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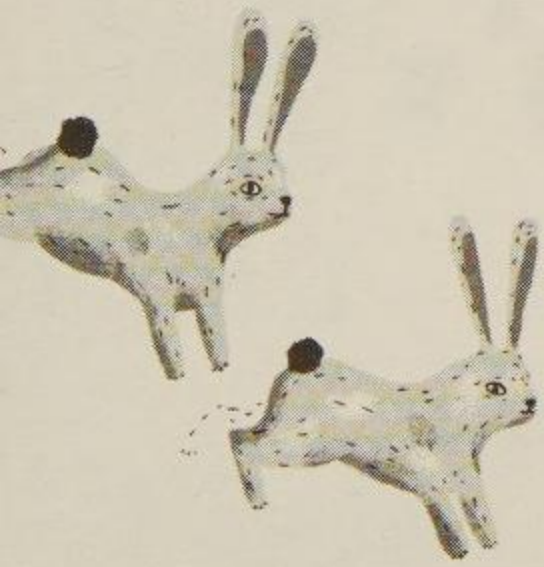
A POEM FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR



Also edited by Allie Esiri
from Macmillan Children's Books

A Poem for Every Night of the Year
Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year

A POEM FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

EDITED BY ALLIE ESIRI

Illustrated by Zanna Goldhawk

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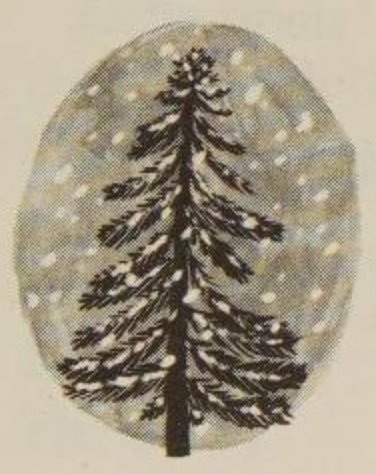
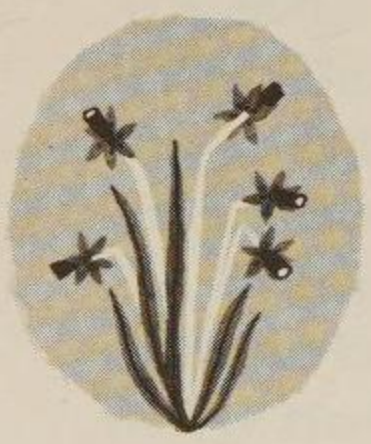
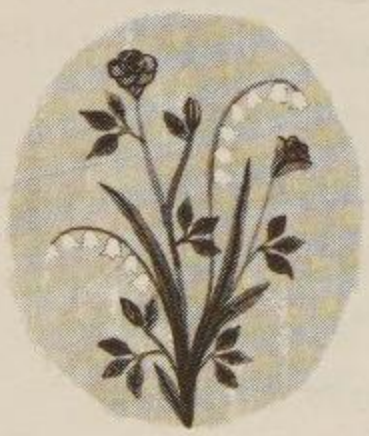
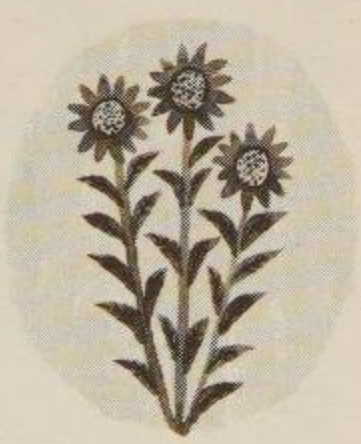
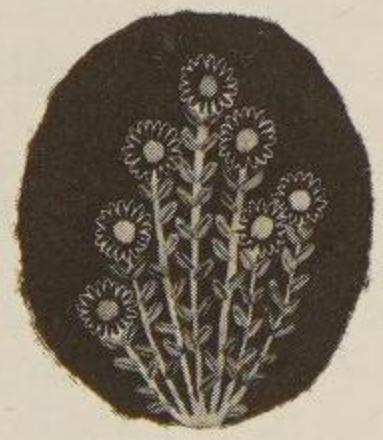
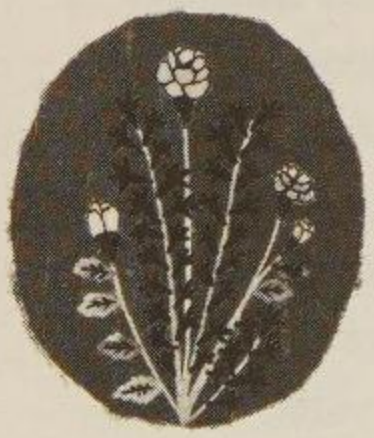
This anthology is dedicated to my parents





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Introduction

Samuel Butler once said that 'words are the clothes thoughts wear' – but what, then, are poems? Perhaps they are thoughts and emotions dressed up in their very best outfits, showing the world their most beautiful face. Of course, countless poets have offered their opinion of what poetry is. Coleridge thought that while writing prose was putting words in the best order, writing poetry involved putting 'the best words in their best order'. Alexander Pope said that poetry is 'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd' – that poetry is the language we reach for when everyday language simply isn't enough. For Emily Dickinson, some poems 'dazzled gradually', revealing their beauty and their truth unhurriedly. And others, in utter contrast, made her 'feel physically as if the top of [her] head were taken off'.

Editing this book, I have come to know what Emily Dickinson meant. There are poems here that I have read and reread, feeling that each time they seem more dazzling than they were before. And then there are those poems which make their impact powerfully, immediately and physically – that hit you on top of the head, or deep in the heart. There seems to be as much variety in poetry as there is in life itself: poems can be joyful, or mad, or astonishing, or heartbreaking. For me poetry is language amplified – it exists somewhere in between everyday language and music.

A Poem for Every Night of the Year was a collection of reflections specifically for that moment just before bed. Of course, not everyone used it like that – and there's certainly no 'correct' way to read a book of poems! Some people cheated and read the whole thing at once, or skipped backwards and forwards, or found the poem for their birthday first. This book, *A Poem for Every Day of the Year*, however, has a slightly different aim. Think of your daily poem as a boost of words for

the day ahead. You could start your day by reading a poem and perhaps finding in a handful of words a moment of peace and mindfulness – indeed, it was Wordsworth who famously said that poetry was 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. Or you could think of your daily poem as a moment of personal connection, across hundreds of years or thousands of miles, to another human being who once felt or thought something. The great novelist E. M. Forster once wrote 'only connect . . . and human love will be seen at its height'. For in connecting us with other people, poems tell us that we're not alone.

Poetry helps us see the world through another's eyes. It can put us in the mind of another human, an animal or, in Louis MacNeice's poem, even the mind of an unborn child! A poem can conjure an image so powerful that it can transport you to another place entirely – an experience Emily Dickinson explains exquisitely:

> There is no Frigate like a Book
> To take us Lands away,
> Nor any Coursers like a Page
> Of prancing Poetry –

Poetry can make everyday experiences seem fantastic and it can make the fantastic seem everyday. Some poems transport us into the minds of people in fear and pain – soldiers on the Western Front in the First World War, or men and women fighting racism, or people experiencing grief or heartbreak. Others put us in the minds of those in love, or full of hope, or, in 'The Walrus and the Carpenter', introduce us to characters who live in a world of complete nonsense! Poetry can give us strength, make us double up with laughter, or marvel at life's wonders and absurdities. I hope you find poems here that do all of these things, and more – the very best of words in their very best outfits, poems which will clothe you with brilliant lines to wear always, and which will clad your heart with beauty.

Allie Esiri

January

1 January ✶ Promise ✶ Jackie Kay

Beginning a new year is like opening a new book on to its very first page. Jackie Kay is the current Scots Makar, or Scottish Poet Laureate, and her poem is a toast to all of us at the start of the year.

Remember, the time of year
when the future appears
like a blank sheet of paper
a clean calendar, a new chance.
On thick white snow

you vow fresh footprints
then watch them go
with the wind's hearty gust.
Fill your glass. Here's tae us. Promises
made to be broken, made to last.

2 January ✶ Infant Joy ✶ William Blake

William Blake was a poet, painter, and engraver. Here is one of his short poems from his celebrated collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. It is a simple song of newborn joy – a fitting start to the year, which is itself only two days old.

'I have no name:
'I am but two days old.'
What shall I call thee?
'I happy am,
'Joy is my name.'
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee:
Thou dost smile,
I sing the while,
Sweet joy befall thee!

3 January ✶ Poem for a New Year ✶
Matt Goodfellow

As it gets under way, there can be a mounting sense of anticipation about what the year ahead might hold – about what will stay the same and what might be completely different or unexpected or wonderful. Matt Goodfellow's poem captures that sense of excitement and uncertainty – of 'something' – through a rush of rural images.

Something's moving in,
I hear the weather in the wind,
sense the tension of a sheep-field
and the pilgrimage of fins.

Something's not the same,
I taste the sap and feel the grain,
hear the rolling of the rowan
ringing, singing in a change.

Something's set to start,
there's meadow-music in the dark
and the clouds that shroud the mountain
slowly, softly start to part.

4 January ✶ Lines Written by a Bear of Very Little Brain ✶ A. A. Milne

In Chapter Seven of A. A. Milne's 1926 classic children's novel *Winnie-the-Pooh*, the eponymous Pooh recites a poem that he has made up to his friends Kanga, Rabbit and Roo. It contains just short words: as Pooh explains, 'I am a Bear of Very Little Brain, and long words bother me.' The poem ends abruptly when Kanga interrupts Pooh's train of thought.

On Monday, when the sun is hot
I wonder to myself a lot:
'Now is it true, or is it not,
That what is which and which is what?'

On Tuesday, when it hails and snows
The feeling on me grows and grows
That hardly anybody knows
If those are these or these are those.

On Wednesday, when the sky is blue,
And I have nothing else to do,
I sometimes wonder if it's true
That who is what and what is who.

On Thursday, when it starts to freeze
And hoar-frost twinkles on the trees,
How very readily one sees
That these are whose – but whose are these?

On Friday—

5 January ✶ *from* Twelfth Night ✶
William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is so named because it was originally written as a 'Twelfth Night' entertainment. The Christian holiday of Twelfth Night falls on 5 January, and marks the coming of the Feast of Epiphany. Traditionally, people would celebrate by having parties, and by playing tricks on one another. Shakespeare's play ends, as many of his comedies do, with a lively song from a comical character.

When that I was and a little tiny boy,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came to man's estate,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came, alas! to wive,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
By swaggering could I never thrive,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came unto my beds,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
With toss-pots still had drunken heads,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

A great while ago the world begun,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that's all one, our play is done,
  And we'll strive to please you every day.

6 January ✶ The Three Kings ✶
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

After Twelfth Night comes Epiphany itself, celebrated on 6 January as the date, twelve days after Christmas, when the Three Kings followed a star to Bethlehem to meet the baby Christ. Longfellow's poem tells of the journey of the three Magi: Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar.

Three Kings came riding from far away,
  Melchior and Gaspar and Baltasar;
Three Wise Men out of the East were they,
And they travelled by night and they slept by day,
  For their guide was a beautiful, wonderful star.

The star was so beautiful, large and clear,
  That all the other stars of the sky
Became a white mist in the atmosphere.
And by this they knew that the coming was near
  Of the Prince foretold in the prophecy.

Three caskets they bore on their saddle-bows,
  Three caskets of gold with golden keys;
Their robes were of crimson silk with rows
Of bells and pomegranates and furbelows,
  Their turbans like blossoming almond-trees.

And so the Three Kings rode into the West,
  Through the dusk of the night, over hill and dells,
And sometimes they nodded with beard on breast,
And sometimes talked, as they paused to rest,
  With the people they met at the wayside wells.

'Of the child that is born,' said Baltasar,
  'Good people, I pray you, tell us the news;
For we in the East have seen his star,
And have ridden fast, and have ridden far,
  To find and worship the King of the Jews.'

And the people answered, 'You ask in vain;
  We know of no king but Herod the Great!'
They thought the Wise Men were men insane,
As they spurred their horses across the plain,
  Like riders in haste, who cannot wait.

And when they came to Jerusalem,
  Herod the Great, who had heard this thing,
Sent for the Wise Men and questioned them;
And said, 'Go down unto Bethlehem,
  And bring me tidings of this new king.'

So they rode away; and the star stood still,
  The only one in the grey of morn;
Yes, it stopped, it stood still of its own free will,
Right over Bethlehem on the hill,
  The city of David where Christ was born.

And the Three Kings rode through the gate and the guard,
  Through the silent street, till their horses turned
And neighed as they entered the great inn-yard;
But the windows were closed, and the doors were barred,
  And only a light in the stable burned.

And cradled there in the scented hay,
  In the air made sweet by the breath of kine,
The little child in the manger lay,
The Child, that would be King one day
  Of a kingdom not human but divine.

His mother, Mary of Nazareth,
Sat watching beside his place of rest,
Watching the even flow of his breath,
For the joy of life and the terror of death
Were mingled together in her breast.

They laid their offerings at his feet:
The gold was their tribute to a King,
The frankincense, with its odour sweet,
Was for the Priest, the Paraclete,
The myrrh for the body's burying.

And the mother wondered and bowed her head,
And sat as still as a statue of stone;
Her heart was troubled yet comforted,
Remembering what the Angel had said
Of an endless reign and of David's throne.

Then the Kings rode out of the city gate,
With a clatter of hoofs in proud array;
But they went not back to Herod the Great,
For they knew his malice and feared his hate,
And returned to their homes by another way.

7 January ✶ Dawn ✶ Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Ella Wheeler Wilcox was an American poet writing in the nineteenth century. Her poem 'Dawn' casts night and day as lovers, and it is a perfect reflection on the theme of this book – a poem for every day.

Day's fondest moments are at dawn,
  Refreshed by his long sleep, the Light
  Kisses the languid lips of Night
Ere she can rise and hasten on.
All glowing from his dreamless rest
He holds her closely to his breast,
And sees her dusky eyes grow dim,
Till, lo! she dies for love of him.

8 January ✶ Life ✶ Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte was the eldest of the three Brontë sisters, and the author of several novels, including *Jane Eyre*. In 1846 Charlotte and her sisters Emily and Anne published a volume of poetry under names that might be mistaken for men's: Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Charlotte wrote few poems in her life, but those that remain are filled with powerful expressions of emotion and deep thinking about love, friendship and life itself.

Life, believe, is not a dream
So dark as sages say;
Oft a little morning rain
Foretells a pleasant day.
Sometimes there are clouds of gloom,
But these are transient all;
If the shower will make the roses bloom,
O why lament its fall?
Rapidly, merrily,
Life's sunny hours flit by,
Gratefully, cheerily
Enjoy them as they fly!
What though Death at times steps in,
And calls our Best away?
What though sorrow seems to win,
O'er hope, a heavy sway?
Yet Hope again elastic springs,
Unconquered, though she fell;
Still buoyant are her golden wings,
Still strong to bear us well.
Manfully, fearlessly,
The day of trial bear,
For gloriously, victoriously,
Can courage quell despair!

9 January ✶ The Pulley ✶ George Herbert

Born in Wales in 1593, the priest George Herbert was among the foremost poets of his day, and many of his poems mix religious imagery with inventive storytelling. In 'The Pulley' Herbert narrates the story of God creating humans. God gives all of his gifts to man except one: rest. We have to be like a pulley: sending love up to God, and not just pulling it down to earth.

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
'Let us,' said He, 'pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.'

So Strength first made a way;
Then Beauty flowed, then Wisdom, Honour, Pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

'For if I should,' said He,
'Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

'Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.'

10 January ✶ Letter to N. Y. ✶ Elizabeth Bishop

The word 'epistolary' means a kind of literature formed of a letter or letters – like this poem by Elizabeth Bishop. It is an ancient literary technique, appearing in the poetry of Ovid, making up some of the books of the Bible ('Epistles'), and forming the narrative framework for novels, including *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Next time you need to write a letter or message to a friend, why not try writing a poem instead?

In your next letter I wish you'd say
where you are going and what you are doing;
how are the plays, and after the plays
what other pleasures you're pursuing:

taking cabs in the middle of the night,
driving as if to save your soul
where the road goes round and round the park
and the meter glares like a moral owl,

and the trees look so queer and green
standing alone in big black caves
and suddenly you're in a different place
where everything seems to happen in waves,

and most of the jokes you just can't catch,
like dirty words rubbed off a slate,
and the songs are loud but somehow dim
and it gets so terribly late,

and coming out of the brownstone house
to the gray sidewalk, the watered street,
one side of the buildings rises with the sun
like a glistening field of wheat.

– Wheat, not oats, dear. I'm afraid
if it's wheat it's none of your sowing,
nevertheless I'd like to know
what you are doing and where you are going.

11 January ✶ Dust of Snow ✶ Robert Frost

Robert Frost remains one of America's best loved poets, and he won more Pulitzer Prizes for poetry than anyone else – six in total. His poetry is usually carefully measured, and he prefers directness and simple, striking images to elaborate or intricate poems.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

12 January ✶ Occasional Poem ✶
Jacqueline Woodson

Poems written for particular dates or days, or to remember certain historical or personal events, are called 'occasional poems'. In this poem, the occasion isn't a great battle or a political event, but just a bitterly cold January day – the characters in the poem even start to argue about what counts as an occasion! Jacqueline Woodson is a celebrated American writer, and Barack Obama, the 44th US President, is a fan of her work.

Ms. Marcus says that an occasional poem is a poem
written about something
important
or special
that's gonna happen
or already did.
Think of a specific occasion, she says – *and write about it.*

Like what?! Lamont asks.
He's all slouched down in his seat.
I don't feel like writing about no occasion.

How about your birthday? Ms. Marcus says.
What about it? Just a birthday. Comes in June and it ain't June, Lamont says. *As a matter of fact,*
he says, *it's January and it's snowing.*
Then his voice gets real low and he says
And when it's January and all cold like this,
feels like June's a long, long ways away.

The whole class looks at Ms. Marcus.
Some of the kids are nodding.
Outside the sky looks like it's made out of metal
and the cold, cold air is rattling the windowpanes
and coming underneath them too.

I seen Lamont's coat.
It's gray and the sleeves are too short.
It's down but it looks like a lot of the feathers fell out
a long time ago.
Ms. Marcus got a nice coat.
It's down too but real puffy so
maybe when she's inside it
she can't even tell January from June.

Then write about January, Ms. Marcus says, *that's an occasion.*
But she looks a little bit sad when she says it
Like she's sorry she ever brought the whole
occasional poem thing up.

I was gonna write about Mama's funeral
but Lamont and Ms. Marcus going back and forth
zapped all the ideas from my head.

I guess them arguing
on a Tuesday in January's an occasion
So I guess this is an occasional poem.

13 January ✶ The Midnight Skaters ✶
Roger McGough

13 January is St Hilary's Day, which is known as 'the coldest day of the year'; not because it always is, but because remarkably icy conditions mark the history of that day. The nickname can be traced back to a great frost in 1086, but it is the big freeze of 1205 that cemented the day's reputation. The weather was so icy that people held frost fairs, and even the River Thames froze over – intrepid Londoners were able to skate on its surface!

It is midnight in the ice-rink
  And all is cool and still.
Darkness seems to hold its breath
  Nothing moves, until

Out of the kitchen, one by one,
  The cutlery comes creeping,
Quiet as mice to the brink of the ice
  While all the world is sleeping.

