her mum
On the fringe of Bethnal Green
She worked all week for a rich old Greek
For her dad was on the dole
And her one delight was a Friday night
When she had a little rock and roll

Chorus

To my rit-fall-all
To my titty-fall-all
To my itty-bitty-fall-dall-day

Then one fine day in the month of May
She found her big romance
He was dark and sleek with a scar on his cheek
And a pair of drainpipe pants
And she thought, "With you, I could be so true
Through all the years to come."
For she loved the gay abandoned way
He chewed his chewing gum.

Chorus

It started well because he fell
For all her girlish charms
But he had some doubt when he caught her out
In someone else's arms
He said, "Look here, you know, my dear,
This is going a bit too far."
Then he went quite white and he sloshed her right
In the middle of her cha-cha-cha.

Chorus

He went before a man of the law
Who said, "This will not do.
I've had enough of the sort of stuff
I get from the likes of you."
And was she peeved when he received
A longish term in clink!
In a fit of pique, she married the Greek
And now she's dressed in mink.

Chorus

The Belle of Barking Creek Paddy Roberts (1910-1975)

Oh, woe is me, and alas alack!
A tear rolls down my cheek
As I tell the story of Nelly Clack,
The Belle of Barking Creek.
Her hair is yellow as the morning sun—
Except where the black shows through—
And her age has been a steady twenty-one
Since nineteen-fifty-two,
And all day long she wheels her barrow,
Selling whelks and winkles by the quart,
And she'll only stray from the straight-and-narrow
When the fleet is home in port,
For a sailor boy she can not resist,
Her mind and her knees grow weak,
And every matelot for miles has kissed
The Belle of Barking Creek.

One lovely evening, when the moon was new,
She stood by the garden gate,
While idly wondering what to do,
Poor Nelly met her fate.

A great big stoker by the name of Bert,
Had come into town that day,
And he said, "Cor blimy, what a piece of skirt!"
And carried her away.
And she darned his socks and she fried his bacon,
And she scarcely paused for breath,
And very soon she was overtaken
By 'a fate that is worse than death.'
Then he said, "I'm going, but I'll soon be back.
I'll write to you every week,"
But I know darn well that Nelly Clack
Is up the Barking Creek!

There's no more to tell, of poor little Nell, the Belle of Barking Creek.

I studied to teach Maths at college, so this poem / song by Tom Lehrer was a favourite then. Nicolai Ivanovitch Lobachevsky was indeed a Russian Mathematician (1792-1856)

Lobachevsky Tom Lehrer (b 1928)

Who made me the genius I am today,
The mathematician that others all quote,
Who's the professor that made me that way?
The greatest that ever got chalk on his coat.

One man deserves the credit,
One man deserves the blame,
And Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name.
Hi!
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobach-

I am never forget the day I first meet the great Lobachevsky
In one word he told me secret of success in mathematics:
Plagiarize!

Plagiarize,
Let no one else's work evade your eyes,
Remember why the good lord made your eyes,
So don't shade your eyes,
But plagiarize, plagiarize, plagiarize -

Only be sure always to call it please 'research'.

And ever since I meet this man
My life is not the same,
And Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name.
Hi!
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobach-

I am never forget the day I am given first original paper
to write. It was on analytic and algebraic topology of
Locally Euclidean parameterization of infinitely differentiable
Riemannian manifold.
Bozhe moi!
This I know from nothing.
but I think of great Lobachevsky and get idea - ahah!

I have a friend in Minsk,
Who has a friend in Pinsk,
Whose friend in Omsk
Has friend in Tomsk
With friend in Akmolinsk.
His friend in Alexandrovsk
Has friend in Petropavlovsk,
Whose friend somehow
Is solving now
The problem in Dnepropetrovsk.

And when his work is done -
Ha ha! - begins the fun.
From Dnepropetrovsk
To Petropavlovsk,
By way of iliysk,
And Novorossiysk,
To Alexandrovsk to Akmolinsk
To Tomsk to Omsk
To Pinsk to Minsk
To me the news will run,
Yes, to me the news will run!

And then I write
By morning, night,
And afternoon,
And pretty soon
My name in Dnepropetrovsk is cursed,
When he finds out I publish first!

And who made me a big success
And brought me wealth and fame?
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name.
Hi!
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobach -

I am never forget the day my first book is published.
Every chapter I stole from somewhere else.
Index I copy from old Vladivostok telephone directory.
This book was sensational!
Pravda - well, Pravda said: (Russian double-talk)
It stinks.
But Izvestia! Izvestia said: (Russian double-talk)
It stinks.
Metro-Goldwyn-Moskva buys movie rights for six million rubles,
Changing title to 'the eternal triangle',
With Brigitte Bardot playing part of hypotenuse.

And who deserves the credit?
And who deserves the blame?
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name.
Hi!

Sydney Carter is probably better known for the popular hymns Lord of the Dance and One More Step Along the World I go, but **Down Below** is a different genre altogether.

Down Below Sydney Carter (1915- 2004)

When you're working in the dark, down below
Underneath St James Park, down below
When you're working in the dark
Underneath St James park
It isn't half a lark, down below

Now it isn't hard to tell, down below
If it's Bow or Clerkenwell, down below
Cos Bow and Clerkenwell
Have a different kind of smell
And you know it pretty well, down below

Come down Covent Garden way, down below
in the merry month of May, down below
The fragrance of the flowers
Gives us many happy hours
And we sing a roundelay, down below

When to Billingsgate you come, down below
When to Billingsgate you come, down below
When to Billingsgate you come
Well the things begin to hum
And the smell will knock you dumb, down below

And the objects that you find, down below
Serve to exercise the mind, down below
There are watches that won't wind
All wrapped up in bacon rind
And that isn't all you find, down below

Yes there's something in a sewer, down below
Seems to have a strange allure, down below
The magic of the drain
Is a thing I can't explain
But it's calling me again, down below
Yes it's calling me again, down below

The songs of Flanders and Swann became firm favourites, often being included in a less serious second half of a recital.

