IN THE THIRD-CLASS SEAT SAT THE JOURNEYING BOY, AND THE ROOF-LAMP’S OILY FLAME PLAYED DOWN ON HIS LISTLESS FORM AND FACE, BEWRAPT PAST KNOWING TO WHAT HE WAS GOING, OR WHENCE HE CAME. IN THE BAND OF HIS HAT THE JOURNEYING BOY HAD A TICKET STUCK; AND A STRING AROUND HIS NECK BORE THE KEY OF HIS BOX, THAT TWINKLED GLEAMS OF THE LAMP’S SAD BEAMS LIKE A LIVING THING.

WHAT PAST CAN BE YOURS, O JOURNEYING BOY TOWARDS A WORLD UNKNOWN, WHO CALMLY, AS IF INCURIOUS QUITE ON ALL AT STAKE, CAN UNDERTAKE THIS PLUNGE ALONE? KNOWS YOUR SOUL A SPHERE, O JOURNEYING BOY, OUR RUDE REALMS FAR ABOVE, WHENCE WITH SPACIOUS VISION YOU MARK AND METE THIS REGION OF SIN THAT YOU FIND YOU IN, BUT ARE NOT OF?

TOWARDS A WORLD UNKNOWN
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Towards a World Unknown is OCR’s new poetry anthology designed to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum Programme of Study and of the Department for Education Subject Criteria for GCSE English Literature, for first teaching from September 2015. There are three themed poetry clusters to choose from in the anthology, each comprising 15 literary heritage and modern poems as well as poems from around the world. The poems have been carefully selected to provide a balanced and diverse collection for study.

Using Towards a World Unknown with the OCR J352 GCSE English Literature specification

Component J352/02 Exploring poetry and Shakespeare
For the poetry section of the exam, candidates choose one themed poetry cluster for study from:
- Love and Relationships
- Conflict
- Youth and Age

Students will also need to read poetry more widely related to their chosen theme, to prepare for a comparison task based on a poem they have studied in Towards a World Unknown and a thematically linked unseen poem.

Detailed information can be found in the OCR specification and support materials at www.ocr.org.uk.
There will be creative, digital teacher resources to accompany Towards a World Unknown, also at www.ocr.org.uk.
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Love and Relationships

A Song

I
No riches from his scanty store
   My lover could impart;
He gave a boon I valued more —
   He gave me all his heart!

II
His soul sincere, his generous worth,
   Might well this bosom move;
And when I asked for bliss on earth,
   I only meant his love.

III
But now for me, in search of gain
   From shore to shore he flies;
Why wander riches to obtain,
   When love is all I prize?

IV
The frugal meal, the lowly cot
   If blest my love with thee!
That simple fare, that humble lot,
   Were more than wealth to me.

V
While he the dangerous ocean braves,
   My tears but vainly flow:
Is pity in the faithless waves
   To which I pour my woe?

VI
The night is dark, the waters deep,
   Yet soft the billows roll;
Alas! at every breeze I weep —
   The storm is in my soul.

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS
(1761–1827)
**Bright Star**

1 Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
   Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
   And watching, with eternal lids apart,
   Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
   The moving waters at their priestlike task
   Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
   Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
   Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
   No – yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
10 Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
   To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
   Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
   Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
   And so live ever – or else swoon to death.

JOHN KEATS
(1795–1821)

**Now**

1 Out of your whole life give but a moment!
   All of your life that has gone before,
   All to come after it, – so you ignore
   So you make perfect the present, – condense,
   In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment,
   Thought and feeling and soul and sense –
   Merged in a moment which gives me at last
   You around me for once, you beneath me, above me –
   Me – sure that despite of time future, time past, –
10 This tick of our life-time's one moment you love me!
   How long such suspension may linger? Ah, Sweet –
   The moment eternal – just that and no more –
   When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core
   While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and lips meet!

ROBERT BROWNING
(1812–1889)
Love and Friendship

Love is like the wild rose-briar,
Friendship like the holly-tree—
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms
But which will bloom most constantly?

The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,
Its summer blossoms scent the air;
Yet wait till winter comes again
And who will call the wild-briar fair?

Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now
And deck thee with the holly's sheen,
That when December blights thy brow
He still may leave thy garland green.