Then suddenly, a serving-spoon
  Switches on the light,
And the silver swoops upon the ice
  Screaming with delight.

The knives are high-speed skaters
  Round and round they race,
Blades hissing, sissing,
  Whizzing at a dizzy pace.

Forks twirl like dancers
  Pirouetting on the spot.
Teaspoons (who take no chances)
  Hold hands and giggle a lot.

All night long the fun goes on
    Until the sun, their friend,
Gives the warning signal
    That all good things must end.

So they slink back to the darkness
    of the kitchen cutlery-drawer
And steel themselves to wait
    Until it's time to skate once more.

At eight the canteen ladies
    Breeze in as good as gold
To lay the tables and wonder
    Why the cutlery is so cold.

14 January ✶ To Science ✶ Edgar Allan Poe

In January 1610, the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei wrote of his discovery of the four moons of Jupiter. This was the first time someone had proved that there were objects in space that could not be seen with the naked eye, but which were visible through the use of a telescope (then a recent invention). Galileo's findings were not received well, particularly by the Catholic Church, and he was penalized for his claim that the earth revolves around the sun. He spent the last eight years of his life under house arrest. In Poe's sonnet 'To Science' the poet asks a series of questions. Does science serve to tear poetry and mythology out of life itself, and give us only 'dull realities'? In a word, does science make things more *boring*? It's important to note that the poem doesn't answer its own questions.

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
  Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
  Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
  Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
  Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
  And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
  Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

15 January ✶ *from* I Have a Dream ✶ Martin Luther King, Jr.

No one can say for sure what makes a poem, but it is usually accepted that poetry is about the sound as well as the sight of words, and about rhythm, the flow of lines, and the uniqueness of the words the poet chooses to use. Few people would dispute the poetic power of Dr Martin Luther King's speech known as 'I Have a Dream'. Delivered in 1963, the speech calls for the end of racism in the United States, and is considered to be a crucial moment in the American Civil Rights Movement. It was delivered a hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, which led the way to the abolition of slavery in the United States. In 1983 Martin Luther King Jr. Day was designated an American holiday on the third Monday in January, close to his 15 January birthday.

I say to you today, my friends . . .
I still have a dream. It is a dream
deeply rooted in the American dream.
I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up
and live out the true meaning of its creed.
We hold these truths to be self-evident
that all men are created equal.
  I have a dream
that one day on the red hills of Georgia
the sons of former slaves and the sons
of former slave-owners will be able
to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream
that one day, even the state of Mississippi,
a state sweltering with the heat of injustice,
sweltering with the heat of oppression,
will be transformed into an oasis
of freedom and justice.
I have a dream
that my four little children will one day
live in a nation where they will not
be judged by the colour of their skin
but by the content of their character.
I have a dream today!

I have a dream
that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious
racists, with its governor having his lips
dripping with the words of interposition
and nullification, one day, right here in Alabama,
little black boys and black girls will be able
to join hands with little white boys
and white girls as sisters and brothers.
I have a dream today!

I have a dream . . .
This is our hope.
This is the faith that I go
back to the South with . . .

Let freedom ring . . . !
Allow freedom to ring . . . !
from every mountainside . . .
from every peak . . .
from every village and hamlet . . .
we will be able to join hands and sing . . .
'Free at last, free at last;
thank God Almighty, we are free at last.'

16 January ✶ The Burial of Sir John Moore ✶ Charles Wolfe

Charles Wolfe was a nineteenth-century Irish priest, but is better remembered for this poem on 'The Burial of Sir John Moore'. The poem was a favourite of the great poet Lord Byron, who was largely responsible for its popularity after Wolfe's death. The Battle of Corunna, in Spain, was fought between France and Britain in 1806, as part of the larger Napoleonic Wars. Sir John Moore, a distinguished general who was in charge of the British forces, was fatally wounded by cannon fire at Corunna. Wolfe's words serve to commemorate Moore as a hero.

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
  As his corse to the rampart we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
  O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

We buried him darkly at dead of night,
  The sods with our bayonets turning;
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light
  And the lantern dimly burning.

No useless coffin enclosed his breast,
  Nor in sheet nor in shroud we wound him,
But he lay like a warrior taking his rest
  With his martial cloak around him.

Few and short were the prayers we said,
  And we spoke not a word of sorrow;
But we steadfastly gazed on the face that was dead,
  And we bitterly thought of the morrow.

We thought, as we hollowed his narrow bed
And smoothed down his lonely pillow,
That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head,
And we far away on the billow!

Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that's gone,
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him –
But little he'll reck, if they let him sleep on
In the grave where a Briton has laid him.

But half of our heavy task was done
When the clock struck the hour for retiring;
And we heard the distant and random gun
That the foe was sullenly firing.

Slowly and sadly we laid him down,
From the field of his fame fresh and gory;
We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone –
But left him alone with his glory!

17 January ✶ *from* Elegy on Captain Cook ✶ Anna Seward

On this day in 1773, Captain James Cook, on his ship HMS *Resolution*, led the first crossing of the Antarctic Circle. Cook went on to be the first European to chart the east coast of Australia and to circumnavigate the entirety of New Zealand. Seward's poem for Cook is an elegy, meaning a poem that marks and laments a death (Cook died in 1779, a year before Seward's poem was written). In this extract, Seward asks the Nine Muses – the mythological inspiration for poets – to sing to her of Cook, and to tell her what would motivate someone to such wild and dangerous adventure.

Ye, who ere-while for Cook's illustrious brow
Pluck'd the green laurel, and the oaken bough,
Hung the gay garlands on the trophied oars,
And pour'd his fame along a thousand shores,
Strike the slow death-bell! – weave the sacred verse,
And strew the cypress o'er his honour'd hearse;
In sad procession wander round the shrine,
And weep him mortal, whom ye sung divine!
Say first, what Power inspir'd his dauntless breast
With scorn of danger, and inglorious rest,
To quit imperial London's gorgeous domes,
Where, deck'd in thousand tints, bright Pleasure roams;
In cups of summer-ice her nectar pours,
Or twines, 'mid wint'ry snows, her roseate bowers . . .
Where Beauty moves with fascinating grace,
Calls the sweet blush to wanton o'er her face,
On each fond youth her soft artillery tries,
Aims her light smile, and rolls her frolic eyes:
What Power inspir'd his dauntless breast to brave
The scorch'd Equator, and th' Antarctic wave?

18 January ✶ January ✶ William Carlos Williams

When we think about poetry we usually think about carefully measured lines that end in rhymes. But not all poetry is rhymed – in fact, the majority of modern poetry is rhymeless. But there is still rhythm even without rhyme, and poets like William Carlos Williams are experts in harnessing the invisible powers of sound – found here in the image of the musical wind.

Again I reply to the triple winds
running chromatic fifths of derision
outside my window:
                Play louder.
You will not succeed. I am
bound more to my sentences
the more you batter at me
to follow you.
                And the wind,
as before, fingers perfectly
its derisive music.

19 January ✶ I'll Tell You How the Sun Rose ✶ Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson was a nineteenth-century American poet. She was an intensely private person, and published only a handful of short poems in her lifetime. After her death, her sister discovered nearly 2,000 poems hidden in her room. Many of Dickinson's poems are short meditations that reflect her individual thoughts or moods. Though there is often a sadness in her writing, this poem about the rising and setting of the sun is full of wonder at something which happens each and every day but never stops being beautiful and remarkable.

I'll tell you how the Sun rose –
A Ribbon at a time –
The Steeples swam in Amethyst –
The news like Squirrels ran.
The Hills untied their Bonnets –
The Bobolinks – begun –
Then I said softly to myself –
'That must have been the Sun!'
But how he set – I know not –
There seemed a purple stile
Which little Yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while –
Till when they reached the other side,
A Dominie in Gray –
Put gently up the evening Bars –
And led the flock away –

20 January ✶ Days ✶ Philip Larkin

Through reading a poem a day, we are counting the days as they pass. But what are days for, anyway? Philip Larkin's short, comical verse is a kind of warning. If living in days is a problem, then the solution is a bad one: to die.

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question
Brings the priest and the doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.

21 January ✶ A Colossal Glossary ✶ Paul Muldoon

Paul Muldoon's career as a poet has included a spell as the Oxford Professor of Poetry, one of the highest honours alongside the Poet Laureateship, as well as being poetry editor at the *New Yorker* magazine. While most of his poetry is serious, this alphabetical array of strange and surprising words is a light-hearted tour of the English language.

The **aardvark**'s a kind of ant-eater, an 'earth-pig' in Dutch,
while **abracadabra** is a charm much

favoured by alchemists.
As for that wine-coloured gem, the **amethyst**,

A Greek would place it in his cup 'so as not to be drunk',
a thought no foul-mouthed **Anglo-Saxon** ever thunk.

Azure is the blue of lapis lazuli.
The **bandicoot** is a rat from Australasia

that likes to **browse** or graze on the tender shoots of rice.
A **carbon-copy**'s a replica, though only once or twice.

Yellow or green, **chartreuse** is a liqueur
distilled, as always, by monks. The **coypu**'s prized for its fur;

not so the wild dog or **dingo**.
An **eland**'s an African antelope. In medical lingo

an **epiglottis** is a tongue, an **esophagus** a gizzard.
A **glitch** would be a snag or hazard.

The **ibex** is a mountain goat; **i.e.** is short for **id est**,
in Latin 'that is'. A pain in the side

was once a **jade**, a word which
we now use of the greenish stone deemed to mend the stitch.

A **jennet** might be a jade, in the horse-sense.
Soldiers in **khaki** uniforms tense

when they hear the siren-song of a **klaxon**,
since it almost always represents a call to action.

A **lagoon** is a shallow lake, usually on the coast.
The nocturnal **lemur** is essentially a ghost.

A **Lilo** is a rubber raft, while a **limousine**
is a vehicle whose occupants thankfully can't be seen

since they're often types who say **moi** for 'me'
and have a penchant for drinking sparkling **mongoose**-pee.

Whipped cream is the main ingredient of **mousse**.
The **narwhal** relies on its tusk when hunting Eskimos.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon
for whom the writing on the wall was plain

as plain can be; a **nicety** may be either a subtle
or idle distinction: as such, it's its own rebuttal.

The **oryx**, like all gazelles, is thought by lions to wallow
in self-pity. An **osier** is a type of willow.

A **pickle** is anything preserved in vinegar or brine.
As one pine opined to another pitch-pine,

'He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled';
though **pitch** more commonly refers to asphalt.

The root of **prehensile** is 'prehendere', to seize;
you may already have grasped that a **quagga** is a wild ass.

The **rouble** and **rupee** are Russian and Indian coins.
To be **scrupulous** is to have qualms of conscience,

from 'scrupulus', a stone with a cutting edge;
the reed with a razor-sharp blade is a **sedge**.

Tamburlaine, also known as Tamerlane or Timur,
was a Mongol king whose deportment was anything but
demure,

his stock-in-trade being rapine and reprisal.
The **tapir** lives as a hermit in the rain-forests of Brazil

where it meditates on **Theology**;
'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was Algae'.

A no less avid theologian was Thomas de **Torquemada**
whose cruel streak ran the gamut

from burning at the stake through hanging by a gaff
to the flaying of some fatted divinity calf

all in the name of Truth and Justice.
On the subject of the 'thrice-great' Hermes **Trismegistus**,

or his Lord Lieutenant, Zoroaster,
my lips are sealed. I will say this; a **trundle** is a caster.

Often mistaken for a llama or alpaca, the newly-shorn **vicuña**
spits at the thought of the Norseman or **Viking**

who stole the shirt off his back. The chief
sense of **winnow** is to fan, to separate the wheat from the chaff,

the sheep from the goats, good from evil.
It's hard to categorize the **xylophagan**, this wood-boring
weevil

makes of something nothing, **zilch**;
just as a worm may contain an armada, little much,

all the meanings of all the rest
of the words in this book are buried in one, a treasurechest.

22 January ✶ Human Family ✶ Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou, who died in 2014, was a celebrated poet and civil rights activist. She moved between several careers in her life, doing everything from working as a cook to reporting as a journalist in North Africa. This poem explores the essence of humanity, the thing we all have in common, no matter how different we might seem on the surface.

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.
Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived
as true profundity,
and others claim they really live
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones
can confuse, bemuse, delight,
brown and pink and beige and purple,
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world,
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women
called Jane and Mary Jane,
but I've not seen any two
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different
although their features jibe,
and lovers think quite different thoughts
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,
we weep on England's moors,
and laugh and moan in Guinea,
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,
are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unalike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unalike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unalike.

23 January ✶ The Distance ✶ Eleanor Farjeon

This poem has an incantatory and dreamlike quality. Farjeon takes us over the horizon and back again on a trip of the imagination.

Over the sounding sea,
Off the wandering sea
I smelt the smell of the distance
And longed for another existence.
Smell of pineapple, maize, and myrrh,
Parrot-feather and monkey-fur,
    Brown spice,
    Blue ice,
Fields of tobacco and tea and rice,

And soundless snows,
And snowy cotton,
Otto of rose
Incense in an ivory palace,
Jungle rivers rich and rotten,
    Slumbering valleys
    Smouldering mountains
    Rank morasses
    And frozen fountains,
Black molasses and purple wine,
Coral and pearl and tar and brine,
The smell of panther and polar-bear
    And leopard-lair
    And mermaid-hair
Came from the four-cornered distance,
And I longed for another existence.

24 January ✶ Friendship ✶ Cole Porter

Cole Porter was an American composer and lyricist in the first half of the twentieth century. He is noted for his musical *Kiss Me Kate*, and for the hit song 'I've Got You Under My Skin', made famous by Frank Sinatra. Here he provides a song in homage to friendship.

If you're ever in a jam,
  Here I am.
If you're ever in a mess,
  S.O.S.
If you ever feel so happy you land in jail,
  I'm your bail.

It's friendship, friendship,
Just a perfect blendship.
When other friendships have been forgot,
Ours will still be hot.

If you're ever up a tree,
  Phone to me.
If you're ever down a well,
  Ring my bell.
If you ever lost your teeth and you're out to dine,
  Borrow mine.

It's friendship, friendship,
Just a perfect blendship.
When other friendships have been forgot,
Ours will still be great.

It's friendship, friendship,
Just a perfect blendship.
When other friendships have been forgot,
Ours will still be it.

25 January ✶ To a Mouse ✶ Robert Burns

25 January is Burns Night, a celebration of the life and works of the eighteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Burns, most famous to us for the New Year's Eve song 'Auld Lang Syne'. Burns was so popular in his life that there were fan clubs set up in his honour, and the tradition of toasting his memory started in these Burns Clubs. On this night, Scots eat haggis, drink whisky, toast the lassies and the laddies, and recite Burns's verse. This poem gives us the expression 'the best laid plans of mice and men', which we use to describe how even well-made plans go wrong.

On Turning Her up in her Nest with the Plough, November 1785

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
    Wi' bickerin brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
    Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
    Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
    An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave
    'S a sma' request:
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
    An' never miss 't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary Winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

26 January ✶ Ballad of the Totems ✶ Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)

Today is Australia Day, the national holiday of Australia. It marks the 1788 arrival of British ships on the island, and the raising of the British flag. It is considered to be a controversial holiday by those who see it as a celebration of the European colonization of native people and their land. Oodgeroo Noonuccal was an Aboriginal Australian poet and activist, and the first Aboriginal to publish a book of poetry.

My father was Noonuccal man and kept
old tribal way,
His totem was the Carpet Snake,
whom none must ever slay;
But mother was of Peewee clan,
and loudly she expressed
The daring view that carpet snakes
were nothing but a pest.

Now one lived inside with us
in full immunity,
For no one dared to interfere
with father's stern decree;
A mighty fellow ten feet long,
and as we lay in bed
We kids could watch him round a beam
not far above our head.

Only the dog was scared of him,
we'd hear its whines and growls,
But mother fiercely hated him
because he took her fowls.
You should have heard her diatribes
that flowed in angry torrents,
With words you'd never see in print,
except in D.H. Lawrence.

'I kill that robber,' she would scream,
fierce as a spotted cat;
'You see that bulge inside of him?
My speckly hen make that!'
But father's loud and strict command
made even mother quake;
I think he'd sooner kill a man
than kill a carpet snake.

That reptile was a greedy guts,
and as each bulge digested
He'd come down on the hunt at night,
as appetite suggested.
We heard his stealthy slithering sound
across the earthen floor,
While the dog gave a startled yelp
and bolted out the door.

Then over in the chicken-yard
hysterical fowls gave tongue,
Loud frantic squawks accompanied by
the barking of the mung,
Until at last the racket passed,
and then to solve the riddle,
Next morning he was back up there
with a new bulge in his middle.

When father died we wailed and cried,
    our grief was deep and sore;
And strange to say from that sad day
    the snake was seen no more.
The wise old men explained to us:
    'It was his tribal brother,
And that is why it done a guy' –
    but some looked hard at mother.

She seemed to have a secret smile,
    her eyes were smug and wary,
She looked about as innocent as the cat
    that ate the pet canary.
We never knew, but anyhow
    (to end this tragic rhyme)
I think we all had snake for tea
    one day about that time.

27 January ✶ First They Came for the Jews ✶ Martin Niemöller

Today is designated Holocaust Remembrance Day, a day to remember the devastating tragedies of the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1945, over six million Jewish men, women and children were murdered by Adolf Hitler's Nazi party – two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe at that time. Other victims of the Holocaust included people with different religious or political views, disabled people, those with different sexualities, the Romani people, and many many more. Pastor Martin Niemöller's lines are a powerful reminder that we must speak up and stand up for others, and not just for ourselves – and that we must never let the horrors of the Holocaust be repeated.

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the communists
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me –
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

28 January ✶ Yonder See the Morning Blink ✶ A. E. Housman

Reading a poem a day can become a little ritual, like brushing your teeth in the morning or making yourself a cup of tea. In Housman's witty little poem, the speaker is at the point where he wants to put a stop to all of his routines, and he asks himself why he bothers at all. (And, in case you're wondering, ten thousand mornings is the equivalent to twenty-seven years.)

Yonder see the morning blink:
  The sun is up, and up must I,

To wash and dress and eat and drink

And look at things and talk and think
  And work, and God knows why.

Oh often have I washed and dressed
  And what's to show for all my pain?

Let me lie abed and rest:

Ten thousand times I've done my best
  And all's to do again.

29 January ✶ *from* Romeo and Juliet ✶ William Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet is the tragic tale of two young lovers from rival families, who fall for one another but who lose their lives in the name of their love. In these lines, from Act 3, Scene 2 of the play, Juliet eagerly awaits the arrival of Romeo, whom she has recently married in secret. Impatient to see her lover, she is wishing the sun and the day away so that night will bring with it Romeo.

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus' lodging. Such a waggoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the west,
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That runaways' eyes may wink, and Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,
It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle, till strange love grown bold
Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come, night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo; and, when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

O, I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it, and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd. So tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them.

30 January ✶ Rain ✶ Spike Milligan

Have you ever wondered why rain shoots down in little thin jets rather than in some other strange shape – well, Spike Milligan has an answer for you.