Misalliance Michael Flanders (1922-1975)
Donald Swann (1923-1994)

The fragrant honeysuckle spirals clockwise to the sun,
And many other creepers do the same.
But some climb anti-clockwise, the bindweed does, for one,
Or Convolvulus, to give her proper name.
Rooted on either side a door, one of each species grew,
And raced towards the window-ledge above.
Each corkscrewed to the lintel in the only way it knew,
Where they stopped, touched tendrils, smiled, and fell in love.

Said the right-handed honeysuckle to the left-handed bindweed,
"Oh, let us get married, if our parents don't mind, we'd
Be loving and inseparable, inextricably entwined, we'd
Live happily ever after" said the honeysuckle to the bindweed.

To the honeysuckle's parents it came as a shock.
"The bindweeds," they cried, "are inferior stock!
They're uncultivated, of breeding bereft,
We twine to the right and they twine to the left."
Said the anti-clockwise bindweed to the clockwise honeysuckle,
"We'd better start saving, many a mickle macks a muckle,
Then run away for a honeymoon and hope that our luck'll
Take a turn for the better" said the bindweed to the honeysuckle.

A bee who was passing remarked to them then,
"I've said it before and I'll say it again,
Consider your offshoots, if offshoots there be,
They'll never receive any blessing from me".
"Poor little sucker, how will it learn,
When it is climbing, which way to turn?
Right, left, what a disgrace,
Or it may go straight up and fall flat on its face!"

Said the right-hand-thread honeysuckle to the left-hand-thread bindweed,
"It seems they're against us, all fate has combined.
Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling Colombine,
Thou art lost and gone forever, we shall never intertwine".

Together, they found them, the very next day,
They had pulled up their roots and just shrivelled away.
Deprived of that freedom for which we must fight,
To veer to the left or to veer to the right!

A Transport of Delight Michael Flanders (1922-1975)
Donald Swann (1923-1994)

Some talk of a Lagonda, some like a smart MG,
Or for bonny army lorry, they'd lay them down and dee.
Such means of locomotion seem rather dull to us,
Swann: The driver...
... and conductor of...
... a London omnibus!

Hold very tight please, ting ting.
Hold very tight please, ting ting.

When you are lost in London, and you don't
know where you are,
You'll hear my voice a-calling, "Move further down the
car!".
And very soon you'll find yourself inside the
terminus,
In a London transport, diesel engine, ninety-seven
horsepower omnibus.

Along the Queen's great highway, I drive my
merry load,
At twenty miles per hour in the middle of the road.
We like to drive in conveys, we're most
gregarious,
The big six-wheeler, scarlet painted, London transport,
diesel engine, ninety-seven horsepower omnibus.

Earth has not anything to show more fair,

Mind the stairs, please,
Mind the stairs...
Mind the stairs...
Earth has not anything to show more fair,
Any more fares?
Any more fares, any more fares?

When cabbies try to pass me before they
overtakes,
I sticks me flippin' hand out and I jams on all me
brakes.
Those jackal taxi drivers can only swear and
cuss,
Behind that monarch of the road,
Observer of the highway code,
That big six-wheeler,
Scarlet painted,
London transport,
Diesel engine,
Ninety-seven horsepower omnibus.

I stops when I'm requested, although it spoils
the ride,
So we can shout,
"Get out of it! We're full right up inside".

We don't ask much for wages, we only want fair
shares,
So cut down all the stages, and stick up all the fares.
If tickets cost a pound apiece, why should you make a
fuss?
It's worth it just to ride inside,
That thirty-foot long by ten-foot wide,
Inside that monarch of the road,
Observer of the highway code,
The big six-wheeler,
London transport,
Diesel engine,
Ninety-seven horsepower,
Ninety-seven horsepower omnibus!

Hold very tight, please!
Ting ting!

I sang in *The Silver Ring Choir* in Bath for a short time in the late 1960s. Unlike a cathedral or church choir, where you stand and sing from books or sheets of music, the Silver Rings demanded that one sang *sans musique* at concerts. You all know that I don't possess that sort of memory, so after surreptitiously secreting my music, a few times, I decided it was letting the side down and resigned. But it did add some pieces that otherwise I might have missed.

The Silver Swan Christopher Hatton ? (1579-1619)
Music: Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

The silver swan, who living had no note,
When death approached unlocked her silent throat.
Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,
She sung her first and last, and sung no more.

Farewell old joys, oh death come close mine eyes.
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise.

O Waly Waly, (an old Scottish / English folk song collected by Cecil Sharp – 1859-1924. Tune arranged by various composers, including Benjamin Britten – 1913-1976)

The water is wide
I can't cross over
And neither have
I wings to fly
Build me a boat
That can carry two
And both shall row
My love and I

There is a ship
And she sails the sea
She's loaded deep
As deep can be
But not so deep
As the love I'm in
I know not how
I sink or swim

Oh love is handsome
And love is fine
The sweetest flower
When first it's new
But love grows old
And waxes cold
And fades away
Like summer dew

Build me a boat
That can carry two
And both shall row
My love and I
And both shall row
My love and I

The Lark in the Clear Air Samuel Ferguson (1810-1886)
Music: Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

Dear thoughts are in my mind
And my soul soars enchanted
As I hear the sweet lark sing
In the clear air of the day
For a tender beaming smile
To my hope has been granted
And tomorrow she shall hear
All my fond heart would say

I shall tell her all my love
All my soul's adoration
And I think she will hear
And will not say me nay
It is this that gives my soul
All its joyous elation
As I hear the sweet lark sing
In the clear air of the day

The Blue Bird Mary E Coleridge (1861-1907)
Music: Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)

The lake lay Blue, below the hill.
O'er it, as I looked, there flew across the water
Cold and still, a bird,
Whose wings were palest blue.
The sky above was blue at last.