EMILY BRONTË
(1818–1848)

A Broken Appointment

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

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

THOMAS HARDY
(1840–1928)
Fin de Fête

Sweetheart, for such a day
One mustn’t grudge the score;
Here, then, it’s all to pay,
It’s Good-night at the door.

Good-night and good dreams to you,—
Do you remember the picture-book thieves
Who left two children sleeping in a wood the long night through,
And how the birds came down and covered them with leaves?

So you and I should have slept,—But now,
With just the shadow of a waving bough
In the moonlight over your bed.

CHARLOTTE MEW
(1869–1928)

The Sorrow of True Love

The sorrow of true love is a great sorrow
And true love parting blackens a bright morrow:
Yet almost they equal joys, since their despair
Is but hope blinded by its tears, and clear
Above the storm the heavens wait to be seen.
But greater sorrow from less love has been
That can mistake lack of despair for hope
And knows not tempest and the perfect scope
Of summer, but a frozen drizzle perpetual
Of drops that from remorse and pity fall
And cannot ever shine in the sun or thaw,
Removed eternally from the sun’s law.

EDWARD THOMAS
(1878–1917)
An Arundel Tomb

1 Side by side, their faces blurred,
The earl and countess lie in stone,
Their proper habits vaguely shown
As jointed armour, stiffened pleat,
And that faint hint of the absurd—
The little dogs under their feet.

Such plainness of the pre-baroque
Hardly involves the eye, until
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still
Clasped empty in the other; and
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand.

They would not think to lie so long,
Such faithfulness in effigy
Was just a detail friends would see:
A sculptor’s sweet commissioned grace
Thrown off in helping to prolong
The Latin names around the base.

They would not guess how early in
Their supine stationary voyage
The air would change to soundless damage,
Turn the old tenantry away;
How soon succeeding eyes begin
To look, not read. Rigidly they
Persisted, linked, through lengths and breadths
Of time. Snow fell, undated. Light
Each summer thronged the glass. A bright
Litter of birdcalls strewed the same
Bone-riddled ground. And up the paths
The endless altered people came,
Washing at their identity.
Now, helpless in the hollow of
An unarmorial age, a trough
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins
Above their scrap of history,
Only an attitude remains:
Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

PHILIP LARKIN
(1922–1985)
Love After Love

1 The time will come
   when, with elation
   you will greet yourself arriving
   at your own door, in your own mirror
5 and each will smile at the other’s welcome,

   and say, sit here. Eat.
   You will love again the stranger who was your self.
   Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

10 all your life, whom you ignored
   for another, who knows you by heart.
   Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

   the photographs, the desperate notes,
   peel your own image from the mirror.
15 Sit. Feast on your life.

DEREK WALCOTT
(b. 1930)

Morning Song

1 Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
   The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
   Took its place among the elements.

5 Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
   In a drafty museum, your nakedness
   Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I’m no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind’s hand.

10 All night your moth-breath
   Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
   A far sea moves in my ear.

   One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
   In my Victorian nightgown.
15 Your mouth opens clean as a cat’s. The window square

   Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
   Your handful of notes;
   The clear vowels rise like balloons.

SYLVIA PLATH
(1932–1963)
Long Distance II

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

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

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

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

TONY HARRISON
(b. 1937)
I Wouldn’t Thank You for a Valentine

1  I wouldn’t thank you for a Valentine.
   I won’t wake up early wondering if the postman’s been.
   Should 10 red-padded satin hearts arrive with sticky sickly saccharine
   Sentiments in very vulgar verses I wouldn’t wonder if you meant them.

2  Two dozen anonymous Interflora roses?
   I’d not bother to swither over who sent them!
   I wouldn’t thank you for a Valentine.

   Scrawl SWALK across the envelope
   I’d just say ‘Same Auld story

3  I canny be bothered deciphering it –
   I’m up to hear with Amore!
   The whole Valentine’s Day Thing is trivial and commercial,
   A cue for unleashing clichés and candyheart motifs to
   which I personally am not partial.’

4  Take more than singing Telegrams, or pints of Chanel Five, or sweets,
   To get me ordering oysters or ironing my black satin sheets.
   I wouldn’t thank you for a Valentine.