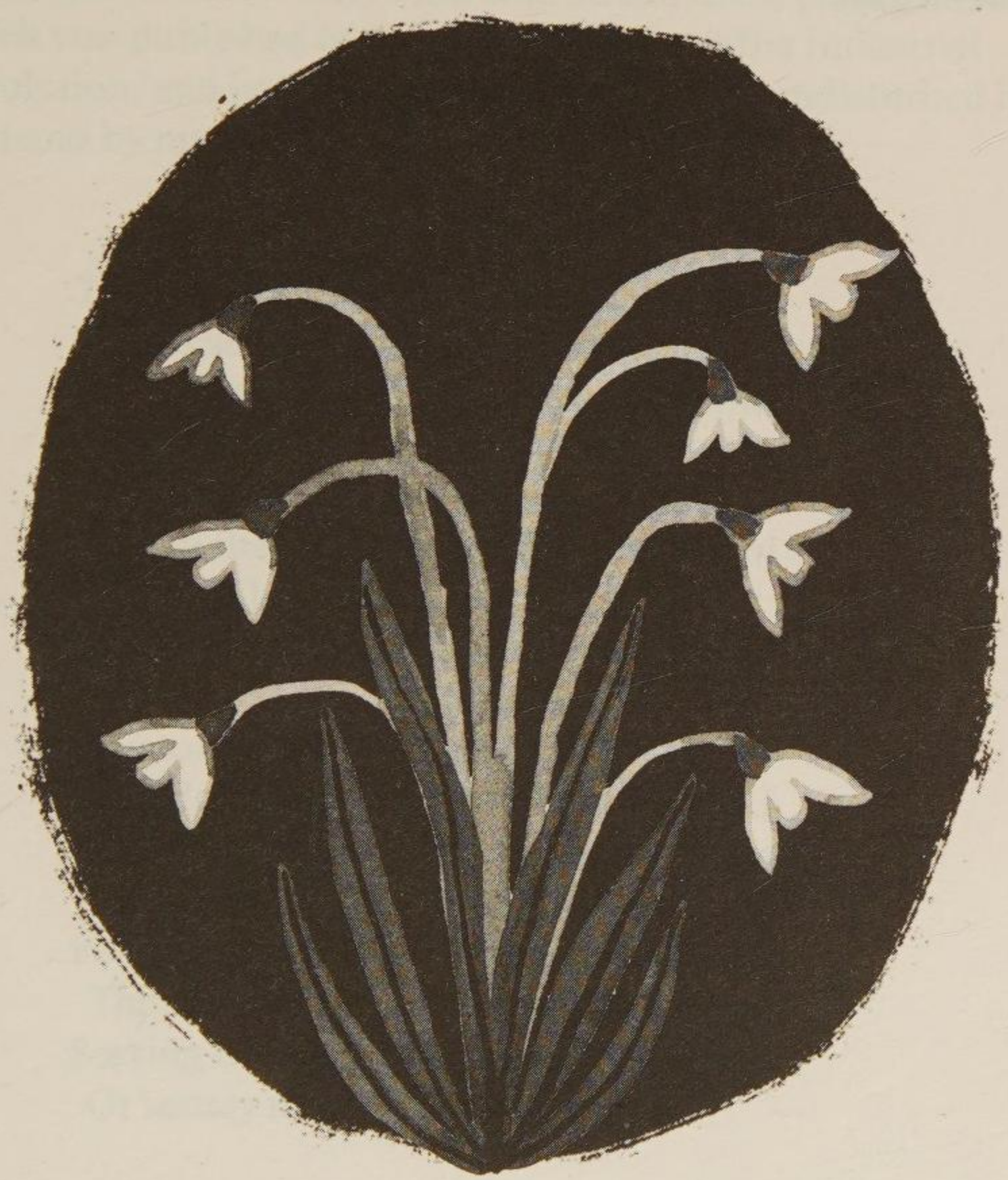
There are holes in the sky.
Where the rain gets in.
But they're ever so small.
That's why the rain is thin.

31 January ✶ Peas ✶ Anon.

Here, to help offset any winter gloom you might be experiencing at the end of January, is another funny four-line poem – this time about peas.

I eat my peas with honey,
I've done it all my life,
They do taste kind of funny,
But it keeps them on the knife.

February



1 February ✶ Days ✶ Tony Mitton

We are already one month into the year – where did all the days go? The children's author and poet Tony Mitton asks such a question, in this poem about the change that happens between days.

Old day, gold day,
where did you go?

Over the skyline,
sinking low.
Into the arms
of the waiting night
to nestle myself
in its dark delight.

New day, blue day,
what will you bring?

Light in the sky
and a song to sing.
Sun bobs brightly
up with the dawn,
spreading warmth
as the day is born.

2 February ✶ *from* February ✶ John Clare

John Clare's poetry is a celebration of nature and the natural world. Clare was the son of a farm labourer in rural England, and worked as a farmhand while still a child in the early nineteenth century. There is a wild streak to his poetry, which was published in the period known as the Industrial Revolution, and he presents a vision of nature undisturbed by man and by machines.

The barking dogs, by lane and wood,
  Drive sheep a-field from foddering ground;
And echo, in her summer mood,
  Briskly mocks the cheering sound.
The flocks, as from a prison broke,
  Shake their wet fleeces in the sun,
While, following fast, a misty smoke
  Reeks from the moist grass as they run.

No more behind his master's heels
  The dog creeps on his winter-pace;
But cocks his tail, and o'er the fields
  Runs many a wild and random chase,
Following, in spite of chiding calls,
  The startled cat with harmless glee,
Scaring her up the weed-green walls,
  Or mossy mottled apple tree.

As crows from morning perches fly,
  He barks and follows them in vain;
E'en larks will catch his nimble eye,
  And off he starts and barks again,
With breathless haste and blinded guess,
  Oft following where the hare hath gone;
Forgetting, in his joy's excess,
  His frolic puppy-days are done!

3 February ✶ A Giant Firefly ✶ Kobayashi Issa

Kobayashi Issa was a Japanese poet, living from 1763 to 1828. He was known as 'Issa', meaning 'a cup of tea' – an everyday object that captures a sense of his simple and elegant style. Issa was one of the 'Great Four' masters of the 'haiku' form. Traditionally, a haiku is composed of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Despite the length, the haiku form is a challenge, precisely because every word must count.

A giant firefly:
that way, this way, that way, this –
and it passes by.

4 February ✶ All That Is Gold Does Not Glitter ✶ J. R. R. Tolkien

This poem appears twice in the *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book of Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. It is a riddle, in which things appear out of their opposites. It describes the character of Aragorn, who is set to be king, despite seeming unkingly. Tolkien took inspiration from the popular phrase 'all that glitters is not gold'.

All that is gold does not glitter,
  Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
  Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
  A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be the blade that was broken,
  The crownless again shall be king.

5 February ✶ Spellbound ✶ Emily Brontë

Emily Brontë was the sister of Anne Brontë and Charlotte Brontë (whose poem 'Life' appeared in January). She is usually remembered for her tale of gothic romance *Wuthering Heights*, but Emily was also an accomplished poet. The Brontës lived on the Yorkshire moors, and the often fierce weather of that landscape appears in their writings ('wuthering' refers to howling wind).

The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow.
And the storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me;
I will not, cannot go.

6 February ✶ A Riddle ✶ Jonathan Swift

Jonathan Swift was one of the greatest satirists in the English language. In his writings he takes up the voices and styles of other writers and literary forms, and he exposes the inherent silliness of politics and society alike. Swift's best known work is *Gulliver's Travels*, the mock travel journal of a man who goes on fantastic adventures to lands of giants and lands where horses rule over people. In the poem below, Swift uses the traditional form of the riddle to find creative ways of thinking about . . . snow.

From Heav'n I fall, tho' from Earth I begin,
No Lady alive can show such a Skin.
I'm bright as an Angel, and light as a Feather,
But heavy, and dark, when you squeeze me together.
Tho' candor and truth in my aspect I bear,
Yet many poor creatures I help to insnare.
Though so much of Heav'n appears in my Make,
The foulest Impressions I easily take.
My Parent and I produce one another,
The Mother the Daughter, the Daughter the Mother.

7 February ✶ A Winter Bluejay ✶ Sara Teasdale

Sara Teasdale was an American poet, writing in the early part of the twentieth century. Her skill as a poet was well recognized in her lifetime, and in 1917 she was the first person to win a Pulitzer Prize for a collection of poems *Love Songs*. Here, Teasdale describes a couple out walking through freshly fallen snow.

Crisply the bright snow whispered,
Crunching beneath our feet;
Behind us as we walked along the parkway,
Our shadows danced
Fantastic shapes in vivid blue.
Across the lake the skaters
Flew to and fro,
With sharp turns weaving
A frail invisible net.
In ecstasy the earth
Drank the silver sunlight;
In ecstasy the skaters
Drank the wine of speed;
In ecstasy we laughed
Drinking the wine of love.
Had not the music of our joy
Sounded its highest note?
But no,
For suddenly, with lifted eyes you said,
'Oh look!'
There, on the black bough of a snow-flecked maple,
Fearless and gay as our love,
A bluejay cocked his crest!
Oh, who can tell the range of joy
Or set the bounds of beauty?

8 February ✶ An Unusual Cat-Poem ✶
Wendy Cope

The poet Wendy Cope has a remarkable talent to be both very serious and very funny, as you can see in her unusual poem below. She is, of course, making a drama out of the cat being dead by writing a poem!

My cat is dead
But I have decided not to make a big
tragedy out of it.

9 February ✶ It Was Long Ago ✶ Eleanor Farjeon

Poems are ways of memorizing as well as memorializing events from the past. The poet Eleanor Farjeon uses this poem as an exercise in memory, thinking back as far as she possibly can across her own past.

I'll tell you, shall I, something I remember?
Something that still means a great deal to me.
It was long ago.

A dusty road in summer I remember,
A mountain, and an old house, and a tree
That stood, you know,

Behind the house. An old woman I remember
In a red shawl with a grey cat on her knee
Humming under a tree.

She seemed the oldest thing I can remember,
But then perhaps I was not more than three.
It was long ago.

I dragged on the dusty road, and I remember
How the old woman looked over the fence at me
And seemed to know

How it felt to be three, and called out, I remember
'Do you like bilberries and cream for tea?'
I went under the tree

And while she hummed, and the cat purred, I remember
How she filled a saucer with berries and cream for me
So long ago,

Such berries and such cream as I remember
I never had seen before, and never see
Today, you know.

And that is almost all I can remember,
The house, the mountain, the grey cat on her knee,
Her red shawl, and the tree,

And the taste of the berries, the feel of the sun I
remember,
And the smell of everything that used to be
So long ago,

Till the heat on the road outside again I remember,
And how the long dusty road seemed to have for me
No end, you know.

That is the farthest thing I can remember.
It won't mean much to you. It does to me.
Then I grew up, you see.

10 February ✶ Colouring In ✶ Jan Dean

Colouring in is, of course, meant to be beautifully neat and precise – but, as Jan Dean shows us in this poem, sometimes it's more fun to live life a little more rebelliously!

And staying inside the lines
Is fine, but . . .
I like it when stuff leaks –
When the blue bird and the blue sky
Are just one blur of blue flying,
And the feeling of the feathers in the air
And the wind along the blade of wing
Is a long gash of smudgy colour.
I like it when the flowers and the sunshine
Puddle red and yellow into orange,
The way the hot sun on my back
Lulls me – muddles me – sleepy
In the scented garden,
Makes me part of the picture . . .
Part of the place.

11 February ✶ The Missile ✶ Michael Leunig

In early February 2016 talks were held, under the United Nations in Geneva, between the Syrian government and its opponents. The goal was to establish peace and end the Syrian Civil War, but the conflicts continued. Michael Leunig's poem draws on older traditions of poetry for children (even subtly referencing William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*), using them to paint a sad picture of modern warfare.

There is a missile, so I've heard,
Which locks on to the smallest bird,
Finely tuned to seek and kill
A tiny chirp or gentle trill.
It's modern warfare's answer to
An ancient wisdom tried and true:
When fighting wars, you first destroy
All songs of innocence and joy.

12 February ✶ Lift Every Voice and Sing ✶ James Weldon Johnson

12 February is the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States of America. Lincoln was president during America's darkest hour: the Civil War of 1861–65. He is remembered as a great leader, not least because slavery was abolished under his presidency. James Weldon Johnson, an author and civil rights activist, wrote the following lines on this day in 1900 to commemorate Lincoln on his birthday. It is often referred to as the American 'Black National Anthem'.

Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

13 February ✶ Shrove Tuesday ✶ Celia Warren

While Shrove Tuesday (or, as some people call it, Pancake Day) falls on a different date each year, it's usually around the middle of February. Traditionally, now is the time to use up the rich and delicious food items, such as butter, eggs, and sugar, that are discouraged during Lent – and that's why we throw all of those ingredients into pancakes, cover them with maple syrup, and guzzle them up before Ash Wednesday.

I slept like a twig in a willow
and woke to a tickle of snow.
The blue sky was gold at the edges
where the wind had forgotten to blow.

The pansies had ice on their petals
but the sparrows had sun in their wings.
They hopped on the green and white garden
as if they were fitted with springs.

The sky was still making its mind up
what language it wanted to speak;
it was slow translating winter
in words uncertain and weak.

But nevertheless I felt bouncy,
like a schoolchild who leaps out of bed
remembering it's Saturday morning,
for Springtime had entered my head:

Today was a day to pick daisies,
to skip and to skate and to sing;
today was a day to toss pancakes
to spread with the flavour of Spring.

14 February ✶ Valentine ✶ Wendy Cope

Today is Valentine's Day, the feast day honouring the patron saint of love and marriage (and also, strangely, bee-keeping). Couples send cards to each other, go out for dinner together, buy flowers and chocolates, and, of course, write poems.

My heart has made its mind up
And I'm afraid it's you.
Whatever you've got lined up,
My heart has made its mind up
And if you can't be signed up
This year, next year will do.
My heart has made its mind up
And I'm afraid it's you.

15 February ✶ All You Need Is Love ✶ John Lennon and Paul McCartney

Written in 1967, 'All You Need Is Love' is a song by The Beatles that captured the essence of the hippie movement. It was first performed by 'the Fab Four' during an event called Our World – the first ever live global television link. Its message is therefore one designed to be understood the world over.

Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love.
There's nothing you can do that can't be done.
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.
Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game.
It's easy.

There's nothing you can make that can't be made.
No one you can save that can't be saved.
Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time.
It's easy.

All you need is love, all you need is love,
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love.
All you need is love, all you need is love,
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

There's nothing you can know that isn't known.
Nothing you can see that isn't shown.
Nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be.
It's easy.

All you need is love, all you need is love,
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

All you need is love (all together now)
All you need is love (everybody)
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

16 February ✶ Lettuce Marry ✶ Anon.

This very funny love poem is full of playful puns, delicious declarations and a greengrocer's worth of fruit and vegetables!

Do you carrot all for me?
My heart beets for you,
With your turnip nose
And your radish face.
You are a peach.
If we cantaloupe,
Lettuce marry.
Weed make a swell pear.

17 February ✶ It's No Use ✶
Sappho, translated by Mary Barnard

Sappho was a Greek poet, born around 630 BC. She is known for her lyric poetry – poems composed to be read aloud or sung – and her writings are frequently about love. Sappho's works, like many ancient poems, only survive in fragments, meaning we're only left with a tiny part of a much bigger poem that was lost thousands of years ago. With only a handful of words to go on, we are left to guess at what else might be happening in the story.

It's no use

Mother dear, I
can't finish my
weaving
You may
blame Aphrodite

soft as she is

she has almost
killed me with
love for that boy

18 February ✶ *from* The Great Lover ✶
Rupert Brooke

Rupert Brooke is best known for the poems that describe his experiences in the First World War. Here, though, Brooke writes about the things in his life that he has loved, and his love is very inclusive – ranging from rooftops in the rain to the smell of old clothes. These are the words of a man in love with life itself.

. . . These I have loved:
White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faery dust;
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light; the strong crust
Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food;
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers;
And flowers themselves, that sway through sunny hours,
Dreaming of moths that drink them under the moon;
Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon
Smooth away trouble; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets; grainy wood; live hair that is
Shining and free; blue-massing clouds; the keen
Unpassioned beauty of a great machine;
The benison of hot water; furs to touch;
The good smell of old clothes; and other such –
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,
Hair's fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers
About dead leaves and last year's ferns . . .

19 February ✶ Rainbow ✶ John Agard

On 19 February 1672, Sir Isaac Newton published his work on rainbows, after refracting light through a prism. Newton first catalogued five colours, before settling on the seven we know today – Newton thought seven was a suitable number, as there are seven notes in a musical scale. The Guyanese poet John Agard makes a rainbow the occasion for some reflections on the nature of God.

When you see
de rainbow
you know
God know
wha he doing –
One big smile
across the sky –
I tell you
God got style
the man got style

When you see
raincloud pass
and de rainbow
make a show
I tell you
is God doing
limbo
the man doing
limbo

But sometimes
you know
when I see
de rainbow
so full of glow
and curving
like she bearing a child
I does want to know
if God
ain't a woman

If that is so
the woman got style
man she got style

20 February ✶ A Summing Up ✶ Charles Mackay

The Scottish poet Charles Mackay here offers a reflection on days gone by, from the perspective of the end of his life. Despite the bitter words he uses, his tone is wry and witty.

I have lived and I have loved;
I have waked and I have slept;
I have sung and I have danced;
I have smiled and I have wept;
I have won and wasted treasure;
I have had my fill of pleasure;
And all these things were weariness,
And some of them were dreariness,
And all these things, but two things,
Were emptiness and pain:
And Love – it was the best of them;
And Sleep – worth all the rest of them.

21 February ✶ I Saw a Peacock with a Fiery Tail ✶ Anon.

This classic poem seems, at first, to be composed of nonsensical things: seas brimming with ale, and houses as big as the moon. But if you read the first half of each line along with the second half of the line above, the poem shifts into sense: the sun as big as the moon, and higher, a sturdy oak with ivy circled round. (A 'pismire', incidentally, is an old word for an ant.)

I saw a peacock with a fiery tail
I saw a blazing comet drop down hail
I saw a cloud with ivy circled round
I saw a sturdy oak creep on the ground
I saw a pismire swallow up a whale
I saw a raging sea brim full of ale

I saw a Venice glass sixteen foot deep
I saw a well full of men's tears that weep
I saw their eyes all in a flame of fire
I saw a house as big as the moon and higher
I saw the sun even in the midst of night
I saw the man that saw this wondrous sight.

22 February ✶ The Little Mute Boy ✶
Federico García Lorca, translated by W. S. Merwin

Lorca was a Spanish poet in the 'Surrealist' tradition, meaning his work explores strange and often dreamlike images. He was only thirty-eight when he was assassinated at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War because of his political views. This is a poem about expression, and what it means to be able to vocalize our thoughts and speak our minds. For Lorca, who was so tragically silenced, it was important that even silence itself could be displayed.

The little boy was looking for his voice.
(The king of the crickets had it.)
In a drop of water
the little boy was looking for his voice.

I do not want it for speaking with;
I will make a ring of it
so that he may wear my silence
on his little finger.

In a drop of water
the little boy was looking for his voice.

(The captive voice, far away,
put on a cricket's clothes.)

23 February ✶ There Is No Frigate Like a Book ✶ Emily Dickinson

23 February 1455 is thought to be the date of the first printing of the 'Gutenberg Bible' – the earliest example of a mass-produced book, with around 180 copies printed. Today, therefore, is the birthday of the printed book in the Western world – the date that Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press, changed the world forever. Dickinson wrote this short verse in celebration of books and of literature; in it, books are vessels that transport us to far off shores.