The sky beneath me blue in blue
A moment, ere the bird had passed.
It caught his image as he flew
The lake lay blue below the hill.

I was introduced to the poetry of **Dylan Thomas** when I was at college. I bought an extended play 7" disc of him reading these next two poems. I still have it. On the cover is a quotation of him declaring that he could only read his own work when he was drunk, because he didn't understand it. He was a notorious alcoholic.

Do not go Gentle Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning, they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Fern Hill

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
 The night above the dingle starry,
 Time let me hail and climb
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
Flying with the ricks, and the horses
Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep

 I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
 Time held me green and dying
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

The Ballad of Reading Goal Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

The Ballad was written in France after Wilde's release from Reading prison in 18897, where he had served two years with hard labour for 'acts of gross indecency'. It is his expression of sympathy, for his fellow inmates, and a plea for prison reform. The are 110 verses arranged in six parts. What follows is undoubtedly the most often quoted and most well-known; verse 7 to 9.

Each man kills the thing they love,
 By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
 Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
 The brave man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young,
 And some when they are old;
Some strangle with hands of Lust,
 Some with the hands of Gold;
The kindest use a knife, because

The dead so soon grow cold.
Some love too little, some too long,
Some sell, and others buy;
Some do the deed with many tears,
And some without a sigh:
For each man kills the thing he loves,
Yet each man does not die.

Ted Hughes came to college in 1964 to give a reading of his poetry, and later became Poet Laureate from 1984 until his death. He too was a Yorkshireman. His muse was the American poet Sylvia Plath who suffered with depression, which she wrote about in *The Bell Jar*. He remarried and returned to Yorkshire. I love the way that poetry can be penned about anything. This poem always reminds me of childhood railway journeys, watching through the carriage window, at the telephone wires falling and rising.

Telegraph Wires Ted Hughes (1930-1998)

Take telegraph wires, a lonely moor,
And fit them together. The thing come alive in hour ear.

Towns whisper to towns over the heather.
But the wires cannot hide from the weather.

So oddly, so daintily made
It is picked up and played.

Such unearthly airs
The ear hears, and withers.

In the revolving ballroom of space,
Bowed over the moor, a bright face

Draws out of telegraph wires the tines
That empty human bones.

Philip Larkin (1933-1985) also came from 'up North', a wifeless, childless librarian from Hull, he could be earthy, humorous or humourless, also writing about the mundane, the everyday, people, places, emotions, in lyrical, easily remembered verse.

The Mower Philip Larkin (1933-1985)

The Mower stalled. Twice; kneeling. I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades.
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help.

Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

Just one of the verses I ever managed to remember from the long poem.

The Rubaiyat (Omar Khayam (1048-1131)
Translated Edward FitzGerald 1859

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Susan and I used to read **The Prophet** together and remembered various ‘prophesies’ as we lived our lives together and our family grew and grew-up. Here are a few selected lines.

The Prophet Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

When **love** beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.
And when he speaks to you believe him,
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the garden.

Your **children** are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.
They come to you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them our love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies, but not their souls.

The Leaden-Eyed Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

LET not young souls be smothered out before
They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride.
It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull,
Its poor are ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.

Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly,
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap,
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve,
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

The next five poems, are ones which I used when I was running workshops around the Country for Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)

Criticism Anon

If a child lives with criticism,
She learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility,
He learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule,
She learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame,
He learns to feel guilt.

If a child lives with tolerance,
She learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement,
He learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise,
 She learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness,
 He learns justice.
If a child lives with security,
 She learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval,
 He learns to like himself.
If children live with acceptance and friendship,
 They learn to give love in the world.

Two Short Planks Anon

They sat me in the classroom, and said I had to wait
They gave me sheets of paper, and said, "Now write the date."
And when I said I couldn't, I'd got a special need,
They sat me in the corner and gave me books to read.
And when I said I couldn't, they laughed and took the mick.
The teacher sighed and shook his head. A kid said I was thick.
So then they said, "Fill in this form, we have to know your name."
I said, "Well I can tell you that." They said it wasn't quite the same.
They sharpened me a pencil, to write out my address.
And then I said I couldn't when the page became a mess.
I don't know what my problem is, I lost and all at sea.
A book's a bolted padlocked door, I just can't find the key.
The words don't click, the letters fuse, the flash cards never speak.
"Break it up and sound it out," they tell me twice a week.
And when I say "I cannot, it doesn't seem to work,"
The Head of Special Needs get cross and screams and goes berserk.
I can't think what the answer is, believe you me I've tried –
To learn the alphabet. Most nights I've sat and cried.
But still they give me spelling lists, stuff paper in my hand.
And still I'll feel the utter shame, till the day they'll understand

Mrs Henderson, LSA John Townsend

They all say I've got problems, it's in my school report.
So they sent in Mrs Henderson, they call her my 'Support'.
Although she sits right next to me, I prefer it on my own.
Her hair gets greyer by the day, but I don't think it's her own.
She's meant to stick right by me, every minute of each day.
I've got this game a dinner time called, 'Escape from LSA.'
She can't keep up when I run around and dash off in a blur.
She gets stressed up by twelve o'clock; I end up supporting her.
She wears bright woolly cardigans, and skirt down to her shin.
She smells of nice deodorant, although it could be gin.
She can't read off the blackboard though from halfway down the room,
I help her, but I have to ask, 'Just who's supporting whom?'

We struggle in the science lab, we don't like Mr. Turner,
As Mrs. Henderson gets all uptight near any Bunsen burner.
She tries real hard at D&T. It's clear to all for miles...
She's got a crush on Mr. Jones, and blushes when he smiles.
Last week in Art she tried to draw. It looked like... I dare not mention.
Enough to say, it caused a scene, the whole class got detention.
We got told off in Games as well; we both forgot our kit.
So off we sneaked behind the gym, I taught her how to spit.
In Music while we sang a hymn I went from bad to worse.
Mrs. Henderson tried singing too... a very different verse.
The other day she had the 'flu, and left me on my own,
I messed about, got shouted at, felt totally alone.