5  If you sent me a solitaire and promises solemn,
   Took out an ad in the Guardian Personal Column
   Saying something very soppy such as ‘Who Loves Ya, Poo?
   I’ll tell you, I do, Fozzy Bear, that’s who!’
   You’d entirely fail to charm me, in fact I’d detest it
   I wouldn’t be eighteen again for anything, I’m glad I’m past it.
   I wouldn’t thank you for a Valentine.

6  If you sent me a single orchid, or a pair of Janet Reger’s
   in a heart-shaped box and declared your Love Eternal
   I’d say I’d not be caught dead in them they were
   politically suspect and I’d rather something thermal.
   If you hired a plane and blazed our love in a banner across the skies;
   If you bought me something flimsy in a flatteringly wrong size;
   If you sent me a postcard with three Xs and told me how you felt
   I wouldn’t thank you, I’d melt.

LIZ LOCHHEAD
(b. 1947)
In Paris With You

Don’t talk to me of love. I’ve had an earful
And I get tearful when I’ve downed a drink or two.
I’m one of your talking wounded.
I’m a hostage. I’m marooned.
But I’m in Paris with you.

Yes I’m angry at the way I’ve been bamboozled
And resentful at the mess I’ve been through.
I admit I’m on the rebound
And I don’t care where are we bound.
I’m in Paris with you.

Do you mind if we do not go to the Louvre,
If we say sod off to sodding Notre Dame,
If we skip the Champs Elysées
And remain here in this sleazy

Old hotel room
Doing this and that
To what and whom
Learning who you are,
Learning what I am.

Don’t talk to me of love. Let’s talk of Paris,
The little bit of Paris in our view.
There’s that crack across the ceiling
And the hotel walls are peeling
And I’m in Paris with you.

Don’t talk to me of love. Let’s talk of Paris.
I’m in Paris with the slightest thing you do.
I’m in Paris with your eyes, your mouth,
I’m in Paris with... all points south.
Am I embarrassing you?
I’m in Paris with you.

JAMES FENTON
(b. 1949)
Warming Her Pearls

Next to my own skin, her pearls. My mistress bids me wear them, warm them, until evening when I’ll brush her hair. At six, I place them round her cool, white throat. All day I think of her, resting in the Yellow Room, contemplating silk or taffeta, which gown tonight? She fans herself whilst I work willingly, my slow heat entering each pearl. Slack on my neck, her rope.

She’s beautiful. I dream about her in my attic bed; picture her dancing with tall men, puzzled by my faint, persistent scent beneath her French perfume, her milky stones.

I dust her shoulders with a rabbit’s foot, watch the soft blush seep through her skin like an indolent sigh. In her looking-glass my red lips part as though I want to speak.

Full moon. Her carriage brings her home. I see her every movement in my head... Undressing, taking off her jewels, her slim hand reaching for the case, slipping naked into bed, the way she always does... And I lie here awake, knowing the pearls are cooling even now in the room where my mistress sleeps. All night I feel their absence and I burn.

CAROL ANN DUFFY (b. 1955)
Dusting the Phone

I am spending my time imagining the worst that could happen.
I know this is not a good idea, and that being in love, I could be spending my time going over the best that has been happening.

The phone rings heralding some disaster. Sirens.
Or it doesn’t ring which also means disaster. Sirens.
In which case, who would ring me to tell? Nobody knows.

The future is a long gloved hand. An empty cup.
A marriage. A full house. One night per week in stranger’s white sheets. Forget tomorrow,

You say, don’t mention love. I try. It doesn’t work.
I assault the postman for a letter. I look for flowers.
I go over and over our times together, re-read them.

This very second I am waiting on the phone.
Silver service. I polish it. I dress for it.
I’ll give it extra in return for your call.

Infuriatingly, it sends me hoaxes, wrong numbers;
or worse, calls from boring people. Your voice disappears into my lonely cotton sheets.

I am trapped in it. I can’t move. I want you.
All the time. This is awful – only a photo.
Come on, damn you, ring me. Or else. What?

I don’t know what.

JACKIE KAY
(b. 1961)
A Poison Tree

1 I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

5 And I watered it in fears,
   Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
   And with soft deceitful wiles.

   And it grew both day and night,
   Till it bore an apple bright.
   And my foe beheld it shine.
   And he knew that it was mine,

   And into my garden stole
   When the night had veiled the pole;
10 In the morning glad I see
   My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

WILLIAM BLAKE
(1757–1827)
Envy

1  This rose-tree is not made to bear
   The violet blue, nor lily fair,
       Nor the sweet mignonet:
   And if this tree were discontent,
5  Or wished to change its natural bent,
       It all in vain would fret.