There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away,
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry –
This Travel may the poorest take
Without offence of Toll –
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human soul.

24 February ✶ She Was Poor, But She Was Honest ✶ Billy Bennett

Also known as 'It's the same the whole world over', this song is an example of vintage music-hall entertainment, the telling of a comical working-class tale. At its heart, though, there is a serious point being made about injustice and inequality.

She was poor, but she was honest
Though she came from 'umble stock
And an honest heart was beating
Underneath her tattered frock

'Eedless of 'er Mother's warning
Up to London she 'ad gone
Yearning for the bright lights gleaming
'Eedless of temp-ta-shy-on

But the rich man saw her beauty
She knew not his base design
And he took her to a hotel
And bought her a small port wine

Then the rich man took 'er ridin'
Wrecker of poor women's souls
But the Devil was the chauffeur
As she rode in his Royce Rolls

In the rich man's arms she fluttered
Like a bird with a broken wing
But he loved 'er and he left 'er
Now she hasn't got no ring

It's the same the whole world over
It's the poor what gets the blame
It's the rich what gets the pleasure
Ain't it all a bloomin' shame?

Time has flown, outcast and helpless
In the street she stands and says
While the snowflakes fall around 'er
'Won't you buy my bootlaces?'

See him riding in a carriage
Past the gutter where she stands
He has made a stylish marriage
While she wrings her ringless hands

See him there at the theatre
In the front row with the best
While the girl that he has ruined
Entertains a sordid guest

See 'er on the bridge at midnight
She says 'Farewell, blighted love'
There's a scream, a splash . . . Good 'eavens!
What is she a-doing of?

So they dragged 'er from the river
Water from 'er clothes they wrung
They all thought that she was drownded
But the corpse got up and sung

It's the same the whole world over
It's the poor what gets the blame
It's the rich what gets the pleasure
Ain't it all a bloomin' shame?

25 February ✶ First Sight ✶ Philip Larkin

As winter draws on and spring is just around the corner, the first lambs of the season are born. Larkin is known for his gloomy writing, but this poem is surprisingly optimistic: there is fairer weather on the way.

Lambs that learn to walk in snow
When their bleating clouds the air
Meet a vast unwelcome, know
Nothing but a sunless glare.
Newly stumbling to and fro
All they find, outside the fold,
Is a wretched width of cold.

As they wait beside the ewe,
Her fleeces wetly caked, there lies
Hidden round them, waiting too,
Earth's immeasurable surprise.
They could not grasp it if they knew,
What so soon will wake and grow
Utterly unlike the snow.

26 February ✶ The Poetry Grand National ✶ Roger Stevens

It was on this day in Aintree in 1839 that the race that would become the Grand National was first run – it is now the horse race with the biggest prize in Europe. In Roger Stevens's poem, it is the various components of poetry itself that line up to race – adverb, adjective, simile, hyperbole. They jockey for position while performing their own meanings, but they are all finally caught up in one big metaphor.

The poems line up
They're under starter's orders
They're off

Adverb leaps gracefully over the first fence
Followed by Adjective
A sleek, palomino poem

Simile is overtaking on the outside
Like a pebble skimming the water

Half-way round the course
And Hyperbole is gaining on the leaders
Travelling at a million miles an hour

Adverb strides smoothly into first place
Haiku had good odds
But is far behind – and falls
At the last sylla-
ble

And as they flash past the winning post
The crowd is cheering

The winner is
Metaphor
Who quietly takes a bow

27 February ✶ Love's Philosophy ✶
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley was a radical Romantic poet of the early nineteenth century. He was married to Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*, and the pair travelled around Europe with fellow poet Lord Byron. Shelley drowned when he was only twenty-nine, but he produced hundreds of poems in his short life. In this poem, Shelley shows how in nature two things often meet and become one – like rivers joining or moonbeams falling down to touch the sea.

The fountains mingle with the river
 And the rivers with the Ocean,
The winds of Heaven mix for ever
 With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
 All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle.
 Why not I with thine?

See the mountains kiss high Heaven,
 And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
 If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
 And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What is all this sweet work worth
 If thou kiss not me?

28 February ✶ In Tenebris ✶ Ford Madox Ford

Ford Madox Ford was a prolific novelist, writing in the early twentieth century. He was friends with many of the great writers of his day, from Joseph Conrad to Ernest Hemingway, and he was responsible for publishing many of their works in his magazine *The English Review*. 'In Tenebris' is a Latin phrase meaning 'in darkness'. The poem tells of the narrator, amid winter darkness, yearning strongly for the coming of spring.

All within is warm,
  Here without it's very cold,
  Now the year is grown so old
And the dead leaves swarm.

In your heart is light,
  Here without it's very dark,
  When shall I hear the lark?
When see aright?

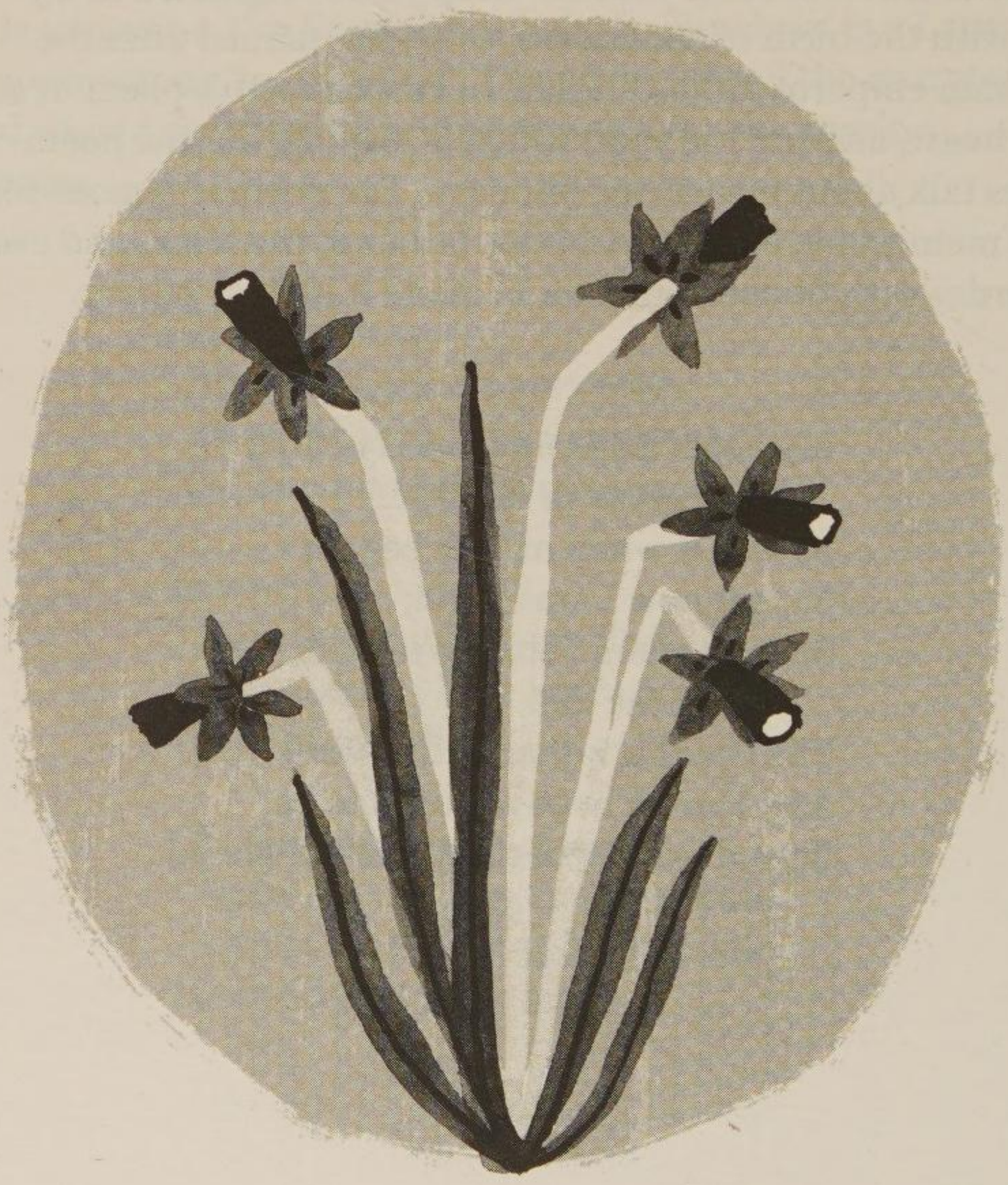
Oh, for a moment's space!
  Draw the clinging curtains wide
  Whilst I wait and yearn outside
Let the light fall on my face.

29 February ✶ My Hearts Leaps Up ✶ William Wordsworth

Today is Leap Day – the day added to calendars every four years to make up for the fact that it takes the earth 365 ¼ days to travel around the sun. Leap years originated in 45 BC, with the birth of the 'Julian' calendar, named after the Roman emperor Julius Caesar. In Wordsworth's poem, it is his heart, and not the year, which is leaping, but the poem does talk about measuring out days. The poem is famous for the memorable line 'The Child is father of the Man', and even Wordsworth himself went on to quote it in later poems.

My heart leaps up when I behold
    A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
    Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

March



1 March ✶ *from* Under Milk Wood ✶ Dylan Thomas

Today is St David's Day, the patron saint of Wales. Dylan Thomas, who was one of Wales's finest poets, wrote the following lines as part of his celebrated radio play *Under Milk Wood*.

Every morning when I wake,
Dear Lord, a little prayer I make,
O please do keep Thy lovely eye
On all poor creatures born to die.

And every evening at sun-down
I ask a blessing on the town,
For whether we last the night or no
I'm sure is always touch-and-go.

We are not wholly bad or good
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
To see our best side, not our worst.

O let us see another day!
Bless us this holy night, I pray,
And to the sun we all will bow
And say goodbye – but just for now!

2 March ✶ The Bright Field ✶ R. S. Thomas

R. S. Thomas was another proudly Welsh poet. A clergyman for much of his life, his poems are often very spiritual in nature, and he frequently makes reference to Bible stories, as he does here with Moses and the burning bush. This poem is about how we live in the present moment. If life is not about the past or future, then it is about finding the right to look at the things directly in front of us, now.

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

3 March ✶ Extinct ✶ Mandy Coe

3 March is World Wildlife Day, a day to celebrate and raise awareness about the planet's animal and plant life, and the threats posed to their existence. Mandy Coe's poem is a warning about the species we have lost and those that we might yet lose.

We live in books and photographs,
our stories all begin with 'Once',
three, two, going, going . . . gone.

Barbary Lion, Atitlan Grebe,
Caribbean Monk Seal, Carolina Parakeet.

We tasted good, our forests were yours,
Our horn was valuable, you wore our furs,
three, two, going, going . . . gone.

Laughing Owl, Passenger Pigeon,
Javan Tiger, Japanese Sea Lion.

We flew and swam beneath the sun,
nested, hunted, raised our young,
three, two, going, going . . . gone.

Western Black Rhinoceros, Aldabra Snail,
Pyrenean Ibex, Wake Island Rail.

Shells, tails, whiskers and bone,
three, two, going, going . . .

4 March ✶ Holi ✶ Chrissie Gittins

Holi is a Hindu festival that falls at this time of year. It is known as the 'Festival of Colours'. To mark the triumph of good (spring) over evil (winter), festival-goers brightly colour one another with handfuls of paints and dyed water balloons. Chrissie Gittins's poem imagines a language being made out of the colourful marks of the festival.

A splodge of purple on your neck
and you can feel the temperature rising.

A rub of brown on your cheek
and your friend is your friend for ever.

A cloud of red above your head
and your feet start itching to dance.

A scatter of yellow on your shirt
and your enemy is now your friend.

A blotch of blue on your nose
and the winter is soon forgotten.

A bucket of black down your back
and you are ready to beat the drum.

A stream of orange in the air
and your heart begins to surge.

A smear of pink on your forehead
and your misdeeds fade away.

A dusting of green on your eyelashes –
spring is surely on its way.

5 March ✶ The River in March ✶ Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes was one of the greatest British poets of the twentieth century, and was Poet Laureate from 1984 until his death in 1998. He is mainly known for his nature poetry, often in deceptively plain language, and his poems show a great respect for the natural world.

Now the river is rich, but her voice is low.
It is her Mighty Majesty the sea
Travelling among the villages incognito.

Now the river is poor. No song, just a thin mad whisper.
The winter floods have ruined her.
She squats between draggled banks, fingering her rags and rubbish.

And now the river is rich. A deep choir.
It is the lofty clouds, that work in heaven,
Going on their holiday to the sea.

The river is poor again. All her bones are showing.
Through a dry wig of bleached flotsam she peers up ashamed
From her slum of sticks.

Now the river is rich, collecting shawls and minerals.
Rain brought fatness, but she takes ninety-nine percent
Leaving the fields just one percent to survive on.

And now she is poor. Now she is East wind sick.
She huddles in holes and corners. The brassy sun gives her a headache.
She has lost all her fish. And she shivers.

But now once more she is rich. She is viewing her lands.
A hoard of king-cups spills from her folds, it blazes, it cannot be hidden.
A salmon, a sow of solid silver,

Bulges to glimpse it.

6 March ✶ Young Lambs ✶ John Clare

We measure the seasons through a cycle of events. With the approach of spring, the season of new life, we see the arrival of young farmyard animals. John Clare celebrates the coming season with the lightness of his rhymes in this poem about lambs. Even in relating this jubilant display of life, however, Clare's poem seems drawn to the dark imagery of death.

The spring is coming by a many signs;
  The trays are up, the hedges broken down,
That fenced the haystack, and the remnant shines
  Like some old antique fragment weathered brown.
And where suns peep, in every sheltered place,
  The little early buttercups unfold
A glittering star or two – till many trace
  The edges of the blackthorn clumps in gold.
And then a little lamb bolts up behind
  The hill and wags his tail to meet the yoe,
And then another, sheltered from the wind,
  Lies all his length as dead – and lets me go
Close by and never stirs, but beaking lies,
  With legs stretched out as though he could not rise.

7 March ✶ To my Sister ✶ William Wordsworth

Like Ted Hughes and John Clare, and an inspiration to them both, Wordsworth was a great poet of nature. And, like Hughes, he was also Poet Laureate. This poem is a celebration of taking the time to enjoy a beautiful day, away from work and responsibilities.

It is the first mild day of March:
Each minute sweeter than before,
The red-breast sings from the tall larch
That stands beside our door.

There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

My Sister! ('tis a wish of mine)
Now that our morning meal is done,
Make haste, your morning task resign;
Come forth and feel the sun.

Edward will come with you – and, pray,
Put on with speed your woodland dress,
And bring no book: for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

No joyless forms shall regulate
Our living Calendar:
We from today, my friend, will date
The opening of the year.

Love, now an universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth –
It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more
Than fifty years of reason;
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey:
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from today.

And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls:
They shall be tuned to love.

Then come, my sister! come, I pray,
With speed put on your woodland dress,
And bring no book: for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

8 March ✶ Warning ✶ Jenny Joseph

8 March is International Women's Day, a celebration of the political, social and cultural achievements of women everywhere. The day exists as a symbol of the victories made so far in the struggle for gender equality, although its existence is also a sign that equality has not yet been gained. Jenny Joseph's warm and comical poem makes fun of the rules that seem to govern being a woman in modern society, and it represents a quiet but important act of female defiance.

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

9 March ✶ The Battle of the Sexes ✶ Liz Brownlee

International Women's Day was first held in New York in 1909, though it didn't gain recognition by the United Nations until 1975. Now, the day is celebrated in many different ways, with many different gestures – some big, some small. In 1973 the male ex-tennis champion Bobbie Riggs challenged the great female tennis champion Billie Jean King to a tennis match, asserting that she could not, as a woman, beat him. In front of a TV audience of over 45 million, in a match that came to be known as 'The Battle of the Sexes', Billie Jean King won. Although this match did not happen on International Women's Day, the spirit of what the day commemorates is captured in this new poem by Liz Brownlee.

Bobby Riggs, tennis champ,
said a woman couldn't
beat a man . . .

Billie Jean King, tennis champ,
in three straight sets, showed
a woman can.

10 March ✶ Remember ✶ Christina Rossetti

Christina Rossetti is associated with the 'Pre-Raphaelite' movement, which was founded by her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti, along with the painters William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. The Pre-Raphaelites rejected the major recent trends in Victorian art in favour of an older inspiration. Christina Rossetti's most well-known work is the poem 'In the Bleak Midwinter', which was set to music by Gustav Holst and is still performed as a Christmas carol today. In this poem, which is in the fourteen-line sonnet form, a lover imagines how she will be remembered once she has passed away.

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 planned:
  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.

11 March ✶ Mothering Sunday ✶
George Hare Leonard

Mother's Day falls in March in the United Kingdom. The day celebrates the selfless and essential role that mothers play in families and society alike. In times past, maids and servants were allowed to take the day off to see their mothers and go to church. They would take with them cakes and other treats for their mothers – like the specially baked wheaten cake in this poem.

It is the day of all the year,
Of all the year the one day,
When I shall see my Mother dear
  And bring her cheer,
A-Mothering on Sunday.

And now to fetch my wheaten cake,
To fetch it from the baker,
He promised me, for Mother's sake,
  The best he'd bake
For me to fetch and take her.

Well have I known, as I went by
One hollow lane, that none day
I'd fail to find – for all they're shy –
  Where violets lie,
As I went home on Sunday.

My sister Jane is waiting-maid
Along with Squire's lady;
And year by year her part she's played,
  And home she stayed
To get the dinner ready.

For Mother'll come to Church, you'll see –
Of all the year it's the day –
'The one,' she'll say, 'that's made for me.'
  And so it be:
It's every Mother's free day.

The boys will all come home from town,
Not one will miss that one day;
And every maid will bustle down
  To show her gown,
A-Mothering on Sunday.

It is the day of all the year,
Of all the year the one day;
And here come I, my Mother dear,
  And bring you cheer,
A-Mothering on Sunday.

12 March ✶ Human Affection ✶ Stevie Smith

Here is another one for Mother's Day, from the female British poet Stevie Smith. It is an illustration of how even one scene, one image, can convey a depth of emotion in poetry.

> Mother, I love you so.
> Said the child, I love you more than I know.
> She laid her head on her mother's arm,
> And the love between them kept them warm.

13 March ✶ Here Comes the Sun ✶ George Harrison

Another song by The Beatles, 'Here Comes the Sun', is the work of guitarist George Harrison. In the poetic move from the coldness of winter to the warmth of spring, we might think back to Philip Larkin's poem 'First Sight' earlier in this volume (25 February).

Here comes the sun, here comes the sun
And I say it's all right

Little darling, it's been a long cold lonely winter
Little darling, it feels like years since it's been here
Here comes the sun, here comes the sun
And I say it's all right

Little darling, the smiles returning to their faces
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been here
Here comes the sun, here comes the sun
And I say it's all right

Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes

Little darling, I feel that ice is slowly melting
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been clear
Here comes the sun, here comes the sun, I say
It's all right
Here comes the sun, it's all right.

14 March ✶ Green Rain ✶ Mary Webb

Mary Webb's novels and poems usually focus on the landscape of her native Shropshire. Her poems in particular are snapshot images of the natural world, and in this poem the sense of peace and stillness she feels while walking through woodlands gives the impression that even the rain might hang in the air and cease to move.