They say some things grow on you, not unlike a wart.
Well Mrs. Henderson's like that, my very own support.
In Maths she struggles to keep up. She could ask me, but won't.
One word's enough when I play up. Mrs. Henderson shouts 'Don't!'
We have a laugh and talk a lot, she listens to me read.
She says I've got '*pertenshal*' now, despite my special need.

I miss her in the holidays, with all those words to learn.
I won't tell anyone else of course, but I'm glad when we return.

I still find lessons really hard. My problems just won't end.
But now with Mrs' Henderson, At least I've got a friend –
Who may not know all answers yet, and though things aren't too fine,
I look at Mrs. Henderson, and smile...because she's mine.

My New Spell Checker Anon

Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my lea sea
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss Steaks eye kin knot sea
Eye strike a key and type a word
And weigh four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
It shows me strait a weigh
As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error rite
Its rare lea ever wrong
Eye have run the poem threw it
I am shore your pleased to no
Its letter perfect awl the weigh
My chequer tolled me sew

Reading Scheme

Wendy Cope (1945)

A wonderful parody on the one-time popular Janet and John reading scheme.

Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.
Jane has a big doll. Peter has a ball.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Here is Mummy. She has baked a bun.
Here is the milkman. He has come to call.
Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.

Go Peter! Go Jane! Come, milkman, come!
The milkman likes Mummy. She likes them all.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Here are the curtains. They shut out the sun.
Let us peep! On tiptoe Jane! You are small!
Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.

I hear a car, Jane. The milkman looks glum.
Here is Daddy in his car. Daddy is tall.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Daddy looks very cross. Has he a gun?
Up milkman! Up milkman! Over the wall!
Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Adlestrop

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

I was asked to read this poem at a 'do' at Holy Trinity church some year ago, so we drove to Adlestrop, a village near Banbury in Oxfordshire, not far from us. The railway station is no longer there, but the famous name sign is kept in the bus shelter.

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat, the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Whiter Shade of Pale (song by Procol Harem 1967)

At the time it was being played everywhere; a haunting tune. The words seem to capture the essence of the drug-infused flower-power of the swinging sixties.

We skipped the light fandango
Turned cartwheels 'cross the floor
I was feeling kinda seasick
But the crowd called out for more
The room was humming harder
As the ceiling flew away
When we called out for another drink
And the waiter brought a tray

And so it was that later
As the miller told his tale
That her face, at first just ghostly,
Turned a whiter shade of pale

She said, "There is no reason
And the truth is plain to see. "
But I wandered through my playing cards
And they would not let her be
One of sixteen vestal virgins
Who were leaving for the coast
And although my eyes were open wide
They might have just as well been closed

And so it was that later
As the miller told his tale
That her face, at first just ghostly,
Turned a whiter shade of pale

She said, "I'm here on a shore leave,"
Though we were miles at sea.
I pointed out this detail
And forced her to agree,
Saying, "You must be the mermaid
Who took King Neptune for a ride. "
And she smiled at me so sweetly
That my anger straightway died.

And so it was that later
As the miller told his tale
That her face, at first just ghostly,
Turned a whiter shade of pale

If music be the food of love
Then laughter is it's queen
And likewise if behind is in front
Then dirt in truth is clean
My mouth by then like cardboard

Seemed to slip straight through my head
So we crash-dived straightway quickly
And attacked the ocean bed

And so it was that later
As the miller told his tale
That her face, at first just ghostly,
Turned a whiter shade of pale

If you read **The Non-Conformist at 80**, (2019) and the section **From a Christian Agnostic**, you'll understand why the next few poems have been included.

Dulce Et Decorum Est (Wilfred Owen 1893-1918)

In remembrance of WW1 in 2018, I read a great deal about the conflict, it's devastation of lands and peoples, the killed, the wounded, and those left at home to grieve and to cope. This for me encapsulates the horrors of involvement.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.

'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country'. Horace
Thought to have been written between 8 October 1917 and March, 1918)

Gerald Finzi is a favourite of mine, not for his poetry, though he was a prestigious collector of poetry now held in the library at the University of Reading, but for his musical settings of poems. His song cycles, for tenor or bass soloists, demonstrate a wonderfully clear understanding of the voice and its capabilities.

Farewell to Arms R Knevet (1600-1671) & G Peele (1556-1596)
Music: Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

Introduction

The helmet now an hive for bees becomes,
And hilts of swords may serve for spiders' looms;
Sharp pikes may make
Teeth for a rake;
And the keen blade, th'arch enemy of life,
Shall be degraded to a pruning knife.
The rustic spade
Which first was made
For honest agriculture, shall retake
Its primitive employment, and forsake
The rampires steep
And trenches deep.
Tame conies in our brazen guns shall breed,
Or gentle doves their young ones there shall feed.
In musket barrels
Mice shall raise quarrels
For their quarters. The ventriloquious drum,
Like lawyers in vacations, shall be dumb.
Now all recruits,
But those of fruits,
Shall be forgot; and th'unarmed soldier
Shall only boast of what he did whilere,
In chimney's ends
Among his friends.

Aria

His golden locks Time hath to silver turned.
O Time too swift! Oh swiftness never ceasing!
His youth 'gainst Time and Age hath ever spurned,
But spurned in vain; youth waneth by increasing.
Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;
Duty, faith, love are roots and ever green.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees,
And lover's sonnets turn to holy psalms.
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
And feed on prayers which are Age's alms.
But though from Court to cottage he depart,
His Saint is sure of his unspotted heart.

But though from court to cottage he depart,
His saint is sure of his unspotted heart.
His golden locks, time has to silver turned.
O time too swift. O swiftness never ceasing.