   And should it fret, you would suppose
   It ne’er had seen its own red rose,
       Nor after gentle shower
10  Had ever smelled its rose’s scent,
   Or it could ne’er be discontent
       With its own pretty flower.

   Like such a blind and senseless tree
   As I’ve imagined this to be,
15   All envious persons are:
   With care and culture all may find
   Some pretty flower in their own mind,
       Some talent that is rare.

MARY LAMB
(1764–1847)
Boat Stealing

I went alone into a Shepherd’s boat,
A skiff, that to a willow-tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on
Just like a man who walks with stately step
Though bent on speed. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure. Not without the voice
Of mountain echoes did my boat move on,
Leaving behind her still on either side
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. A rocky steep uprose
Above the cavern of the willow-tree,
And now, as suited one who proudly rowed
With his best skill, I fixed a steady view
Upon the top of that same craggy ridge,
The bound of the horizon – for behind
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; twenty times
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And as I rose upon the stroke my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan —
When from behind that rocky steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge cliff,
As if voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measured motion, like a living thing
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went with grave
And serious thoughts; and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
There was darkness – call it solitude,
Or blank desertion – no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
(1770–1850)

From 1799 Prelude
The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.

LORD BYRON
(1788–1824)
There’s a Certain Slant of Light

1 There’s a certain Slant of light,
   Winter Afternoons –
   That oppresses, like the Heft
   Of Cathedral Tunes –

5 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
   We can find no scar,
   But internal difference,
   Where the Meanings, are –

   None may teach it – Any –

10 ‘Tis the Seal Despair –
    An imperial affliction
    Sent us of the Air –

    When it comes, the Landscape listens –
    Shadows – hold their breath –

15 When it goes, ‘tis like the Distance
    On the look of Death –

EMILY DICKINSON
(1830–1886)

The Man He Killed

1 Had he and I but met
   By some old ancient inn,
   We should have set us down to wet
   Right many a nipperkin!

5 But ranged as infantry,
   And staring face to face,
   I shot at him as he at me,
   And killed him in his place.

   I shot him dead because –

10 Because he was my foe,
    Just so: my foe of course he was;
    That’s clear enough; although
    He thought he’d ‘list, perhaps,
    Off-hand like – just as I –

15 Was out of work – had sold his traps –
    No other reason why.

   Yes; quaint and curious war is!
   You shoot a fellow down
   You’d treat, if met where any bar is,

20 Or help to half a crown.

THOMAS HARDY
(1840–1928)
Anthem for Doomed Youth

1 What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
   Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
   Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
   Can patter out their hasty orisons.
5 No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
   Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
   The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
   And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

   What candles may be held to speed them all?
10 Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
   Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
   The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
   Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
   And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

WILFRED OWEN
(1893–1918)
Vergissmeinnicht

Three weeks gone and the combatants gone
returning over the nightmare ground
we found the place again, and found
the soldier sprawling in the sun.

The frowning barrel of his gun
overshadowing. As we came on
that day, he hit my tank with one
like the entry of a demon.

Look. Here in the gunpit spoil
the dishonoured picture of his girl
who has put: Steffi. Vergissmeinnicht.
in a copybook gothic script.

We see him almost with content,
abased, and seeming to have paid
and mocked at by his own equipment
that’s hard and good when he’s decayed.

But she would weep to see today
how on his skin the swart flies move;
the dust upon the paper eye
and the burst stomach like a cave.

For here the lover and killer are mingled
who had one body and one heart.
And death who had the soldier singled
has done the lover mortal hurt.

KEITH DOUGLAS
(1920–1944)
What Were They Like?

Did the people of Viet Nam
use lanterns of stone?
Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?
Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
Did they use bone and ivory,
jade and silver, for ornament?
Had they an epic poem?
Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
It is not remembered whether in gardens
stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
but after their children were killed
there were no more buds.
Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
All the bones were charred.
It is not remembered. Remember,
most were peasants; their life
was in rice and bamboo.
When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
maybe fathers told their sons old tales.