Into the scented woods we'll go,
And see the blackthorn swim in snow.
High above, in the budding leaves,
A brooding dove awakes and grieves;
The glades with mingled music stir,
And wildly laughs the woodpecker.
When blackthorn petals pearl the breeze,
There are the twisted hawthorn trees
Thick-set with buds, as clear and pale
As golden water or green hail –
As if a storm of rain had stood
Enchanted in the thorny wood,
And, hearing fairy voices call,
Hung poised, forgetting how to fall.

15 March ✶ To Daffodils ✶ Robert Herrick

Robert Herrick was one of the seventeenth-century 'Cavalier Poets', so named because they supported King Charles during the English Civil War (Charles was eventually executed). Herrick wrote well over two thousand poems in his life, many of which were inspired by the Latin expression *carpe diem* – 'seize the day'. A 'carpe diem' poem is one that focuses on the shortness of life, and thus on the importance of enjoying every present moment.

Fair daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the evensong;
And, having prayed together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die,
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.

16 March ✶ Go and Catch a Falling Star ✶
John Donne

This poem at first hides its theme. It asks the reader to perform impossible tasks relating to mythological things and beings, and to go on lifelong travels. Only at the end of the second stanza is it revealed that these impossibilities are being used as a joke comparison to another task: finding a true and fair woman.

Go and catch a falling star,
  Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
  Or who cleft the Devil's foot;
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
      And find
      What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,
  Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights
  Till Age snow white hairs on thee;
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,
All strange wonders that befell thee,
      And swear,
      No where
Lives a woman true and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know;
  Such a pilgrimage were sweet.
Yet do not; I would not go,
  Though at next door we might meet.
Though she were true when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
        Yet she
        Will be
False, ere I come, to two or three.

17 March ✶ Ich Am of Irlaunde ✶ Anon.

17 March is St Patrick's Day. As St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, it is also a day on which people celebrate the culture and history of the 'Emerald Isle'. St Patrick's Day is thought to be the most widely celebrated national festival in the world. The song 'Ich am of Irlaunde' is a traditional medieval poem originating in around the year 1300. Reading and making sense of a poem like this can require some concentration, but it is also rewarding; it teaches us about the history of the English language itself.

Ich am of Irlaunde,
And of the holy londe
  Of Irlande.

Gode sire, pray ich thee,
For of sainte charite,
Come an daunce wit me
  In Irlaunde.

Translation

I am of Ireland,
and of the holy realm
of Ireland.

Good sir, I pray thee:
for the sake of holy charity,
come dance with me
in Ireland.

18 March ✶ Meeting at Night ✶ Robert Browning

This love poem was written around 1845, when Robert Browning was courting his future wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett. The simple narrative of the poem focuses less on the meeting of the lovers, and more on the journey leading up to that meeting. We do not have much access to the narrator's thoughts, but through the images of the sea and the landscape he passes, we experience a sense of mounting anticipation.

The grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, through joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

19 March ✶ Historical Associations ✶
Robert Louis Stevenson

Among Robert Louis Stevenson's most famous works today are the novels *Treasure Island* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. He was also noted for his wonderful volume of poetry, *A Child's Garden of Verses*. This imaginative poem is a series of reflections, or jumps between thoughts, as a child, playing with his uncle, travels far and wide through geography and history, and still gets home in time for tea.

Dear Uncle Jim, this garden ground
That now you smoke your pipe around,
Has seen immortal actions done
And valiant battles lost and won.

Here we had best on tip-toe tread,
While I for safety march ahead,
For this is that enchanted ground
Where all who loiter slumber sound.

Here is the sea, here is the sand,
Here is simple Shepherd's Land,
Here are the fairy hollyhocks,
And there are Ali Baba's rocks.

But yonder, see! apart and high,
Frozen Siberia lies; where I,
With Robert Bruce and William Tell,
Was bound by an enchanter's spell.

There, then, awhile in chains we lay,
In wintry dungeons, far from day;
But ris'n at length, with might and main,
Our iron fetters burst in twain.

Then all the horns were blown in town;
And to the ramparts clanging down,
All the giants leaped to horse
And charged behind us through the gorse.

On we rode, the others and I,
Over the mountains blue, and by
The Silver River, the sounding sea
And the robber woods of Tartary.

A thousand miles we galloped fast,
And down the witches' lane we passed,
And rode amain, with brandished sword,
Up to the middle, through the ford.

Last we drew rein – a weary three –
Upon the lawn, in time for tea,
And from our steeds alighted down
Before the gates of Babylon.

20 March ✶ A Morning Song ✶ Eleanor Farjeon

Today is the vernal equinox, and officially the first day of spring. These words were written in 1931 by Eleanor Farjeon, but became well known as a hymn after they were set to a Gaelic tune.

Morning has broken
Like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken
  Like the first bird.
Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing
  From the first Word.

Sweet the rain's new fall,
Sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dewfall
  In the first hour.
Praise for the sweetness,
Of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness
  From the first shower.

Mine is the sunlight!
Mine is the morning
Born of the one light
  Eden saw play.
Praise with elation,
Praise every morning
Spring's re-creation
  Of the new day!

21 March ✶ Spring ✶ Christina Rossetti

Spring is the season of life, birth and rebirth. But poetry often finds reminders of things in their opposites, and even life can serve to be a reminder of death. In Rossetti's simple song of spring, the poet cannot resist seeing the season of spring as a time 'that passes by' all too soon.

Frost-locked all the winter,
Seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits,
What shall make their sap ascend
That they may put forth shoots?
Tips of tender green,
Leaf, or blade, or sheath;
Telling of the hidden life
That breaks forth underneath,
Life nursed in its grave by Death.

Blows the thaw-wind pleasantly,
Drips the soaking rain,
By fits looks down the waking sun:
Young grass springs on the plain;
Young leaves clothe early hedgerow trees;
Seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits,
Swollen with sap put forth their shoots;
Curled-headed ferns sprout in the lane;
Birds sing and pair again.

There is no time like Spring,
When life's alive in everything,
Before new nestlings sing,
Before cleft swallows speed their journey back
Along the trackless track –
God guides their wing,
He spreads their table that they nothing lack, –
Before the daisy grows a common flower
Before the sun has power
To scorch the world up in his noontide hour.

There is no time like Spring,
Like Spring that passes by;
There is no life like Spring-life born to die,
Piercing the sod,
Clothing the uncouth clod,
Hatched in the nest,
Fledged on the windy bough,
Strong on the wing:
There is no time like Spring that passes by,
Now newly born, and now
Hastening to die.

22 March ✶ Spring ✶ William Blake

Blake's collection of poems, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* is celebrated as a great experiment in poetry, where he offsets the plain songs of joy of 'Innocence' with the complicated reflections found in 'Experience'. But even in the simpler poems we find Blake playing around with rhythms, such as the three-syllable rhymed lines in this poem about spring.

Sound the Flute!
Now it's mute.
Birds delight
Day and Night;
Nightingale
In the dale
Lark in Sky,
Merrily,
Merrily, Merrily, to welcome in the Year.

Little Boy,
Full of joy;
Little Girl,
Sweet and small;
Cock does crow,
So do you;
Merry voice,
Infant noise,
Merrily, Merrily, to welcome in the Year.

Little Lamb,
Here I am;
Come and lick
My white neck;
Let me pull
Your soft Wool;
Let me kiss
Your soft face:
Merrily, Merrily, we welcome in the Year.

23 March ✶ Sonnet 98 ✶ William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's sonnets are carefully measured – each line must have ten syllables, which alternate in stresses, and there must be a total of fourteen lines. They are usually arranged into very particular rhyme schemes, and end with a couplet, which offers a final thought of its own.

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd, and leap'd with him.
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew:
Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you – you pattern of all those.
Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play.

24 March ✶ The Frog and the Nightingale ✶ Vikram Seth

This powerful rhyming fable about a cunning frog and a gullible nightingale is by the acclaimed Indian novelist and poet, Vikram Seth. It is a cautionary tale, whose moral is to beware of the unscrupulous master, and always to have self-belief.

Once upon a time a frog
Croaked away in Bingle Bog.
Every night from dusk to dawn
He croaked awn and awn and awn.
Other creatures loathed his voice,
But, alas, they had no choice,
And the crass cacophony
Blared out from the sumac tree
At whose foot the frog each night
Minstrelled on till morning night.

Neither stones nor prayers nor sticks,
Insults or complaints or bricks
Stilled the frog's determination
To display his heart's elation.
But one night a nightingale
In the moonlight cold and pale
Perched upon the sumac tree
Casting forth her melody.
Dumbstruck sat the gaping frog
And the whole admiring bog
Stared towards the sumac, rapt,
And, when she had ended, clapped.
Ducks had swum and herons waded
To her as she serenaded,

And a solitary loon
Wept beneath the summer moon.
Toads and teals and tiddlers, captured
By her voice, cheered on, enraptured:
'Bravo!' 'Too divine!' 'Encore!'
So the nightingale once more,
Quite unused to such applause,
Sang till dawn without a pause.

Next night when the nightingale
Shook her head and twitched her tail,
Closed an eye and fluffed a wing,
And had cleared her throat to sing
She was startled by a croak.
'Sorry – was that you who spoke?'
She enquired when the frog
Hopped towards her from the bog.
'Yes,' the frog replied. 'You see,
I'm the frog who owns this tree.
In this bog I've long been known
For my splendid baritone
And, of course, I wield my pen
For *Bog Trumpet* now and then.'
'Did you . . . did you like my song?'
'Not too bad – but far too long.
The technique was fine, of course,
But it lacked a certain force.'
'Oh!' the nightingale confessed,
Greatly flattered and impressed
That a critic of such note
Had discussed her art and throat:
'I don't think the song's divine.
But – oh, well – at least it's mine.'

'That's not much to boast about,'
Said the heartless frog. 'Without
Proper training such as I
– And few others – can supply.
You'll remain a mere beginner.
But with me you'll be a winner.'

'Dearest frog,' the nightingale
Breathed: 'This is a fairy tale –
And you are Mozart in disguise
Come to earth before my eyes.'
'Well, I charge a modest fee.'
'Oh!' 'But it won't hurt, you'll see.'

Now the nightingale, inspired,
Flushed with confidence, and fired
With both art and adoration,
Sang – and was a huge sensation.
Animals for miles around
Flocked towards the magic sound,
And the frog with great precision
Counted heads and charged admission.

Though next morning it was raining,
He began her vocal training.
'But I can't sing in this weather.'
'Come, my dear – we'll sing together.
Just put on your scarf and sash.
Koo-oh-ah! ko-ash! ko-ash!'
So the frog and nightingale
Journeyed up and down the scale
For six hours, till she was shivering
And her voice was hoarse and quivering.

Though subdued and sleep deprived,
In the night her throat revived,
And the sumac tree was bowed
With a breathless, titled crowd:
Owl of Sandwich, Duck of Kent,
Mallard and Milady Trent,
Martin Cardinal Mephisto,
And the Coot of Monte Cristo.
Ladies with tiaras glittering
In the interval sat twittering –
And the frog observed them glitter
With a joy both sweet and bitter.

Every day the frog who'd sold her
Songs for silver tried to scold her:
'You must practise even longer
Till your voice, like mine, grows stronger.
In the second song last night
You got nervous in mid-flight.
And, my dear, lay on more trills:
Audiences enjoy such frills.
You must make your public happier:
Give them something sharper, snappier.
We must aim for better billings.
You still owe me sixty shillings.'

Day by day the nightingale
Grew more sorrowful and pale.
Night on night her tired song
Zipped and trilled and bounced along,
Till the birds and beasts grew tired
At a voice so uninspired

And the ticket office gross
Crashed, and she grew more morose –
For her ears were now addicted
To applause quite unrestricted,
And to sing into the night
All alone gave no delight.

Now the frog puffed up with rage.
'Brainless bird – you're on the stage –
Use your wits, and follow fashion.
Puff your lungs out with your passion.'
Trembling, terrified to fail,
Blind with tears, the nightingale
Heard him out in silence, tried,
Puffed up, burst a vein, and died.

Said the frog: 'I tried to teach her,
But she was a stupid creature –
Far too nervous, far too tense,
Far too prone to influence.
Well, poor bird – she should have known
That your song must be your own.
That's why I sing with panache:
'Koo-oh-ah! ko-ash! ko-ash!'
And the foghorn of the frog
Blared unrivalled through the bog.

25 March ✶ Today ✶ Billy Collins

Billy Collins is among the foremost American poets alive today, and was the Poet Laureate of the United States from 2001 to 2003. This is an example of how a poem can surprise us, by taking us on a journey through a writer's thoughts and feelings, in a single sentence.

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw
open all the windows in the house

and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

a day when the cool brick paths
and the garden bursting with peonies

seemed so etched in sunlight
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants
from their snow-covered cottage

so they could walk out,
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,
well, today is just that kind of day.

26 March ✶ I Remember, I Remember ✶ Thomas Hood

Thomas Hood was a Victorian poet who, like Christina Rossetti, was concerned with the powers of memory and remembering. Unlike Rossetti's 'Remember', Hood's poem is a lively celebration of memory right up until its final lines.

I remember, I remember
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The violets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday, –
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

27 March ✶ Ballad of the Bread Man ✶ Charles Causley

Charles Causley was a twentieth-century Cornish writer. As popular among the celebrity poets of his day as he was with readers, he counted Siegfried Sassoon and Ted Hughes as close friends. The 'Ballad of the Bread Man' is a modernized telling of the life and death of Jesus. Even the three wise men appear, as a bishop, a general, and an African leader. Though it begins in comic fashion, it ends on a very different tone, and the final stanza reveals Causley's own view of the modern attitude towards spiritual knowledge. Jesus returns from the dead, only to find that the public still has no interest in his message of peace and morality. Causley lived through the Second World War, and may have had those experiences in mind.

Mary stood in the kitchen
  Baking a loaf of bread.
An angel flew in through the window.
  'We've a job for you,' he said.

'God in his big gold heaven
  Sitting in his big blue chair,
Wanted a mother for his little son.
  Suddenly saw you there.'

Mary shook and trembled,
  'It isn't true what you say.'
'Don't say that,' said the angel.
  'The baby's on its way.'

Joseph was in the workshop
  Planing a piece of wood.
'The old man's past it,' the neighbours said.
  'That girl's been up to no good.'

'And who was that elegant fellow,'
They said, 'in the shiny gear?'
The things they said about Gabriel
Were hardly fit to hear.

Mary never answered,
Mary never replied.
She kept the information,
Like the baby, safe inside.

It was the election winter.
They went to vote in town.
When Mary found her time had come
The hotels let her down.

The baby was born in an annexe
Next to the local pub.
At midnight, a delegation
Turned up from the Farmers' Club.

They talked about an explosion
That made a hole in the sky,
Said they'd been sent to the Lamb and Flag
To see God come down from on high.

A few days later a bishop
And a five-star general were seen
With the head of an African country
In a bullet-proof limousine.

'We've come,' they said, 'with tokens
For the little boy to choose.'
Told the tale about war and peace
In the television news.

After them came the soldiers
With rifle and bombs and gun,
Looking for enemies of the state.
The family had packed up and gone.

When they got back to the village
  The neighbours said, to a man,
'That boy will never be one of us,
  Though he does what he blessed well can.'

He went round to all the people
  A paper crown on his head.
Here is some bread from my father.
  Take, eat, he said.

Nobody seemed very hungry.
  Nobody seemed to care.
Nobody saw the God in himself
  Quietly standing there.

He finished up in the papers,
  He came to a very bad end.
He was charged with bringing the living to life.
  No man was that prisoner's friend.

There's only one kind of punishment
  To fit that kind of crime.
They rigged a trial and shot him dead.
  They were only just in time.

They lifted the young man by the leg,
  They lifted him by the arm,
They locked him in a cathedral
  In case he came to harm.

They stored him safe as water
  Under seven rocks.
One Sunday morning he burst out
  Like a jack-in-the-box.

Through the town he went walking.
  He showed them the holes in his head.
Now do you want any loaves? he cried.
  'Not today,' they said.

28 March ✶ I Watched a Blackbird ✶
Thomas Hardy

Easter Sunday can fall on any date between 22 March and 25 April. Here is one Easter Day encounter in poetry, between Thomas Hardy and a blackbird. Hardy was a prolific novelist, writing such great works as *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, for which he is now most famous. Hardy, however, actually thought of himself as more of a poet than a novelist!

I watched a blackbird on a budding sycamore
One Easter Day, when sap was stirring twigs to the core;
    I saw his tongue, and crocus-coloured bill
    Parting and closing as he turned his trill;
    Then he flew down, seized on a stem of hay,
And upped to where his building scheme was under way,
As if so sure a nest were never shaped on spray.

29 March ✶ Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now ✶ A. E. Housman

It is an Easter tradition to wear white clothing – and in Housman's poem, it is the cherry trees that are dressed in white, first in blossom, then in snow. The poet thinks of his full 'threescore years and ten', or seventy years, which is the biblical average life span. If life is so short, then we should be enjoying the beautiful moments not just in spring, but in winter too. Like Robert Herrick's poem on daffodils (see 15 March), this is a *carpe diem* poem, a poem that urges us to 'seize the day'.

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

30 March ✶ The Cherry-Tree Carol ✶ Anon.

This ballad, which is probably a collection of several very old songs that came together across the years, is both an Easter hymn and a Christmas carol. It is a popular carol internationally, though changes occur depending on where it is sung. In Catalan and Provençal, for instance, the ballad is about an apple tree rather than a cherry tree. The ballad tells both the story of Mary and Joseph before Jesus's birth, as well as the newly born Jesus predicting his own death and resurrection.

Joseph was an old man,
  and an old man was he,
When he wedded Mary,
  in the land of Galilee.

Joseph and Mary walked
  through an orchard good,
Where was cherries and berries,
  so red as any blood.

Joseph and Mary walked
  through an orchard green,
Where was berries and cherries,
  as thick as might be seen.

O then bespoke Mary,
  so meek and so mild:
'Pluck me one cherry, Joseph,
  for I am with child.'

O then bespoke Joseph,
  with words most unkind:
'Let him pluck thee a cherry
  that brought thee with child.'

O then bespoke the babe,
  within his mother's womb:
'Bow down then the tallest tree,
  for my mother to have some.'

Then bowed down the highest tree
  unto his mother's hand;
Then she cried, 'See, Joseph,
  I have cherries at command.'

O then bespake Joseph:
  'I have done Mary wrong;
But cheer up, my dearest,
  and be not cast down.'

Then Mary plucked a cherry,
  as red as the blood,
Then Mary went home
  with her heavy load.

Then Mary took her babe,
  and sat him on her knee,
Saying, 'My dear son, tell me
  what this world will be.'

'O I shall be as dead, mother,
  as the stones in the wall;
O the stones in the streets, mother,
  shall mourn for me all.