'In No Strange Land' (Francis Thompson 1859-1907)

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air--
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!--
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;--
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;--and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,--clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

Christian Evidences Robert Hugh Benson (1781-1914)

NOW God forbid that Faith be blind assent,
Grasping what others know; else Faith were nought
But learning, as of some far continent
 Which others sought,
And carried thence, better the tale to teach, 5
Pebbles and shells, poor fragments of the beach.

Now God forbid that Faith be built on dates,
 Cursive or uncial letters, scribe or gloss,
What one conjectures, proves, or demonstrates:
 This were the loss 10
Of all to which God bids that man aspire,
This were the death of life, quenching of fire.

Nay, but with Faith I see. Not even Hope,
 Her glorious sister, stands so high as she. 15
For this but stands expectant on the slope
 That leads where He
Her source and consummation sets His seat,
Where Faith dwells always to caress His Feet.

Nay, but with Faith I saw my Lord and God 20
 Walk in the fragrant garden yesterday.
Ah! how the thrushes sang; and, where He trod
 Like spikenard lay
Jewels of dew, fresh-fallen from the sky,
While all the lawn rang round with melody.

,
 Nay, but with faith I Marked my Saviour go,
 One August noonday, down the stifling street
 That reeked with filth and man; marked from Him flow
 Radiance so sweet,
 The man ceased cursing, laughter lit the child,
 The woman hoped again, as Jesus smiled. 30

Nay, but with Faith I sought my Lord last night,
 And found Him shining where the lamp was dim;
 The shadowy altar glimmered, height on height,
 A throne for Him:
 Seen as through lattice work His gracious Face 35
 Looked forth on me and filled the dark with grace.

Nay then, if proof and tortured argument
 Content thee—teach thee that the Lord is there,
 Or risen again; I pray thee be content,
 But leave me here 40
 With eye unsealed by any proof of thine,
 With eye unsealed to know the Lord is mine.

Carol Ann Duffy DBE born 1955, is the current Poet Laureate. (2019 about to be succeeded) But it was her collaboration with Sasha Johnson Manning in 2008 in *The Manchester Carols* which brought her to my attention. She also commissioned a collection of poems called *Answering Back*, also 2008, which invited other poets to write poetic responses to the works of previous poets. Here is one of my favourites.

A Miracle

Yes, it would be a miracle indeed
 if everyone who needs somewhere to sleep
 could find a bed;
 the tired, the lost, the homeless dispossessed,
 somewhere to rest.
 O Bethlehem, at last we would agree;
 That it would be a miracle indeed.
 A miracle.

Yes, it would be a miracle for sure
If everyone who fears the men with guns
Knew no more war;
The shot, the bombed, the injured innocents
Were whole once more.
O Bethlehem, our hearts would not ignore
That it would be a miracle for sure.
A miracle.

Yes, it would be a miracle tonight
If everyone who stumbles in the dark
Could find a light;
The weak, the poor, the hungry multitudes,
Something to eat.
O Bethlehem, we would believe it right,
that it would be a miracle tonight.
A Miracle.

Desiderata Max Ehrmann (1872-1945)

Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible without surrender
be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly and clearly;
and listen to others,
even the dull and the ignorant;
they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons,
they are vexations to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others,
you may become vain and bitter;
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.
Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble;
it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.
Exercise caution in your business affairs;
for the world is full of trickery.
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;
many persons strive for high ideals;
and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself.
Especially, do not feign affection.
Neither be cynical about love;
for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment
it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years,
gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.
But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline,
be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe,
no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God,
whatever you conceive Him to be,
and whatever your labors and aspirations,
in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world.
Be cheerful.
Strive to be happy.

Jerusalem William Blake (1757-1827)
Music: Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

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

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

Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire.

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

I Vow to Thee My Country Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice (1859-?)
Music: Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.

Simon Armitage was born in 1963, in Huddersfield, a few miles from my birthplace of Elland in the WR of Yorkshire. His prolific outpourings are close to home, the everyday, mundane, earthy, youthful, keenly observed, witty and accessible. Amongst his very many awards, he holds a CBE and the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. I hope he will be our next Poet Laureate. Here are just two of his poems

From **Book of Matches** Simon Armitage (1963-)

...because I've done the same; true!

I've made out a will; I'm leaving myself
to the National Health. I'm sure they can use
the jellies and tubes and syrups and glues,
the web of nerves and veins, the loaf of brains,
and assortment of fillings and stitches and wounds,
blood - a gallon exactly of bilberry soup -
the chassis or cage or cathedral of bone;
but not the heart, they can leave that alone.

They can have the lot, the whole stock:
the loops and coils and sprockets and springs and rods,
the twines and cords and strands,
the face, the case, the cogs and the hands,
but not the pendulum, the ticker;
leave that where it stops or hangs.

About his Person Simon Armitage (1963-)

Five pounds fifty in change, exactly,
a library card on its date of expiry.

A postcard stamped,
unwritten, but franked,

a pocket size diary slashed with a pencil
from March twenty-fourth to the first of April.

A brace of keys for a mortise lock,
an analogue watch, self winding, stopped.

A final demand
in his own hand,

a rolled up note of explanation
planted there like a spray carnation

but beheaded, in his fist.
A shopping list.

A giveaway photograph stashed in his wallet,
a keepsake banked in the heart of a locket.

no gold or silver,
but crowning one finger

a ring of white unweathered skin.
That was everything.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) was born an American, but lived in Britain from around 1915 and became a British citizen in 1923. *The Waste Land* is probably his best known work, but *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* was the basis of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats* in 1981. This is my favourite.

Macavity, The Mystery Cat T.S. Eliot

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw -
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime - Macavity's not there!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime - Macavity's not there!
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air -
But I tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there!

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square -
But when a crime's discovered, then Macavity's not there!