When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream.
There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.
It was reported their singing resembled
the flight of moths in moonlight.
Who can say? It is silent now.

DENISE LEVERTOV
(1923–1997)
Lament

For the green turtle with her pulsing burden,
in search of the breeding ground.
For her eggs laid in their nest of sickness.

For the cormorant in his funeral silk,
the veil of iridescence on the sand,
the shadow on the sea.

For the ocean's lap with its mortal stain.
For Ahmed at the closed border.
For the soldier with his uniform of fire.

For the gunsmith and the armourer,
the boy fusilier who joined for the company,
the farmer's sons, in it for the music.

For the hook-beaked turtles,
the dugong and the dolphin,
the whale struck dumb by the missile's thunder.

For the tern, the gull and the restless wader,
the long migrations and the slow dying,
the veiled sun and the stink of anger.

For the burnt earth and the sun put out,
the scalded ocean and the blazing well.
For vengeance, and the ashes of language.

GILLIAN CLARKE
(b. 1937)
Punishment

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
hers blindfold a soiled bandage,
hers noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adulteress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeuer

of your brain’s exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles’ webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

SEAMUS HEANEY
(1939–2013)
Flag

1 What’s that fluttering in a breeze?
   It’s just a piece of cloth
   that brings a nation to its knees.

   What’s that unfurling from a pole?
5 It’s just a piece of cloth
   that makes the guts of men grow bold.

   What’s that rising over a tent?
10 It’s just a piece of cloth
   that dares the coward to relent.

15 What’s that flying across a field?
   It’s just a piece of cloth
   that will outlive the blood you bleed.

   How can I possess such a cloth?
   Just ask for a flag, my friend.

   Then blind your conscience to the end.

JOHN AGARD
(B. 1949)

Phrase Book

1 I’m standing here inside my skin,
   which will do for a Human Remains Pouch
   for the moment. Look down there (up here).
   Quickly. Slowly. This is my front room

5 where I’m lost in the action, live from a war,
   on screen. I am an Englishwoman. I don’t understand you.
   What’s the matter? You are right. You are wrong.
   Things are going well (badly). Am I disturbing you?

   TV is showing bliss as taught to pilots:
10 Blend, Low silhouette, Irregular shape, Small,
   Secluded. (Please write it down. Please speak slowly.)
   Bliss is how it was in this very room
when I raised my body to his mouth,  
when he even balanced me in the air,  
15 or at least I thought so and yes the pilots say  
yes they have caught it through the Side-Looking  

Airbone Radar, and through the J-Stars.  
I am expecting a gentleman (a young gentleman,  
two gentlemen, some gentlemen). Please send him  
20 (them) up at once. This is really beautiful.  

Yes they have seen us, the pilots in the Kill Box  
on their screens and played the routine for  
getting us Stealthed, that is, Cleaned, to you and me,  
Taken Out. They know how to move into a single room  
25 like that, to send in with Pinpoint Accuracy, a hundred Harms.  
I have two cases and a cardboard box. There is another  
bag there. I cannot open my case – look out,  
the lock is broken. Have I done enough?  

Bliss the pilots say is for evasion  
and escape. What’s love in all this debris?  
Just one person pounding another into dust,  
into dust. I do not know the word for it yet.  
30

Where is the British Consulate? Please explain.  
What does it mean? What must I do? Where  
can I find? What have I done? I have done  
nothing. Let me pass please. I am an Englishwoman.  

JO SHAPCOTT  
(b. 1953)
Honour Killing

At last I’m taking off this coat,
this black coat of a country
that I swore for years was mine,
that I wore more out of habit
than design.
Born wearing it,
I believed I had no choice.

I’m taking off this veil,
this black veil of a faith
that made me faithless
to myself,
that tied my mouth,
gave my god a devil’s face,
and muffled my own voice.

I’m taking off these silks,
these lacy things
that feed dictator dreams,
the mangalsutra and the rings
rattling in a tin cup of needs
that beggared me.

I’m taking off this skin,
and then the face, the flesh,
the womb.

Let’s see
what I am in here
when I squeeze past
the easy cage of bone.

Let’s see
what I am out here,
making, crafting,
plotting
at my new geography.

IMTIAZ DHARKER
(b. 1954)
Partition

1 She was nineteen-years-old then
and when she stood in her garden
she could hear the cries of the people
stranded in the Ahmedabad railway station.