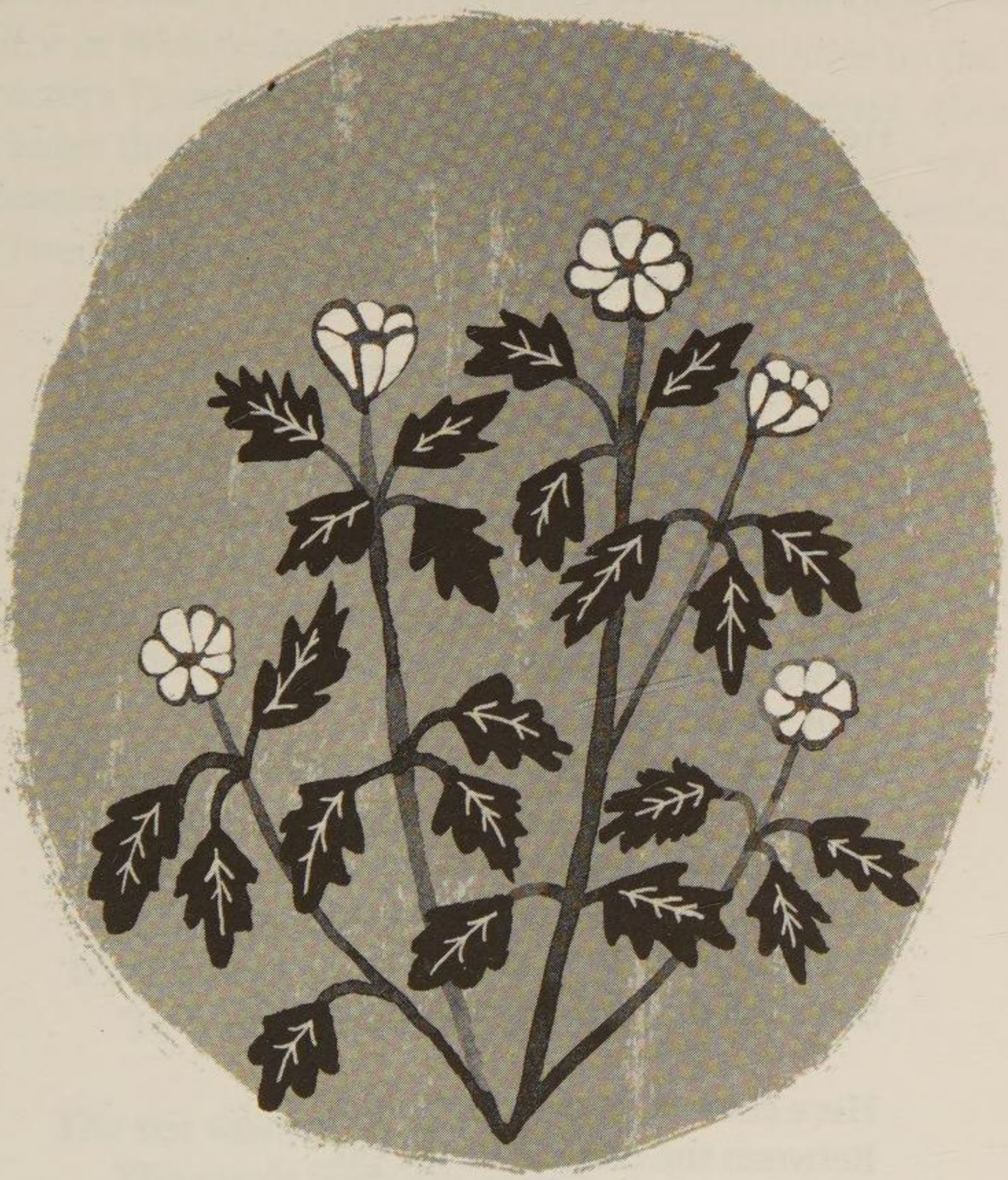
'Upon Easter-day, mother,
  my uprising shall be;
O the sun and the moon, mother,
  shall both rise with me.'

31 March ✶ Easter Day ✶ Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde is something of a rebellious voice within poetry. In this sonnet on the occasion of Easter, Wilde describes vividly the overwhelming majesty and splendour of the Pope in Rome. Yet the poet contrasts these regal images with the ancient origins of Christianity, and ends with the simple image of an exhausted Christ wandering alone millennia before.

The silver trumpets rang across the Dome:
  The people knelt upon the ground with awe:
  And borne upon the necks of men I saw,
Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome.
Priest-like, he wore a robe more white than foam,
  And, king-like, swathed himself in royal red,
  Three crowns of gold rose high upon his head:
In splendour and in light the Pope passed home.
My heart stole back across wide wastes of years
  To One who wandered by a lonely sea,
  And sought in vain for any place of rest:
'Foxes have holes, and every bird its nest,
I, only I, must wander wearily,
And bruise My feet, and drink wine salt with tears.'

April



1 April ✶ April Fool ✶ Louis MacNeice

Pinch, punch, first of the month! It's April Fool's Day, a time for practical jokes and hoaxes. Incidentally, the earliest recorded foolishness on 1 April is a trick played by a fox in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which dates from the late fourteenth century.

Here come I, old April Fool,
Between March hare and nuts in May.
Fool me forward, fool me back,
Hares will dance and nuts will crack.

Here come I, my fingers crossed
Between the shuffle and the deal.
Fool me flush or fool me straight,
Queens are wild and queens will wait.

Here come I, my clogs worn out
Between the burden and the song.
Fool me hither, fool me hence,
Keep the sound but ditch the sense.

Here come I, my hair on fire,
Between the devil and the deep.
Fool me over, fool me down,
Sea shall dry and devil shall drown.

Here come I, in guts and brass,
Between the raven and the pit.
Fool me under, fool me flat,
Coffins land on Ararat.

Here come I, old April Fool,
Between the hoar frost and the fall.
Fool me drunk or fool me dry,
Spring comes back, and back come I.

2 April ✶ The Walrus and the Carpenter ✶ Lewis Carroll

April Fool's Day might have been and gone, but there's always time for a little more nonsense. This poem originally appeared in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, the sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*. The poem is recited to Alice by the characters Tweedledum and Tweedledee. In the novel, Alice concludes that both the Walrus and the Carpenter are 'very unpleasant characters' – and, as it happens, so are Tweedledee and Tweedledum!

The sun was shining on the sea,
    Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
    The billows smooth and bright –
And this was odd, because it was
    The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily,
    Because she thought the sun
Had got no business to be there
    After the day was done –
'It's very rude of him,' she said,
    'To come and spoil the fun.'

The sea was wet as wet could be,
    The sands were dry as dry.
You could not see a cloud, because
    No cloud was in the sky:
No birds were flying overhead –
    There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Were walking close at hand:
They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand:
'If this were only cleared away,'
They said, 'it *would* be grand!'

'If seven maids with seven mops
Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose,' the Walrus said,
'That they could get it clear?'
'I doubt it,' said the Carpenter,
And shed a bitter tear.

'O Oysters, come and walk with us!'
The Walrus did beseech.
'A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,
Along the briny beach:
We cannot do with more than four,
To give a hand to each.'

The eldest Oyster looked at him,
But never a word he said:
The eldest Oyster winked his eye,
And shook his heavy head –
Meaning to say he did not choose
To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up,
All eager for the treat:
Their coats were brushed, their faces washed,
Their shoes were clean and neat –
And this was odd, because, you know,
They hadn't any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them,
And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
And more, and more, and more –
All hopping through the frothy waves,
And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
And waited in a row.

'The time has come,' the Walrus said,
'To talk of many things:
Of shoes – and ships – and sealing-wax –
Of cabbages – and kings –
And why the sea is boiling hot –
And whether pigs have wings.'

'But wait a bit,' the Oysters cried,
'Before we have our chat:
For some of us are out of breath,
And all of us are fat!'
'No hurry!' said the Carpenter.
They thanked him much for that.

'A loaf of bread,' the Walrus said,
'Is what we chiefly need:
Pepper and vinegar besides
Are very good indeed –
Now if you're ready, Oysters dear,
We can begin to feed.'

'But not on us!' the Oysters cried,
Turning a little blue.
'After such kindness, that would be
A dismal thing to do!'
'The night is fine,' the Walrus said.
'Do you admire the view?

'It was so kind of you to come!
And you are very nice!'
The Carpenter said nothing but
'Cut us another slice:
I wish you were not quite so deaf –
I've had to ask you twice!'

'It seems a shame,' the Walrus said,
'To play them such a trick.
After we've brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick!'
The Carpenter said nothing but
'The butter's spread too thick!'

'I weep for you,' the Walrus said:
'I deeply sympathize.'
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

'O Oysters,' said the Carpenter,
'You've had a pleasant run!
Shall we be trotting home again?'
But answer came there none –
And this was scarcely odd, because
They'd eaten every one.

3 April ✶ The Jumblies ✶ Edward Lear

Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear were the kings of nonsense writing. Lear is best known for the narrative poem 'The Owl and the Pussycat', and he also helped to popularize the limerick form ('There once was a poet named Lear . . .'). 'The Jumblies' is an example of one of Lear's most inventive and madcap poems.

I

They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
  In a Sieve they went to sea:
In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
  In a Sieve they went to sea!
And when the Sieve turned round and round,
And every one cried, 'You'll all be drowned!'
They called aloud, 'Our Sieve ain't big,
But we don't care a button! we don't care a fig!
  In a Sieve we'll go to sea!'
    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.

II

They sailed away in a Sieve, they did,
  In a Sieve they sailed so fast,
With only a beautiful pea-green veil
Tied with a riband by way of a sail,
  To a small tobacco-pipe mast;
And every one said, who saw them go,
'O won't they be soon upset, you know!
For the sky is dark, and the voyage is long,
And happen what may, it's extremely wrong
  In a Sieve to sail so fast!'
    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.

III

The water it soon came in, it did,
  The water it soon came in;
So to keep them dry, they wrapped their feet
In a pinky paper all folded neat,
  And they fastened it down with a pin.
And they passed the night in a crockery-jar,
And each of them said, 'How wise we are!
Though the sky be dark, and the voyage be long,
Yet we never can think we were rash or wrong,
  While round in our Sieve we spin!'
    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.

IV

And all night long they sailed away;
  And when the sun went down,
They whistled and warbled a moony song
To the echoing sound of a coppery gong,
  In the shade of the mountains brown.
'O Timballo! How happy we are,
When we live in a sieve and a crockery-jar,
And all night long in the moonlight pale,
We sail away with a pea-green sail,
  In the shade of the mountains brown!'
    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.

V

They sailed to the Western Sea, they did,
  To a land all covered with trees,
And they bought an Owl, and a useful Cart,
And a pound of Rice, and a Cranberry Tart,
  And a hive of silvery Bees.
And they bought a Pig, and some green Jack-daws,
And a lovely Monkey with lollipop paws,
And forty bottles of Ring-Bo-Ree,
  And no end of Stilton Cheese.
    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.

VI

And in twenty years they all came back,
  In twenty years or more,
And every one said, 'How tall they've grown!'
For they've been to the Lakes, and the Torrible Zone,
  And the hills of the Chankly Bore;
And they drank their health, and gave them a feast
Of dumplings made of beautiful yeast;
And every one said, 'If we only live,
We too will go to sea in a Sieve, –
  To the hills of the Chankly Bore!'
    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.

4 April ✶ Who Killed Cock Robin? ✶ Anon.

Robert Walpole became Britain's first Prime Minister on this day in 1721. He was in power until 1742, the longest serving Prime Minister in British history, but he eventually fell from power after a group of detractors rose against him. It is popularly thought that these lines relate to Walpole's downfall. Despite the bloody theme of the song, which has featured in many novels and murder mysteries, there is a childlike quality to the short lines and neat rhymes.

Who killed Cock Robin?
'I,' said the Sparrow,
'With my little bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin.'

Who saw him die?
'I,' said the Fly,
'With my little eye,
I saw him die.'

Who'll dig his grave?
'I,' said the Owl,
'With my spade and show'l,
I'll dig his grave.'

Who'll be the Parson?
'I,' said the Rook,
'With my little book,
I'll be the Parson.'

Who will be chief mourner?
'I,' said the Dove,
'For I mourn my love,
I shall be chief mourner.'

Who'll sing a psalm?
'I,' said the Thrush,
'As I sit in a bush.
I'll sing a psalm.'

Who'll carry the coffin?
'I,' said the Kite,
'If it's not in the night,
I'll carry the coffin.'

Who'll toll the bell?
'I,' said the Bull,
'Because I can pull,
I'll toll the bell.'

All the birds of the air
Fell sighing and sobbing,
When the heard the bell toll
For poor Cock Robin.

5 April ✶ First Word (After Helen Keller) ✶ Rachel Rooney

In 1904, Helen Keller became the first deaf and blind person to graduate from university. Her remarkable story can be traced back to 5 April 1887, when she learned her first words. Her hand was held under the flow water from a pump, and the letters for 'water' were spelt on her other palm. This poem captures the moment that the mystery of language was revealed to her.

This thing she's feeling
is nameless cold
that can't be held.
This unheard sound
its unseen lettering
drums her outstretched skin
like fingertips.
This thing is spilling over.

This thing she's feeling
in her other palm
is nameless warm.
This unseen sound
its unheard lettering
drums her outstretched skin
like drops of rain.
This thing is spelling water.

6 April ✶ The People of the Eastern Ice ✶ Rudyard Kipling

On 6 April 1909, the American explorer Robert Peary reported that he had become the first man to reach the North Pole. Though Rudyard Kipling never visited the Arctic, he nevertheless wrote this poem as an introduction to the Jungle Book story 'Quiquern'. 'Quiquern' is a monstrous dog spirit in Inuit mythology, and Kipling's tale follows two Inuit men as they hunt for food for their starving tribe. Today, the poem has new relevance, as a song of an endangered culture 'melting like snow' takes on fresh meaning in the age of climate change.

The People of the Eastern Ice, they are melting like the snow –
They beg for coffee and sugar; they go where the white men go.
The People of the Western Ice, they learn to steal and fight;
They sell their furs to the trading-post; they sell their souls to the white.
The People of the Southern Ice, they trade with the whaler's crew;
Their women have many ribbons, but their tents are torn and few.
But the People of the Elder Ice, beyond the white man's ken –
Their spears are made of the narwhal-horn, and they are the last of the Men!

7 April ✶ *from* the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales ✶ Geoffrey Chaucer

These are the opening lines to one of the greatest works in English literature, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Written in Middle English, it is sometimes easier to make sense of the language when speaking it aloud. The narrator speaks of the the day in April when he first joins pilgrims at a Southwark pub to set out on the road to Canterbury.

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licóur
Of which vertú engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye,
(So priketh hem Natúre in hir corages),
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
  Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght were come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye

Of sondry folk, by áventure y-falle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon,
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take oure wey, ther as I yow devyse.

8 April ✶ Home-Thoughts from Abroad ✶ Robert Browning

Browning wrote this poem during his 1845 travels around Italy. This is a poem of nostalgia in its truest sense – it comes from the Greek word 'nostos', which means home-coming. Browning might be on holiday, but all he can think of is the beauty of England in springtime, where birds are chirping, flowers blossoming, and nature is coming back to life.

Oh, 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 blossomed 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!

9 April ✶ The Ballad of Semmerwater ✶ William Watson

Semmerwater, more usually spelt 'Semerwater', is one of the largest lakes in Yorkshire, and a home to many great poets over the centuries. Sir William Watson was one such poet, and he uses Semerwater as the basis for a story about poverty, charity and selfishness. The moral of the story is that even the proudest of empires will fall if it earns the curse of its poor and vulnerable.

Deep asleep, deep asleep,
Deep asleep it lies,
The still lake of Semmerwater,
Under the still skies.

And many a fathom, many a fathom,
Many a fathom below,
In a king's tower and a queen's bower
The fishes come and go.

Once there stood by Semmerwater
A mickle town and tall;
King's tower and queen's bower,
And the wakeman on the wall.

Came a beggar halt and sore:
'I faint for lack of bread.'
King's tower and queen's bower
Cast him forth unfed.

He knocked at the door of the herdsman's cot,
The herdsman's cot in the dale.
They gave him of their oat-cake,
They gave him of their ale.

He cursed aloud that city proud,
He cursed it in its pride;
He cursed it into Semmerwater
Down the brant hillside;
He cursed it into Semmerwater,
There to bide.

King's tower and queen's bower,
And a mickle town and tall;
By glimmer of scale and gleam of fin,
Folk have seen them all.

King's tower and queen's bower,
And weed and reed in the gloom,
And a lost city in Semmerwater
Deep asleep till Doom.

10 April ✶ Do Not Stand at my Grave and Weep ✶ Mary Elizabeth Frye

Today is the anniversary of the Good Friday agreement of 1998 – a key moment in the Northern Ireland peace process. This poem, by Mary Elizabeth Frye, became popular in Great Britain after it was read on BBC Radio by the father of a soldier killed during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Frye first wrote it on a paper shopping bag, and people quickly began to pass the poem around – and, as it grew in fame, many people tried to claim that they had composed it! Nearly seventy years passed before Frye was recognized as its true author.

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sun on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn's rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there, I did not die.

11 April ✶ In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' ✶ Thomas Hardy

Hardy wrote this poem in 1915, around a year into the First World War. The setting is a typical rural scene: a farmer toils in a field, and a young couple walks past him. The poem seems to say that these aspects of life – love, and simple labour – are timeless, and will outlive war. Incidentally, the title echoes the line from the Book of Jeremiah in the Bible, 'Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms.'

I

Only a man harrowing clods
  In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
  Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame
  From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
  Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight
  Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
  Ere their story die.

12 April ✶ Dear Yuri ✶ Brian Moses

On 12 April 1961, the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to travel into space. During the same flight, he was also the first person to orbit earth; when his craft, Vostok 1, was launched, he shouted out 'Poyekhali!' – Russian for 'Let's go!'

Dear Yuri, I remember you,
the man with the funny name
who the Russians sent into space,
were you desperate for fame?

There surely must have been safer ways
to get into the history books,
perhaps you couldn't rock like Elvis
or you hadn't got James Dean's looks.

Perhaps you couldn't fight like Ali
or make a political speech
so they packed you into a spaceship
and sent you out of Earth's reach.

And Yuri, what was it like
to be way out there in space,
the first to break free of Earth's gravity
and look down on the human race?

Dear Yuri, I wanted to say
that I remember your flight,
I remember your name, Gagarin,
and the newsreel pictures that night.

And you must have pep talked others
when they took off into the blue.
I've forgotten their names, but Yuri,
I'll always remember you.

13 April ✶ The Song of Wandering Aengus ✶ W. B. Yeats

William Butler Yeats is remembered as one of the key figures of the twentieth-century literary movement known as modernism. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. Many of his poems draw on ancient mythology and Irish tradition. Here he draws on the figure of Aengus, a god of love and youth – but in Yeats, he becomes an old figure, pursuing his past.

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name;
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

14 April ✶ The Woods and Banks ✶ W. H. Davies

Mid-April marks the arrival of cuckoos. They are said to arrive on St. Tiburtius's day, which is today: Cuckoo Day.
W. H. Davies – an extraordinary writer, who lived for many years as a homeless person – here celebrates the unique call that gives the cuckoo its name: cuckoo, cuckoo!

The woods and banks of England now,
  Late coppered with dead leaves and old,
Have made the early violets grow,
  And bulge with knots of primrose gold.
Hear how the blackbird flutes away,
  Whose music scorns to sleep at night:
Hear how the cuckoo shouts all day
  For echoes – to the world's delight:
Hullo, you imp of wonder, you –
Where are you now, cuckoo? Cuckoo?

15 April ✶ Ode on the Loss of the *Titanic* ✶ Geoffrey Hill

Early on the morning of 15 April 1912, RMS *Titanic* sank in the icy waters of the north Atlantic. Over 1,500 people died – almost three-quarters of the passengers and crew on board at the time. It is fixed in the popular imagination as one of the worst, most shocking maritime disasters of all time. Geoffrey Hill's short lines on the *Titanic* themselves swirl and swell like an angry ocean.