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair -
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! Macavity's not there!

And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair -
But it's useless to investigate - Macavity's not there!
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
'It must have been Macavity!' - but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumbs,
Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:
At whatever time the deed took place - MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known,
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime.

The Penis Poem Willie Nelson (1933-)
... which my dear friend Mike used to quote often.

My days of youth are over
My torch of life is out.
What used to be my sex appeal
Is now my water spout.

Time was when of it's own accord
From my trousers it would spring,
But now I've got a full-time job
To find the flippin' thing.

It used to be embarrassing
The way it would behave-
Every single morning it would stand
And watch me as I shaved!

Now, as age approaches,
It sure gives me the blues
To see it hang its little head
And watch me tie my shoes!

Bright the Vision that Delighted Howard Brayton (1938-)

This was written following the BBC1 Televised Morning Service from
Holy Trinity Church, Bradford on Avon August 9th 1970

Curtains drawn to shade the sun.
That oft accursed box beside the hearth,
Flickering, monochrome or colour.
BBC at half past ten.
Morning Service, poker voice.
Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire.
For nine million viewers, another programme.

For Holy Trinity it started weeks ago.
Monday meeting with producer.
Vernon chose the hymns and anthems.
David timed the sermon; kept it short.
Script on yellow paper - foolscap size!
Twenty pages, give or take a few.
Camera cue sheets, four in all,
Long shot, close up, pan and zoom.

Church in chaos days before.
Cables snaking down the aisle,
Link lighting console to organ console.
Floods and spots, and inkie-dinkies;
Light from a score of man-made suns.
Sheets of black, shut out God's sun from God's house.

Full rehearsal Saturday.
The church is full, but not with worshippers.
Scaffolders and electricians,
Cameramen and general porters,
Producer, his assistant and floor manager.
Clergy, choir and servers wait.
Four in congregation, David, Rachel, Pamela and Catherine
To practise their offertory procession.
Manager in head-phones talks to those unseen.
The service starts and follows the plan.

*Face west to say the sermon blessing.
I'd rather not.
Of course, we wouldn't press you.
Then say it here, one pace before the step.
We'll move the mike...
No. Move the choir*

*Choir, form up procession here.
It can't be done - no room.
The Crucifer... The choir goes first."*

No lost nerve, a change of plan.
Is that OK, Vic?
Vic, outside in an armoured van,
Mixing sound and vision,
Gives silent Yea or Nay.

Kevin looks angelic, so do Mo and Nin.
John Boyce is losing interest - rapidly.
Choir boys, once impressed,
Grow more blasé by the minute.

A break before recording.
Visits to the vicarage to answer calls of nature,

A cigarette or cough sweet for the voice.
Cassocks off.
Now the boys behave as others do before the camera at football matches
Forget they are in church.
Remember boys, the ends of words.
A quick run through, then held on tape.
And finally the rehearsal ends.
Until tomorrow. No late nights.
It all depends on you.

Sunday morning, of the ninth.
Banns are read at ten fifteen.
Psalm rehearsal loosens voices.
Cameras scanning over test cards.
Candles lit.
Two minutes. Congregation stand.
Choir boys, forgetting Howard has a beard,
Concentrate on looking nice for God and mum.
Smoothing surplices, tucking ruffs.
Choirmen joke with workmen, idle for an hour.
throats with nervous coughs.
Then, after silence,
Vernon starts to play, as Keith - in suit! is tackled by the choir.

The ten-mile walk - no turning back.
And then the psalm - we're under way.
Our Father, who art in Heaven...
Camera three on dolly, tracking down the aisle,
Unseen at home, but the congregation know.
Hallowed be Thy name... or can it be?
The camera crews are silent - a good sign –
Or so producer says.

Debra waits for her Collect cue.
Then faultlessly reads, all Britain's eyes upon her.
Choir and people let off steam.
Then, Tony telling Gospel truths,
In Oxford accent;
No trace or northern living here.

Now David facing camera two,
Remembers where to stand and what to say.
Little boy with teddy bear
Looks and laughs around the church.
Children should be happy in their pew.
Camera shows him yawning - bored!
Producer laughs - it can't be helped.

The moment they've been waiting for.
The Halls walk down with offertory.
The choir sits back and listens to itself.
Michael and Lloyd are happy
(they were singing yesterday.)
Pictures of faces, and stained glass windows,
Candles and a pretty girl - Rosemary, for remembrance.

Cameras winking small red lights.
Unknown man before the monitor
Fiddles with the brilliance.
The final prayer.
A clever choice of hymn - a subtle pun?
Watchers and Ye Holy Ones
Thunders out across the ether
Into everyone's front room.
Then treble voices raised in descant
Bring the service to a close.

The choir recesses,
Vernon plays,
Announcer speaking Fades away.
All the money, time and effort
Gone to glorify our God.

But what reactions did it gather?
Producer happy –
It went well.
The vicar off to choir camp.
The choir is half its strength at evensong.
And letters from unknown viewers trickle in.

Dear God, we gave our best
Amidst the unfamiliar
The unaccustomed heat and glare!
Forgive our lack of concentration.
We hope we helped a few along the way.

Writings in the Bath Howard Brayton (1938-)

A June 1991 a party of students from West Oxfordshire College in Witney went on a visit to Bath, including the Roman Baths and a barge trip on the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Leaden skies
Reflect the golden sunshine of a field of rape.
Trees flash by in streaks of springtime green.
The motorway,
A never-ending strip of curving grey.
Travelled by a myriad metallic sheep.
Impersonal, never to be seen again.
May and wild parsley turn the hedge to snow.
Look back to winter, forward to the sun.

Why should the Romans claim the baths?
King Bladud and his faithful swine
First proved the water's efficacy.
And the sun shone on the writer's party.
Coins thrown into the Round Bath
Had pleased the god Minerva.
Water from the Mendip Hills.
Ten thousand years old
Ten thousand feet deep
Steam green.
Constant flow
Constant heat.
Healed a million souls and bodies
At 30 pence a glass.
Aquae Sulis –
Waters of the sun.
Random stones.
Imagination.
Feed a burgeoning tourist need.