5 She felt it was endless – their noise –
a new sound added to the city.
Her aunt, her father’s sister,
would go to the station every day
with food and water –

10 But she felt afraid,
felt she could not go with her aunt –
So she stood in the garden
listening. Even the birds sounded different –
and the shadows cast by the neem trees
brought no consolation.

15 And each day she wished
she had the courage to go with her aunt –
And each day passed with her
listening to the cries of the people.

20 Now, when my mother
tells me this at midnight
in her kitchen – she is
seventy-years old and India
is ‘fifty’. ‘But, of course,

25 India is older than that,’ she says,
‘India was always there.

But how I wish I had
gone with my aunt
to the railway station –

30 I still feel
guilty about that.’
And then she asks me:
‘How could they
have let a man
who knew nothing
about geography
divide a country?’

SUJATA BHATT
(B. 1956)
Youth and Age

Holy Thursday

1  ‘Twas on a holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
   The children walking two and two in red and blue and green:
   Grey-headed beadle walked before, with wands as white as snow,
   Till into the high dome of Paul’s they like Thames waters flow.

5  O what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town!
   Seated in companies they sit, with radiance all their own.
   The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
   Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.

   Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
10  Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among:
   Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor.
   Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

WILLIAM BLAKE
(1757–1827)
When I have fears that I may cease to be

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

JOHN KEATS
(1795–1821)
The Bluebell

A fine and subtle spirit dwells
In every little flower,
Each one its own sweet feeling breathes
With more or less of power.

There is a silent eloquence
In every wild bluebell
That fills my softened heart with bliss
That words could never tell.

Yet I recall not long ago
A bright and sunny day,
'Twas when I led a toilsome life
So many leagues away;

That day along a sunny road
All carelessly I strayed,
Between two banks where smiling flowers
Their varied hues displayed.

Before me rose a lofty hill,
Behind me lay the sea,
My heart was not so heavy then
As it was wont to be.

Less harassed than at other times
I saw the scene was fair,
And spoke and laughed to those around,
As if I knew no care.

But when I looked upon the bank
My wandering glances fell
Upon a little trembling flower,
A single sweet bluebell.

Whence came that rising in my throat,
That dimness in my eye?
Why did those burning drops distil –
Those bitter feelings rise?

O, that lone flower recalled to me
My happy childhood's hours
When bluebells seemed like fairy gifts
A prize among the flowers,

Those sunny days of merriment
When heart and soul were free,
And when I dwelt with kindred hearts
That loved and cared for me.

I had not then mid heartless crowds
To spend a thankless life
In seeking after others' weal
With anxious toil and strife.

'Sad wanderer, weep those blissful times
That never may return!'
The lovely floweret seemed to say,
And thus it made me mourn.

ANNE BRONTE
(1820–1849)
Midnight on the Great Western

In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
And the roof-lamp’s oily flame
Played down on his listless form and face,
Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
Or whence he came.

In the band of his hat the journeying boy
Had a ticket stuck; and a string
Around his neck bore the key of his box,
That twinkled gleams of the lamp’s sad beams
Like a living thing.

What past can be yours, O journeying boy
Towards a world unknown,
Who calmly, as if incurious quite
On all at stake, can undertake
This plunge alone?

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,
Our rude realms far above,
Whence with spacious vision you mark and mete
This region of sin that you find you in,
But are not of?

THOMAS HARDY
(1840–1928)
Spring and Fall: to a Young Child

1 Margaret, are you grieving
   Over Goldengrove unleaving?
   Leaves, like the things of man, you
   With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
5 Ah! as the heart grows older
   It will come to such sights colder
   By and by, nor spare a sigh
   Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
10 And yet you will weep and know why.

Now no matter, child, the name:
   Sorrow’s springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
   What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
15 It is Margaret you mourn for.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS
(1844–1889)

Ode

1 We are the music-makers,
   And we are the dreamers of dreams,
   Wandering by lone sea-breakers
   And sitting by desolate streams;
5 World-losers and world-forsakers,
   On whom the pale moon gleams:
   Yet we are the movers and shakers
   Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
10 We build up the world’s great cities,
   And out of a fabulous story
   We fashion an empire’s glory:
   One man with a dream, at pleasure,
   Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
15 And three with a new song’s measure
   Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages lying
   In the buried past of the earth,
   Built Nineveh with our sighing,
   And Babel itself with our mirth;
20 And o’erthrew them with prophesying
   To the old of the new world’s worth;
   For each age is a dream that is dying,
   Or one that is coming to birth.