Thriving against façades the ignorant sea
Souses our public baths, statues, waste ground:
Archaic earth-shaker, fresh enemy
('The tables of exchange being overturned');

Drowns Babel in upheaval and display;
Unswerving, as were the admired multitudes
Silenced from time to time under its sway.
By all means let us appease the terse gods.

16 April ✶ Will Ye No Come Back Again? ✶ Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne

On this day in 1746 was the Battle of Culloden, ending the efforts of Charles Edward Stuart, or 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', to take up the throne of Great Britain. Charles was forced to flee Scotland, never to return. This poem commemorates the failed attempt to take the throne, and hopes for the return of Charles.

Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canne be,
Will ye no come back again?

Bonnie Charlie's now awa,
    Safely owre the friendly main;
Mony a heart will break in twa,
    Should he ne'er come back again.

Ye trusted in your Hieland men,
    They trusted you, dear Charlie;
They kent you hiding in the glen,
    Your cleadin' was but barely.

English bribes were a' in vain;
    An' e'en tho' puirer we may be,
Siller canna buy the heart
    That beats aye for thine and thee.

We watched thee in the gloaming hour,
    We watched thee in the morning grey;
Tho' thirty thousand pounds they'd gie,
    Oh there is nane that wad betray.

Sweet's the laverock's note and lang,
    Lilting wildly up the glen;
But aye to me he sings ae sang,–
    Will ye no come back again?

Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canne be,
Will ye no come back again?

17 April ✶ *from* The Waste Land ✶ T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot remains one of the most important English poets in history. He's also probably one of the most difficult to understand, with much of his poetry filled with unusual words, complex references and even foreign languages! He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. His great poem *The Waste Land* has many famous lines – not least its opening characterization of the month of April, as well as the enigmatic line: 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust'.

I. The Burial of the Dead

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?

'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
– Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer.

18 April ✶ Waste Land Limericks ✶ Wendy Cope

Eliot's *The Waste Land* has inspired many works of literature since it was published, but perhaps none as directly as these poems by Wendy Cope. The limerick is a playful form, associated with naughty humour and poking fun at people. In these poems, Cope plays around with Eliot's weighty words, creating a completely different type of poetic experience.

I

In April one seldom feels cheerful;
Dry stones, sun and dust make me fearful;
Clairvoyantes distress me,
Commuters depress me –
Met Stetson and gave him an earful.

II

She sat on a mighty fine chair,
Sparks flew as she tidied her hair;
She asks many questions,
I make few suggestions –
Bad as Albert and Lil – what a pair!

III

The Thames runs, bones rattle, rats creep;
Tiresias fancies a peep –
A typist is laid,
A record is played –
Wei la la. After this it gets deep.

IV

A Phoenician named Phlebas forgot
About birds and his business – the lot,
Which is no surprise,
Since he'd met his demise
And been left in the ocean to rot.

V

No water. Dry rocks and dry throats,
Then thunder, a shower of quotes
From the Sanskrit and Dante.
Da. Damyata. Shantih.
I hope you'll make sense of the notes.

19 April ✶ Concord Hymn ✶ Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Battle of Lexington and Concord, the opening battle of the American Revolutionary War, took place on this day in 1775 in the state of Massachusetts. Concord is a place of great importance in American literature, as it was home of the philosopher-poets Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as well as the author of *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott.

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
  Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
  And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
  Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
  Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
  We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
  When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
  To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
  The shaft we raise to them and thee.

20 April ✶ I Had a Dove ✶ John Keats

It is extraordinary to think that John Keats, remembered for writing some of the most beautiful poetry in history, died when he was only twenty-five years old. These lines, on a wild bird kept as a pet that dies in its captivity, reflect upon death in a way that feels especially poignant.

I had a dove, and the sweet dove died;
  And I have thought it died of grieving:
O, what could it grieve for? Its feet were tied,
  With a silken thread of my own hand's weaving;
Sweet little red feet, why should you die?
Why should you leave me, sweet bird, why?
You liv'd alone on the forest tree,
Why, pretty thing! could you not live with me?
I kiss'd you oft and gave you white peas;
Why not live sweetly, as in the green trees?

21 April ✶ *from* The Old Vicarage, Grantchester ✶ Rupert Brooke

Brooke wrote this sprightly poem while recuperating from a nervous breakdown in Berlin. It reflects upon his student days at the University of Cambridge, and the nearby village of Grantchester, a popular spot for students escaping their work for a day.

Ah God! to see the branches stir
Across the moon at Grantchester!
To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten
Unforgettable, unforgotten
River-smell, and hear the breeze
Sobbing in the little trees.
Say, do the elm-clumps greatly stand
Still guardians of that holy land?
The chestnuts shade, in reverend dream,
The yet unacademic stream?
Is dawn a secret shy and cold
Anadyomene, silver-gold?
And sunset still a golden sea
From Haslingfield to Madingley?
And after, ere the night is born,
Do hares come out about the corn?
Oh, is the water sweet and cool,
Gentle and brown, above the pool?
And laughs the immortal river still
Under the mill, under the mill?
Say, is there Beauty yet to find?
And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies, and truths, and pain? . . . oh! yet
Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?

22 April ✶ The Woodspurge ✶
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the brother of Christina Rossetti, whose poetry appears earlier in this book. The poem recounts the movements of the narrator's grief, first like a billowing wind, next quiet and still. Sitting perfectly still in his state of grief, all thoughts, like the wind, are dropped – when he stirs from his spell, he finds himself doing nothing more than staring at a woodspurge, a type of wildflower that flowers from April to June.

The wind flapped loose, the wind was still,
Shaken out dead from tree and hill:
I had walked on at the wind's will, –
I sat now, for the wind was still.

Between my knees my forehead was, –
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.

My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;
Among those few, out of the sun,
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one.

From perfect grief there need not be
Wisdom or even memory:
One thing then learnt remains to me, –
The woodspurge has a cup of three.

23 April ✶ *from* Richard II ✶ William Shakespeare

Today is St George's Day, the patron saint of England. It is also the traditional day of Shakespeare's birth (and his death); we do not know when the Bard was born, but he was baptised on 26 April 1564. These lines, from *Richard II*, bring together both days, in Shakespeare's tribute to the blessed plot of England.

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessèd plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

24 April ✶ Incident of the French Camp ✶ Robert Browning

The Battle of Ratisbon took place on the 23 April 1809 (it is placed here in this book as it shares the date with Shakespeare's birthday). It was fought as part of the Napoleonic Wars, between the French and Austrian empires. The poem focuses on an imagined exchange between a very young French soldier, fatally injured on his horse, and the Emperor Napoleon himself.

You know, we French storm'd Ratisbon:
 A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
 Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
 Legs wide, arms lock'd behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
 Oppressive with its mind.

Just as perhaps he mused 'My plans
 That soar, to earth may fall,
Let once my army leader Lannes
 Waver at yonder wall,' –
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
 A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
 Until he reached the mound.

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
  And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
  You hardly could suspect –
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
  Scarce any blood came through)
You look'd twice ere you saw his breast
  Was all but shot in two.

'Well,' cried he, 'Emperor, by God's grace
  We've got you Ratisbon!
The Marshal's in the market-place,
  And you'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird flap his vans
  Where I, to heart's desire,
Perched him!' The chief's eye flash'd; his plans
  Soared up again like fire.

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
  Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
  When her bruised eaglet breathes.
'You're wounded!' 'Nay,' the soldier's pride
  Touch'd to the quick, he said:
'I'm kill'd, Sire!' And his chief beside
  Smiling the boy fell dead.

25 April ✶ Robinson Crusoe's Wise Sayings ✶ Ian McMillan

Robinson Crusoe, popularly thought of as the very first English novel, was published this day in 1719. Written by Daniel Defoe, the book originally listed 'Robinson Crusoe' as its author, and, as the novel wasn't a familiar form of storytelling, it was read by many people as an authentic autobiography and travel journal. Ian McMillan's amusing poem extracts wisdom from Robinson's hardships.

You can never have too many turtle eggs.
I'm the most interesting person in this room.
A beard is as long as I want it to be.

The swimmer on his own doesn't need trunks.
A tree is a good clock.
If you talk long enough to a rock you'll fall asleep.

I know it's Christmas because I cry.
Waving at ships is useless.
Footprints make me happy, unless they're my own.

26 April ✶ Into my Heart an air that Kills ✶ A. E. Housman

This poem's rhetorical questions, about 'blue remembered hills', have become widely quoted. The poem is about the inaccessibility of memory and the past – we cannot get back to where we once were, but can only live our lives in the present.

Into my heart an air that kills
 From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
 What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
 I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
 And cannot come again.

27 April ✶ o by the by ✶ E. E. Cummings

E. E. Cummings wrote around 2,900 poems, all unconventional, and all experimental. Many of his poems don't seem to make sense at all – but that's entirely intentional! Instead of trying to get everything to make sense, try just enjoying the flow of words and sounds. In this poem, being with someone is like flying your dreams as you would fly a kite.

o by the by
has anybody seen
little you-i
who stood on a green
hill and threw
his wish at blue

with a swoop and a dart
out flew his wish
(it dived like a fish
but it climbed like a dream)
throbbing like a heart
singing like a flame

blue took it my
far beyond far
and high beyond high
bluer took it your
but bluest took it our
away beyond where

what a wonderful thing
is the end of a string
(murmurs little you-i
as the hill becomes nil)
and will somebody tell
me why people let go

28 April ✶ Desiderata ✶ Max Ehrmann

'Desiderata' is the most well-known work by the American poet Max Ehrmann. It is a prose poem – a type of writing, as you might expect, somewhere in between poetry and prose. So, while Ehrmann doesn't use rhyme or metre or regular stanza lengths, he does use the sort of language, imagery and metaphors we associate with poetry. Ehrmann's words offer advice and encouragement, both spiritual and practical, and at its centre are two words: 'Be yourself'.

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.

29 April ✶ Dancing with Life ✶
Shauna Darling Robertson

29 April is International Dance Day, in global celebration of the art of dance – from tap-dance to tango, and ballet to breakdance.

I beckoned to the floor
missed buses and lost races.
We body-popped till sore.

I held out my hand
to every failed exam.
We lindy-hopped. We can-canned.

I slipped my arm around the waist
of *chicken, loser, nerd.*
We skip-jived at a pace.

I chose the longest, dullest week
and pressed it to my chest
as we cha-cha'd cheek to cheek.

I tipped and doffed my hat
to a hundred horrid haircuts.
We mambo'd, tango'd, tapped.

Feeling bold, I turned to face
my darkest, rawest faults.
I took them in my arms, we bowed
and broke into a waltz.

30 April ✶ Facing It ✶ Yusef Komunyakaa

On 30 April 1975, Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, was captured by Northern Vietnamese forces. This event, known as the Fall of Saigon, marked the defeat of South Vietnam and the US forces which supported them, and ended the Vietnam War – a conflict which had raged for nearly twenty years and resulted in the deaths of approximately four million people. This poem is set inside the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which honours the American soldiers who lost their lives in the war.

My black face fades,
hiding inside the black granite.
I said I wouldn't,
dammit: No tears.
I'm stone. I'm flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me
like a bird of prey, the profile of night
slanted against morning. I turn
this way – the stone lets me go.
I turn that way – I'm inside
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
again, depending on the light
to make a difference.
I go down the 58,022 names,
half-expecting to find
my own in letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
I see the booby trap's white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
but when she walks away
the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
wings cutting across my stare.

The sky. A plane in the sky.
A white vet's image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I'm a window.
He's lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman's trying to erase names:
No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

May

1 May ✶ Verses said to be written on the Union ✶ Jonathan Swift

On 1 May 1707, the Acts of Union between England and Scotland were passed, forming modern Great Britain. Queen Anne was on the throne at the time, and Swift, a satirist, produced the following lines.

The Queen has lately lost a Part
Of her entirely-*English* Heart,
For want of which, by way of Botch,
She piec'd it up again with *Scotch*.
Blest Revolution, which creates
Divided Hearts, united States.
See how the double Nation lies;
Like a rich Coat with Skirts of Frize:
As if a Man in making Posies
Should bundle Thistles up with Roses.
Who ever yet a Union saw
Of Kingdoms, without Faith or Law.
Henceforward let no Statesman dare,
A Kingdom, to a Ship compare;
Lest he should call our Commonweal
A Vessel with a double Keel:
Which just like ours, new rigg'd and mann'd,
And got about a League from Land,
By Change of Wind to Leeward Side
The Pilot knew not how to guide.
So tossing Faction will o'erwhelm
Our crazy double-bottom'd Realm.

2 May ✶ The Merry Month of May ✶
Thomas Dekker

Thomas Dekker was a writer, poet and playwright during the Elizabethan and Jacobean era. This poem overflows with praise for bright May days.

O! the month of May, the merry month of May,
So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green!
O! and then did I unto my true Love say,
Sweet Peg, thou shalt be my Summer's Queen.

Now the nightingale, the pretty nightingale,
The sweetest singer in all the forest choir,
Entreats thee, sweet Peggy, to hear thy true love's tale:
Lo! yonder she sitteth, her breast against a briar.

But O! I spy the cuckoo, the cuckoo, the cuckoo;
See where she sitteth; come away, my joy:
Come away, I prithee, I do not like the cuckoo
Should sing where my Peggy and I kiss and toy.

O! the month of May, the merry month of May,
So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green!
And then did I unto my true Love say,
Sweet Peg, thou shalt be my Summer's Queen.

3 May ✶ Tartary ✶ Walter de la Mare

'Tartary' is a historical region that covers most of Russia, northern China, and stretches down to India – but it's a word that hasn't been commonly used in centuries. In this poem, de la Mare imagines Tartary as a beautiful and fantastical land, and even goes as far as to imagine himself as its ruler!

If I were Lord of Tartary,
  Myself, and me alone,
My bed should be of ivory,
  Of beaten gold my throne;
And in my court should peacocks flaunt,
And in my forests tigers haunt,
And in my pools great fishes slant
  Their fins athwart the sun.

If I were Lord of Tartary,
  Trumpeters every day
To all my meals should summon me,
  And in my courtyards bray;
And in the evening lamps should shine,
Yellow as honey, red as wine,
While harp, and flute, and mandoline
  Made music sweet and gay.

If I were Lord of Tartary,
  I'd wear a robe of beads,
White, and gold, and green they'd be –
  And small and thick as seeds;
And ere should wane the morning star,
I'd don my robe and scimitar.
And zebras seven should draw my car
  Through Tartary's dark glades.

Lord of the fruits of Tartary,
  Her rivers silver-pale!
Lord of the hills of Tartary,
  Glen, thicket, wood, and dale!
Her flashing stars, her scented breeze,
Her trembling lakes, like foamless seas,
Her bird-delighting citron-trees,
  In every purple vale!

4 May ✶ Back in the Playground Blues ✶ Adrian Mitchell

Have you ever been picked on because you're different? Or seen someone else be bullied for something that isn't their fault at all? Today is the United Nations' Anti-Bullying Day – a day which raises awareness of the damaging effects of bullying. The pain of being bullied is the subject of Adrian Mitchell's poem. His words, revealing the damage that bullying can inflict, remind us how important it is always to be kind.

I dreamed I was back in the playground, I was about four feet high
Yes I dreamed I was back in the playground, standing about four feet high
Well the playground was three miles long and the playground was five miles wide
It was broken black tarmac with a high wire fence all around
Broken black dusty tarmac with a high fence running all around
And it had a special name to it, they called it The Killing Ground

Got a mother and a father they're one thousand years away
The rulers of The Killing Ground are coming out to play
Everybody thinking: 'Who they going to play with today?'

Well you get it for being Jewish
And you get it for being black
Get it for being chicken
Get it for fighting back
You get it for being big and fat
Get it for being small
O those who get it get it and get it
For any damn thing at all

Sometimes they take a beetle, tear off its six legs one by one
Beetle on its black back, rocking in the lunchtime sun
But a beetle can't beg for mercy, a beetle's not half the fun

Heard a deep voice talking, it had that iceberg sound,
'It prepares them for Life' – but I have never found
Any place in my life that's worse than The Killing Ground.

5 May ✶ The Song of the Banana Man ✶
Evan Jones

On 5 May 1494, Christopher Columbus became the first European to reach Jamaica, thus setting in motion events that led to the island enduring centuries of European colonialism. *The Song of the Banana Man* was published as part of the celebrations of Jamaica's independence in 1962, although Jones wrote it in the fifties after some fellow students at Oxford asserted that no poem of quality could ever be written in anything other than 'proper' English. It has since become one of the most loved and well-known poems across the whole of the Caribbean, and is considered a modern song of Jamaican identity.

Touris', white man, wipin' his face,
Met me in Golden Grove market place.
He looked at m' ol' clothes brown wid stain,
An' soaked right through wid de Portlan' rain,
He cas' his eye, turn' up his nose,
He says, 'You're a beggar man, I suppose?'
He says, 'Boy, get some occupation,
Be of some value to your nation.'

I said, 'By God and dis big right han'
You mus' recognize a banana man.

'Up in de hills, where de streams are cool,
An' mullet an' janga swim in de pool,
I have ten acres of mountain side,
An' a dainty-foot donkey dat I ride,
Four Gros Michel, an' four Lacatan,
Some coconut trees, and some hills of yam,
An' I pasture on dat very same lan'
Five she-goats an' a big black ram,

'Dat, by God an' dis big right han'
Is de property of a banana man.

'I leave m' yard early-mornin' time
An' set m' foot to de mountain climb,
I ben m' back to de hot-sun toil,
An' m' cutlass rings on de stony soil,
Ploughin' an' weedin', diggin' an' plantin',
Till Massa Sun drop back o' John Crow mountain,
Den home again in cool evenin' time,
Perhaps whistling dis likkle rhyme,

'Praise God an' m' big right han'
I will live an' die a banana man.

'Banana day is my special day,
I cut my stems an' I'm on m' way,
Load up de donkey, leave de lan'
Head down de hill to banana stan',
When de truck comes roun' I take a ride
All de way down to de harbour side –
Dat is de night, when you, touris' man,
Would change your place wid a banana man.

'Yes, by God, an' m' big right han'
I will live an' die a banana man.

'De bay is calm, an' de moon is bright
De hills look black for de sky is light,
Down at de dock is an English ship,
Restin' after her ocean trip,
While on de pier is a monstrous hustle,
Tallymen, carriers, all in a bustle,
Wid stems on deir heads in a long black snake
Some singin' de sons dat banana men make,

'Like, Praise God an' m' big right han'
I will live an' die a banana man.
'Den de payment comes, an' we have some fun,
Me, Zekiel, Bredda and Duppy Son.
Down at de bar near United Wharf
We knock back a white rum, bus' a laugh,
Fill de empty bag for further toil
Wid saltfish, breadfruit, coconut oil.
Den head back home to m' yard to sleep,
A proper sleep dat is long an' deep.

'Yes, by God, an' m' big right han'
I will live an' die a banana man.

'So when you see dese ol' clothes brown wid stain,
An' soaked right through wid de Portlan' rain,
Don't cas' your eye nor turn your nose,
Don't judge a man by his patchy clothes,
I'm a strong man, a proud man, an' I'm free,
Free as dese mountains, free as dis sea,
I know myself, an' I know my ways,
An' will sing wid pride to de end o' my days

'Praise God an' m' big right han'
I will live an' die a banana man.'