Into the sun and a meal a fresco.
Watching the bargee's working holidays.

Two men in a boat
Not the 'Brummel'
But the 'Jubilee'.
Tom and Jerry
But Ron and Terry.

On either side the water
Lay, long banks of rushes
And of clay.
Clay for puddle proofing.
Clay for Plasticine.
'The Silver Swan,
Who living had no note,'
But many cygnets
Sailing near the boat.

'Tales of the Riverbank.'
Of Ratty and of Mole.
Mallard ducks
On a reed-masked hole.

A German folly of an English pub.
Missed 'Brown's Folly'
Ah there's the rub;
Couldn't see his wife a' shopping.

Back to the coach for the journey home.
(Old O Jones with a crate of ale
On a chara. from Porthcawl.)
Cirencester changed to Letchlade,
But the chippings taste the same.

'Oh stands the coach clock an hour slow,
And is there nowhere else to go?

"Heather's off dear."

Rex Mundi Howard Brayton (1938-)

Written in appreciation of the language of the vintner.

He stands tall, long and tenacious,
Attractive, full-bodied and rich.
He is ageing well, no longer young,
But of a distinctive vintage,
Refined, ripe and mature; tanned and tawny,
Supple, well-structured and not over-weight.
Upfront, he is seriously well balanced and supple,
With a freshness, fine nose, and delightful expression.
But he can be complex;
Open, or seductive and spicy, putting pleasure first.
With an appellation like Rex, he can be silky-smooth,
Sweet and velvety,
Or rough, earthy and bitter, fruity and dry.
He is brilliant, with class,
But a serious blend, intense or quite foxy.
And to finish,
He's well-groomed, perfumed with a musty aroma.
Go on now, give him a swirl,
Then spit him out.
And move on to another.

Sally Forth Howard Brayton (1938-)

Written in recognition of the language of the estate agent

She stands on a ridge at the end of a drive,
Which sweeps down through lawns and filled beds.
Facing south, with a view passed the hills to the sea.
She is tall and elegant, with generous proportions,
A fine double front, large and appealing.
Her mature rear is strikingly beautiful, and of a good size.

Possessing a charming, delightful character, bright and airy.
She is immaculately presented, attractive, generous and popular,
Well preserved, and highly desirable.
With a private position and no chain attached,
Without doubt, she's not to be missed.
Just ring for a date,
And make her an offer.

Limericks, have been a fascination for centuries. The origin is unknown, but it first appeared in England in the 18th century, and made popular by Edward Lear in the 19th century. Many famous writers have used the genre, and thousands are available to read in anthologies and on-line.

Howard Brayton (1938-)

The limericks which I have viewed,
Were clever or funny or crude.
 Yet writers of note
 Keep the genre afloat,
'Cos as poems they are often eschewed.

John Galsworthy (1867-1933)

An Angry young husband called Bicket
Said, "Turn yourself round and I'll kick it;
You have painted my wife
In the nude to the life.
Do you think, Mr. Green it was cricket?"

Arnold Bennett (1867-1931)

There was a young man of Montrose,
Who had pockets in none of his clothes.
 When asked by his lass
 Where he carried his brass,
He said, "Darling, I pay through the nose."

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

For travellers going sidereal,
The dangers, they say, are bacterial.
 I don't know the pattern
 On Mars, or on Saturn,
But on Venus it must be venereal.

Ogden Nash (1902-1971)

A crusader's wife slipped the garrison
And had an affair with a Saracen.
 She was not over-sexed,
 Or jealous or vexed,
She just wanted to make a comparison.

W H Auden (1907-1973)

T S Eliot is quite at a loss
When clubwomen bustle across
 At literary teas
 Crying, "What, if you please
Did you mean by *The Mill on the Floss*?"

Algernon C Swinburne (1837-1909)

There was a young man of Cape Horn,
Who wished he had never been born,
 Nor would he have been
 If his father had seen
That the end of the rubber was torn.

Spike Milligan (1918-2002)

A man who was asked out to dinner,
Came home looking hungry and thinner;
 He said, "Don't look baffled,
 The dinner was raffled,
And somebody else was the winner.

Carolyn Wells (1862-1942)

A tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to teach two young tooters to toot.
 Said the two to the tutor;
 "Is it harder to toot, or
To tutor two tooters to toot?"

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

The last time I slept with the Queen,
She said, as I whispered, '*Ich Dien*';
 "It's royalty's *night* out,
 But please put the light out,
The Queen may be had, but not seen."

Wendy Cope (1945-)

That fine English poet, John Donne,
Was wont to admonish the sunne;
 "You busie old foole
 lie still, and keep cool,
For I am I bed having fun."

T Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924)

I went with the Duchess to tea,
Her manners were shocking to see;
 Her rumblings abdominal
 Were simply phenomenal.
And everyone thought it was me.

Isaac Asimov (1920-1992)

There was a young man of Belgrade,
Who planned to seduce a fair maid,
 And as it befell
 He succeeded quite well,
And the maid, like the plan, was well laid.

John Betjeman (1906-1984)

G'uggery G'uggery Nunc
Your room is all cluttered with junk
 Candles, bamboonery,
 Plush and saloonery -
Pack it all up in a trunk.

Wolf, Words Imtiaz Dharker (1954-)

In another room, the children are pigs.
You can hear them truffling behind sofas,
bumping chairs, snuffling round table legs.

From the dregs of a story, the wolf
inks in, pulled to the sound of breathing,
drawn to the warm, the living.