ARTHUR O’SHAUGHNESSY
(1844–1881)
Out, Out–

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont.
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
And nothing happened: day was all but done.

Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them ‘Supper’. At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh.

As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
He saw all spoiled. ‘Don’t let him cut my hand off
The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!’
So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.

And then — the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little — less — nothing! — and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

ROBERT FROST
(1874–1963)
Red Roses

1 Tommy is three and when he’s bad
   his mother dances with him.
   She puts on the record,
   ‘Red Roses for a Blue Lady’
5 and throws him across the room.
   Mind you,
   she never laid a hand on him.
   only the wall laid a hand on him.
   He gets red roses in different places,
10 the head, that time he was as sleepy as a river,
   the back, that time he was a broken scarecrow,
   the arm like a diamond had bitten it,
   the leg, twisted like a licorice stick,
   all the dance they did together,
15 Blue Lady and Tommy.
   You fell, she said, just remember you fell.
   I fell, is all he told the doctors
   in the big hospital. A nice lady came
   and asked him questions but because
20 he didn’t want to be sent away he said, I fell.
   He never said anything else although he could talk fine.
   He never told about the music
   or how she’d sing and shout
   holding him up and throwing him.

25 He pretends he is her ball.
   He tries to fold up and bounce
   but he squashes like fruit.
   For he loves Blue Lady and the spots
   of red red roses he gives her.

ANNE SEXTON
(1928–1974)
Baby Song

From the private ease of Mother’s womb
I fall into the lighted room.

Why don’t they simply put me back,
Where it is warm and wet and black?

But one thing follows on another.
Things were different inside Mother.

Padded and jolly I would ride
The perfect comfort of her inside.

They tuck me in a rustling bed
– I lie there, raging, small, and red.

I may sleep soon, I may forget,
But I won’t forget that I regret.

A rain of blood poured round her womb,
But all time roars outside this room.

THOM GUNN
(1929–2004)
You’re

Clownlike, happiest on your hands,
Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled,
Gilled like a fish. A common-sense
Thumbs-down on the dodo’s mode.

Wrapped up in yourself like a spool,
Trawling your dark as owls do.
Mute as a turnip from the Fourth
Of July to All Fools’ Day,
O high-riser, my little loaf.

Vague as fog and looked for like mail.
Farther off than Australia.
Bent-backed Atlas, our traveled prawn.
Snug as a bud and at home
Like a sprat in a pickle jug.

A creel of eels, all ripples.
Jumpy as a Mexican bean.
Right, like a well-done sum.
A clean slate, with your own face on.

Cold Knap Lake

We once watched a crowd
pull a drowned child from the lake.
Blue lipped and dressed in water’s long green silk
she lay for dead.

Then kneeling on the earth,
a heroine, her red head bowed,
her wartime cotton frock soaked,
my mother gave a stranger’s child her breath.
The crowd stood silent,
drawn by the dread of it.

The child breathed, bleating
and rosy in my mother’s hands.
My father took her home to a poor house
and watched her thrashed for almost drowning.

Was I there?
Or is that troubled surface something else
shadowy under the dipped fingers of willows
where satiny mud blooms in cloudiness
after the treading, heavy webs of swans
as their wings beat and whistle on the air?

All lost things lie under closing water
in that lake with the poor man’s daughter.

SYLVIA PLATH
(1932–1963)

GILLIAN CLARKE
(b. 1937)
My First Weeks

Sometimes, when I wonder what I’m like, underneath,
I think of my first two weeks, I was drenched
with happiness. The wall opened
like liquid, my head slid through, my legs, I
pushed off, from the side, soared
gently, turned, squeezed out
neatly into the cold illuminated
air and breathed it. Washed off, wrapped,
I slept, and when I woke there was the breast
the size of my head, hard and full,
the springy drupelets of the nipple. Sleep.
Milk. Heat. Every day
she held me up to the window and wagged
otherwise it was sleep and milk,
by day my mother’s, by night the nurses
would prop me with a bottle. Paradise
had its laws – every four hours and not
a minute sooner I could drink, but every four
hours I could have the world in my mouth.

Two weeks, and then home, to the end of the hall,
where at night a nurse would give me four ounces of
water every four hours, and in the meantime I shrieked for it.
They knew it would build my character,
to learn to give up, and I learned it – dawn
and the satiny breast, the burp, the boiled
sheet to be placed on where my sister couldn’t touch me,
I lay and moved my arms and legs like
feelers in the light. Glorious life!
And it would always be there, behind those nights
of tap water, the whole way back,
that fortnight of unlimited ration,
every four hours – clock of cream
and flame, I have known heaven.

SHARON OLDS
(b. 1942)
Venus’s-flytraps

1 I am five,
Wading out into deep
Sunny grass,
Unmindful of snakes
& yellowjackets, out
To the yellow flowers
Quivering in sluggish heat.
Don’t mess with me
‘Cause I have my Lone Ranger
Six-shooter. I can hurt
You with questions
Like silver bullets.
The tall flowers in my dreams are
Big as the First State Bank,
& they eat all the people
Except the ones I love.
They have women’s names,
With mouths like where
Babies come from. I am five.
I’ll dance for you
If you close your eyes. No
Peeping through your fingers.
I don’t supposed to be
This close to the tracks.
One afternoon I saw
What a train did to a cow.
Sometimes I stand so close
I can see the eyes
Of men hiding in boxcars.
Sometimes they wave
& holler for me to get back. I laugh
When trains make the dogs
Howl. Their ears hurt.
I also know bees
Can’t live without flowers.

I wonder why Daddy
Calls Mama honey.
All the bees in the world
Live in little white houses
Except the ones in these flowers.
All sticky & sweet inside.
I wonder what death tastes like.
Sometimes I toss the butterflies
Back into the air.
I wish I knew why
The music in my head
Makes me scared.
But I know things
I don’t supposed to know.
I could start walking
& never stop.
These yellow flowers
Go on forever.
Almost to Detroit.
Almost to the sea.
My mama says I’m a mistake.
That I made her a bad girl.
My playhouse is underneath
Our house, & I hear people
Telling each other secrets.

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA
(b. 1947)
Love

I hadn’t met his kind before. 
His misericord face – really 
like a joke on his father – blurred 
as if from years of polish;
his hands like curled dry leaves;

the profligate heat he gave 
out, gave out, his shallow, 
careful breaths: I thought 
his filaments would blow,

I thought he was an emperor,
dying on silk cushions. 
I didn’t know how to keep 
him wrapped, I didn’t know 
how to give him suck, I had 
no idea about him. At night

I tried to remember the feel 
of his head on my neck, the skull 
small as a cat’s, the soft spot 
hot as a smelted coin,

and the hair, the down, fine

as the innermost, vellum layer 
of some rare snowcreature’s 
aureole of fur, if you could meet 
such a beast, if you could 
get so near. I started there.

KATE CLANCHEY
(b. 1965)
Farther

I don’t know if the day after Boxing Day has a name
but it was then we climbed the Skirrid again,
choosing the long way round,
through the wood, simplified by snow,
along the dry stone wall, its puzzle solved by moss,
and out of the trees into that cleft of earth
split they say by a father’s grief
at the loss of his son to man.
We stopped there at an altar of rock and rested,
watching the dog shrink over the hill before continuing ourselves,
finding the slope steeper than expected.
A blade of wind from the east
and the broken stone giving under our feet
with the sound of a crowd sighing.

Half way up and I turned to look at you,
your bent head the colour of the rocks,
your breath reaching me, short and sharp and solitary,
and again I felt the tipping in the scales of us,
the intersection of our ages.
The dog returns having caught nothing but his own tongue
and you are with me again, so together we climbed to the top
and shared the shock of a country unrolled before us,
the hedged fields breaking on the edge of Wales.
Pulling a camera from my pocket I placed it on the trig point
and leant my cheek against the stone to find you in its frame,
before joining you and waiting for the shutter’s blink
that would tell me I had caught this:
the sky rubbed raw over the mountains,
us standing on the edge of the world, together against the view
and me reaching for some kind of purchase
or at least a shallow handhold in the thought
that with every step apart, I’m another closer to you.

OWEN SHEERS
(b. 1974)
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