Rasping, *Let me in, let me in.*
In their literal world, the children believe
The wolf is a wolf, not a wolf made of words

They make themselves small behind closed doors
in a house made of straw and a house mad of sticks
and a house made of bricks, in a time

made of tricks. But the breath of the wolf
is the breath of the world. It blows a flurry
of straw, a volley of twigs, a fall

of rubble down on the pigs
who come squealing, squalling out of the storm
to a house made of words. This.

Scratching at walls, something is out there,
Ever and after, something that howls.
What outcast word, what unhoused soul?

The British Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-)

Take some Picts, Celts and Silures
And let them settle,
Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.
Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years
Add lots of Norman French to some
Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.
Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,
Trinidadians and Bhajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,
Vietnamese and Sudanese.
Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians
And Pakistanis,
Combine with some Guyanese
And turn up the heat.
Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,
Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some
Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese
And Palestinians
Then add to the melting pot.
Leave the ingredients to simmer.
As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish
Binding them together with English.
Allow time to be cool.
Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,
Serve with justice
And enjoy.
Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than
another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.
Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give
justice and equality to all.

The Pole with No Soul Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-)

I'm wondering
How does he do it?
I'm wondering
What is his role?
I'm speaking of my friend Nobody
Nobody lives by the South Pole.

He ain't got no good friends
To talk to
H ain't got no
Body to kiss
There isn't much there
That he can do,
H can't go on living
Like this.

H ain't got no brother
Or sisters
H ain't got no one
A his side
There's no Mrs
And there's no Mr's
H has no language,
He's from no tribe.

It's so strange to be
With no history
It's so strange that
Nobody's there
I wonder
What his future will be
But Nobody don't seem to care.

Nobody's dancing
He's not on the 'phone,
There is no music
And he's all alone,
Nobody's eating
Nobody's sharing
Nobody's reading
And Nobody's hearing

Nobody's not having
The time of his life,
Nobody's talking to
No one from Fife
Nobody's talking
And saying nothing,
Nobody's a poet
And nobody's singing.

I'm wondering
How does he do it?
It must take
So much self control,
I'm speaking of my friend Nobody
Nobody lives by the South Pole.

Voices for Choices Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-)

If you did not have a car
You could still walk,
If you did not have a 'phone
You could still talk.
If you did not have a batter
Then the cricket would not matter
And you could still eat all your beans
Without a fork.

You could have a great big telly
With no vision,
We could all live without crime
And without prison,
Without dark we'd just have light
Without light we'd just have night
And if we tried we could eat cakes
That have not risen.

But before we part, think on these;

from **There is No God** Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1961)

And almost everyone when age,
Disease, or sorrows strike him,
Inclines to think there is a God,
Or something very like him.

Late Fragment Raymond Carver (1939-1988)

And did you get what
You wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
*To call myself beloved, to feel myself
Beloved on the earth.*

Remember Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

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

from **I lost my Identity Card** Yehuda Amichai (1920-2000)

And death is when someone keeps calling you
And calling you
And you no longer turn around to see
Who it is.

Song Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

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

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

This World is Not Conclusion Emily Dickenson (1830-1886)

This World is not Conclusion.
A Species stands beyond –
Invisible, as Music –
But positive, as Sound –
It beckons, and it baffles –
Philosophy – don't know –
And through a Riddle, at the last –
Sagacity, must go –
To guess it, puzzles scholars –
To gain it, Men have borne

Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown –
Faith slips – and laughs, and rallies –
Blushes, if any see –
Plucks at a twig of Evidence –
And asks a Vane, the way –
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit –
Strong Hallelujahs roll –
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul –

Happy the Man John Dryden (1631-1700)

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He who can call today his own:
He who, secure within, can say,
Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today.
Be fair or foul or rain or shine
The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine.
Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour.

To Be a Slave of Intensity Kabir (?1440-1518?)
Translated from Urdu: Robert Bly (1926-)

Friend, hope for the guest while you are alive.
Jump into experience while you are alive!
Think...and think...while you are alive.
What you call 'salvation' belongs to the time before death.

If you don't break your ropes while you're alive,
do you think ghosts will do it after?

The idea that the soul will join with the ecstatic
Just because the body is rotten - that is all fantasy.
What is found now is found then.
If you find nothing now,
you will simply end up with an apartment in the City of Death.
If you make love with the divine now, in the next life you will have the face of
satisfied desire.

So plunge into the truth, find out who the Teacher is,
Believe in the Great Sound!

Kabir says this: When the guest is being searched for, it is the intensity of the longing for the Guest that does all the work.
Look at me, and you will see a slave of that intensity.

I'm Free Anon

Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free
I'm following the path God laid for me.
I took his hand when I heard his call,
I turned my back and left it all.

I could not stay another day,
To laugh, to love, to work, to play
Tasks left undone must stay that way,
I've found that peace at the close of the day.
If my parting has left a void,
The fill it with remembered joy.
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss,
Ah yes, these things I too will miss.

Be not burdened with times of sorrow,
I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow.
My life's been full, I savoured much,
Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.

Perhaps my time seemed all too brief,
Don't lengthen it now with undue grief.
Lift up your heart and share with me,
God wanted me now. He set me free.

Good Night William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

'Good night, Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I should say Good night, till it be...' Oops!

Epilogue Howard Brayton (1938-)

The reel of life spins faster,
running out of time;

Time to look back personally,
and forward for my family.

Family is my pride and joy,
but for others too.

Too many blessings to be thankful for,
some sorrows to remember.

Remember life is short; don't waste it,
treasure everything.

Everything is part of who we are;
The good, the bad, the hopefulness.

Hopefulness is positive; keep that in mind,
and share it with the world.

The world and its resources are finite,
cherish them, they are precious.

Precious are my children, and my grandchildren.
Teach them respect.

Respect for others, regardless of their differences.
And respect *all* things living.

Living is what I have done;
no sorrows, no regrets, no longed for wishes.

Wishes now for pain free days,
and an ever-lucid mind.

Mind you; look after you,
others depend on you.

You are my beloved.
Your God be with you - always.