6 May ✶ Buckingham Palace ✶ A. A. Milne

On this day in 1910, George V became king, and was so until his death in 1936. He was actually only the second monarch after Queen Victoria to reside in Buckingham Palace; this poem was written in 1924, during George's reign. A. A. Milne is better known as the author of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and Christopher Robin – Milne's son – features here as well.

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace –
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.
Alice is marrying one of the guard.
'A soldier's life is terrible hard,'
Says Alice.

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace –
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.
We saw a guard in a sentry-box.
'One of the sergeants looks after their socks,'
Says Alice.

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace –
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.
We looked for the King, but he never came.
'Well, God take care of him, all the same,'
Says Alice.

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace –
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.
They've great big parties inside the grounds.
'I wouldn't be King for a hundred pounds,'
Says Alice.

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace –
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.
A face looked out, but it wasn't the King's.
'He's much too busy a-signing things,'
Says Alice.

They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace –
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.
'Do you think the King knows all about me?'
'Sure to, dear, but it's time for tea,'
Says Alice.

7 May ✶ The Pobble Who Has No Toes ✶
Edward Lear

Another slice of nonsense verse from Edward Lear. This poem features a 'Runcible Cat'; Lear actually made up the word 'runcible', and seemed to like it a lot, as he used it frequently (there is a 'runcible spoon' in 'The Owl and the Pussycat'). It even appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, defined as simply 'a nonsense word'.

I

The Pobble who has no toes
    Had once as many as we;
When they said, 'Some day you may lose them all;' –
    He replied, – 'Fish fiddle de-dee!'
And his Aunt Jobiska made him drink,
Lavender water tinged with pink,
For she said, 'The World in general knows
There's nothing so good for a Pobble's toes!'

II

The Pobble who has no toes,
    Swam across the Bristol Channel;
But before he set out he wrapped his nose,
    In a piece of scarlet flannel.
For his Aunt Jobiska said, 'No harm
Can come to his toes if his nose is warm;
And it's perfectly known that a Pobble's toes
Are safe, – provided he minds his nose.'

III

The Pobble swam fast and well
    And when boats or ships came near him
He tinkedly-binkledy-winkled a bell
    So that all the world could hear him.
And all the Sailors and Admirals cried,
When they saw him nearing the further side, –
'He has gone to fish, for his Aunt Jobiska's
Runcible Cat with crimson whiskers!'

IV

But before he touched the shore,
    The shore of the Bristol Channel,
A sea-green Porpoise carried away
    His wrapper of scarlet flannel.
And when he came to observe his feet
Formerly garnished with toes so neat
His face at once became forlorn
On perceiving that all his toes were gone!

V

And nobody ever knew
    From that dark day to the present,
Whoso had taken the Pobble's toes,
    In a manner so far from pleasant.
Whether the shrimps or crawfish gray,
Or crafty Mermaids stole them away –
Nobody knew; and nobody knows
How the Pobble was robbed of his twice five toes!

VI

The Pobble who has no toes
    Was placed in a friendly Bark,
And they rowed him back, and carried him up,
    To his Aunt Jobiska's Park.
And she made him a feast at his earnest wish
Of eggs and buttercups fried with fish; –
And she said, – 'It's a fact the whole world knows,
'That Pobbles are happier without their toes.'

8 May ✶ Impromptu on Charles II ✶ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

On this day in 1660, Parliament met to restore Charles II to the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland. He became known as 'the Merry Monarch' because of his enjoyment of the arts, wine and women. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester – often simply called 'Rochester' – was a controversial writer of bawdy poems, and a favourite of Charles. However, he pushed his luck too far with this insulting poem, which he is said to have handed to the king himself. Charles was furious, and Rochester was banished from his court.

God bless our good and gracious King
Whose promise none relyes on
Who never said A foolish thing
Nor ever did A wise one.

9 May ✶ What the teacher said when asked: What er we avin for geography, Miss? ✶ John Agard

The Greek astronomer Hipparchus, in the second century BC, was the first person to understand location in terms of longitude and latitude – necessary coordinates for all sea travel and exploration. The student in Agard's poem, though, journeys by another means, by dreaming his class away.

This morning I've got too much energy
much too much for geography

I'm in a high mood
so class don't think me crude
but you can stuff latitude and longitude

I've had enough of the earth's crust
today I want to touch the clouds

Today I want to sing out loud
and tear all maps to shreds

I'm not settling for river beds
I want the sky and nothing less

Today I couldn't care if east turns west
Today I've got so much energy
I could do press-ups on the desk
but that won't take much out of me

Today I'll dance on the globe
In a rainbow robe

while you class remain seated
on your natural zone
with your pens and things
watching my contours grow wings

All right, class, see you later.
If the headmaster asks for me
say I'm a million dreaming degrees
beyond the equator

a million dreaming degrees
beyond the equator

10 May ✶ For my Niece ✶ Kate Tempest

Kate Tempest is a performance poet and rapper, living and working in London. Her poetry, which is direct and modern in style, is nevertheless inspired by poets across the history of English literature.

I hold you in my arms,
your age is told in months.

There's things I hope you'll learn.
Things I'm sure that I learned once.

But there's nothing I can teach you.
You'll find all that you need.

No flower bends its head to offer
teaching to a seed.

The seed will grow and blossom
once the flower's ground to dust.

But even so, if nothing else,
one thing I'll entrust:

Doing what you please
is not the same

as doing what you must.

11 May ✶ *from* Doctor Faustus ✶ Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe was one of the greatest writers in history, though, thanks to Shakespeare, he is remembered as only the second greatest playwright of the Elizabethan age. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is based on a German folk tale about a brilliant young man who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and pleasure. In this scene, Faustus is presented by the devil with the mythical Helen of Troy, who was said to be the most beautiful woman on earth. Her abduction led to the Trojan War.

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul; see, where it flies! –
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for Heaven be in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris, and for love of thee,
Instead of Troy, shall Wittenberg be sack'd;
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my plumèd crest;
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,
And then return to Helen for a kiss.
O, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appear'd to hapless Semele;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms;
And none but thou shalt be my paramour.

12 May ✶ On a Lane in Spring ✶ John Clare

Sonnets usually involve some sort of tension or change of directions, especially in the final couplet. But in Clare's sonnet on spring there is no such tension. The poem moves harmoniously from natural form to natural form, and ends with a complete image of springtime in a country lane. In this way, Clare uses the form of the sonnet to create an unexpectedly tranquil picture.

A little lane – the brook runs close beside,
  And spangles in the sunshine, while the fish glide
    swiftly by;
And hedges leafing with the green springtide;
  From out their greenery the old birds fly,
And chirp and whistle in the morning sun;
  The pilewort glitters 'neath the pale blue sky,
The little robin has its nest begun
  The grass-green linnets round the bushes fly.
How mild the spring comes in! the daisy buds
  Lift up their golden blossoms to the sky.
  How lovely are the pingles and the woods!
  Here a beetle runs – and there a fly
Rests on the arum leaf in bottle-green,
And all the spring in this sweet lane is seen.

13 May ✶ The Lanyard ✶ Billy Collins

Though Mothering Sunday has been and gone in the UK, today is Mother's Day in the USA. The American poet Billy Collins thinks about the impossible debt we owe to our mothers, through a gift he gave his mother: a homemade lanyard. The reference to a 'French novelist' and memory is to Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* – a novel in which a bite of a madeleine, a little French cake, brings back a torrent of memories.

The other day as I was ricocheting slowly
off the blue walls of this room,
bouncing from typewriter to piano,
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,
I found myself in the L section of the dictionary
where my eyes fell upon the word *lanyard*.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist
could send one more suddenly into the past –
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp
by a deep Adirondack lake
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,
but that did not keep me from crossing
strand over strand again and again
until I had made a boxy
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,
and I gave her a lanyard.
She nursed me in many a sick room,
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,
and then led me out into the airy light

and taught me to walk and swim,
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.
Here are thousands of meals, she said,
and here is clothing and a good education.
And here is your lanyard, I replied,
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,
strong legs, bones and teeth,
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.
And here, I wish to say to her now,
is a smaller gift – not the archaic truth

that you can never repay your mother,
but the rueful admission that when she took
the two-tone lanyard from my hands,
I was as sure as a boy could be
that this useless, worthless thing I wove
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

14 May ✶ Rondeau ✶ Leigh Hunt

The 'rondeau' is a poetic form originating in medieval France. It is a lyrical form, meaning it is designed to be set to music and sung, and its name signifies that it goes 'around' – it returns to where it began.

Jenny kissed me when we met,
  Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
  Sweets into your list, put that in:
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
  Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old, but add
  Jenny kissed me.

15 May ✶ *from* The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock ✶ T. S. Eliot

These lines are from the beginning of one of Eliot's greatest poems. Many beautiful lines from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' have become famous – and you only have to read it aloud to hear why! It is the story, sometimes sad, sometimes comical, of a man grown old, who is taking stock of his whole life as it lies behind him.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

16 May ✶ Instructions ✶ Neil Gaiman

This enchanting poem, by Neil Gaiman, references fairy tales in an ingenious fairy tale of its own. Gaiman writes for people of all ages; his ever-growing body of work encompasses poetry, comics, novels, movies, song lyrics, theatre and even episodes of the hit television show *Doctor Who*.

Touch the wooden gate in the wall you never
saw before.
Say 'please' before you open the latch,
go through,
walk down the path.
A red metal imp hangs from the green-painted
front door,
as a knocker,
do not touch it; it will bite your fingers.
Walk through the house. Take nothing. Eat
nothing.
However, if any creature tells you that it hungers,
feed it.
If it tells you that it is dirty,
clean it.
If it cries to you that it hurts,
if you can,
ease its pain.

From the back garden you will be able to see the
wild wood.
The deep well you walk past leads to Winter's
realm;
there is another land at the bottom of it.

If you turn around here,
you can walk back, safely;
you will lose no face. I will think no less of you.

Once through the garden you will be in the
wood.
The trees are old. Eyes peer from the under-
growth.
Beneath a twisted oak sits an old woman. She
may ask for something;
give it to her. She
will point the way to the castle.
Inside it are three princesses.
Do not trust the youngest. Walk on.
In the clearing beyond the castle the twelve
months sit about a fire,
warming their feet, exchanging tales.
They may do favours for you, if you are polite.
You may pick strawberries in December's frost.
Trust the wolves, but do not tell them where
you are going.
The river can be crossed by the ferry. The ferry-
man will take you.
(The answer to his question is this:
If he hands the oar to his passenger, he will be free to leave the boat.
Only tell him this from a safe distance.)

If an eagle gives you a feather, keep it safe.
Remember: that giants sleep too soundly; that
witches are often betrayed by their appetites;
dragons have one soft spot, somewhere, always;
hearts can be well-hidden,
and you betray them with your tongue.

Do not be jealous of your sister.
Know that diamonds and roses
are as uncomfortable when they tumble from
one's lips as toads and frogs:
colder, too, and sharper, and they cut.
Remember your name.
Do not lose hope – what you seek will be found.
Trust ghosts. Trust those that you have helped
to help you in their turn.
Trust dreams.
Trust your heart, and trust your story.
When you come back, return the way you came.
Favours will be returned, debts will be repaid.
Do not forget your manners.
Do not look back.
Ride the wise eagle (you shall not fall).
Ride the silver fish (you will not drown).
Ride the grey wolf (hold tightly to his fur).

There is a worm at the heart of the tower; that is why it will not stand.

When you reach the little house, the place your
journey started,
you will recognize it, although it will seem
much smaller than you remember.
Walk up the path, and through the garden gate
you never saw before but once.
And then go home. Or make a home.
And rest.

17 May ✶ A Handsome Young Fellow Called Frears ✶ Michael Palin

Michael Palin is one of the men behind the British comedy outfit Monty Python. He is a master of the limerick form: first there is a pair of long rhyming lines, then a pair of short rhyming lines, and then a final line returns us to the rhyme of the opening lines. Limericks, named after the Irish county of Limerick, can be identified by their sound as much as their appearance on the page.

A handsome young fellow called Frears
Was attracted to girls by their ears.
He'd traverse the globe
For a really nice lobe,
And the sight would reduce him to tears.

18 May ✶ Matilda: Who Told Lies, and was Burned to Death ✶ Hillaire Belloc

The poem is a cautionary verse, one that serves as a playful warning to its readers. It is in many respects a poetic retelling of one of Aesop's fables: The Boy Who Cried Wolf.

Matilda told such Dreadful Lies,
It made one Gasp and Stretch one's Eyes;
Her Aunt, who, from her Earliest Youth,
Had kept a Strict Regard for Truth,
Attempted to Believe Matilda:
The effort very nearly killed her,
And would have done so, had not She
Discovered this Infirmity.
For once, towards the Close of Day,
Matilda, growing tired of play,
And finding she was left alone,
Went tiptoe to the Telephone
And summoned the Immediate Aid
Of London's Noble Fire-Brigade.
Within an hour the Gallant Band
Were pouring in on every hand,
From Putney, Hackney Downs, and Bow.
With Courage high and Hearts a-glow,
They galloped, roaring through the Town,
'Matilda's House is Burning Down!'
Inspired by British Cheers and Loud
Proceeding from the Frenzied Crowd,
They ran their ladders through a score
Of windows on the Ball Room Floor;
And took Peculiar Pains to Souse
The Pictures up and down the House,
Until Matilda's Aunt succeeded
In showing them they were not needed;
And even then she had to pay

To get the Men to go away!
It happened that a few Weeks later
Her Aunt was off to the Theatre
To see that Interesting Play
The Second Mrs Tanqueray.
She had refused to take her Niece
To hear this Entertaining Piece:
A Deprivation Just and Wise
To Punish her for Telling Lies.
That Night a Fire *did* break out –
You should have heard Matilda Shout!
You should have heard her Scream and Bawl,
And throw the window up and call
To People passing in the Street –
(The rapidly increasing Heat
Encouraging her to obtain
Their confidence) – but all in vain!
For every time She shouted 'Fire!'
They only answered 'Little Liar!'
And therefore when her Aunt returned,
Matilda, and the House, were Burned.

19 May ✶ Oranges and Lemons ✶ Anon.

On 19 May 1536, Anne Boleyn was executed. She was the second wife of Henry VIII, and mother of the future Queen Elizabeth I. Anne was married to Henry for only three years before he began courting Jane Seymour, at which point he ended his marriage to Anne by putting her on trial for treason and having her beheaded. It is popularly believed that the nursery rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons', with its final lines, relates to execution by beheading, and that it may even be modelled on Henry VIII's relationships. The line 'Here comes a chopper to chop off your head' also appears at a crucial moment in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. When read aloud, the poem is said to mimic the distinctive sounds of the bells it describes.

Oranges and lemons,
Say the bells of St Clement's.

You owe me five farthings,
Say the bells of St Martin's.

When will you pay me?
Say the bells of Old Bailey.

When I grow rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.

When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.

I'm sure I don't know,
Says the great bell of Bow.

Here comes a candle to light you to bed,
Here comes a chopper to chop off your head.
Chip chop, chip chop, the last man is dead.

20 May ✶ The Mouse's Tale ✶ Lewis Carroll

'The Mouse's Tale' from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is perhaps the most well-known example of a picture poem in English – a poem that is shaped like its subject matter. Appearing early on in the novel, a mouse begins to tell Alice a sad story, its 'tale'. All Alice can focus on is its real tail, and the two soon are woven together in a classic nonsense poem.

'Fury said to
a mouse, That
he met in the
house, "Let
us both go
to law: *I*
will prose-
cute you.—
Come, I'll
take no de-
nial; We
must have
the trial:
For really
this morn-
ing I've
nothing
to do."
Said the
mouse to
the cur,
"Such a
trial, dear
Sir, With
no jury
or judge,
would
be wast-
ing our
breath."
"I'll be
judge,
I'll be
jury,"
Said
cun-
ning
old
Fury;
"I'll
try
the
whole
cause,
and
condemn
you to
death."'

21 May ✶ Friends ✶ Polly Clark

Poems take their source material from many places. Some draw on the poet's own experiences, some are about the lives of others, and some focus on previous poems or other works of literature. And, in some cases, poems turn to the American sit-com *Friends* for inspiration.

It showed how friendship
doesn't end (like when
Emma and I watched

eight episodes in one go)
though outside my window
the climate was changing

and in my experience
people found each other
quite easy to take or leave.

The day after the last episode
they ran them all again,
protecting me, it seems.

I keep just one from
Two-hundred-and-thirty-six.
It's the one where Ross says,

but this can't be it,
and Rachel says,
then how come it is?

and he sinks to his knees with his arms
around her legs and the camera
moves slowly back

and they hold the shot
for a long time
before the theme tune begins.

22 May ✶ Today Is Very Boring ✶ Jack Prelutsky

Boredom is a state of mind – sometimes if you decide you are bored, then you might miss the truly exciting stuff in life. That is Jack Prelutsky's message, and he pushes it to some extreme examples.

Today is very boring,
it's a very boring day,
there is nothing much to look at,
there is nothing much to say,
there's a peacock on my sneakers,
there's a penguin on my head,
there's a dormouse on my doorstep,
I am going back to bed.

Today is very boring,
it is boring through and through,
there is absolutely nothing
that I think I want to do,
I see giants riding rhinos,
and an ogre with a sword,
there's a dragon blowing smoke rings,
I am positively bored.

Today is very boring,
I can hardly help but yawn,
there's a flying saucer landing
in the middle of my lawn,
a volcano just erupted
less than half a mile away,
and I think I felt an earthquake,
it's a very boring day.

23 May ✶ A Tragic Story ✶
William Makepeace Thackeray

Thackeray's poem gives a serious name and a sombre tone to what is actually a silly subject: a man trying to escape his own pigtail.

There lived a sage in days of yore,
And he a handsome pigtail wore:
But wondered much, and sorrowed more,
  Because it hung behind him.

He mused upon this curious case,
And swore he'd change the pigtail's place,
And have it hanging at his face,
  Not dangling there behind him.

Says he, 'The mystery I've found –
Says he, 'The mystery I've found!
I'll turn me round,' – he turned him round;
  But still it hung behind him.

Then round and round, and out and in,
All day the puzzled sage did spin;
In vain – it mattered not a pin –
  The pigtail hung behind him.

And right and left and round about,
And up and down, and in and out
He turned; but still the pigtail stout
  Hung steadily behind him.

And though his efforts never slack,
And though he twist, and twirl, and tack,
Alas! still faithful to his back,
  The pigtail hangs behind him.

24 May ✶ Buddha ✶ Tony Mitton

Vesak, or Buddha Day, is celebrated on the full moon of the Indian lunar month of Vesakha, which is usually in May. It is one of the most important festivals in the Buddhist calendar as it commemorates three significant events in Gautama Buddha's life – his birth, his enlightenment and his death.

The Buddha is not a god,
but human.

The Buddha's image
is not an icon to be worshipped.

The Buddha is you,
is me.

The Buddha you see
is just a reminder.

It says, simply,
'All you need is this,
this quiet sitting.
The answer is inside you.
You carry it like a seed.

Only listen inwardly
to stillness and to silence,
beneath all thought,
emotion and sensation,

to know the lotus
as its flower unfolds.'

25 May ✶ *from* The Ballad of Reading Gaol ✶ Oscar Wilde

Wilde wrote these lines, a reflection on his two-year imprisonment, from exile in France. He was incarcerated because of his sexuality, and he endured terrible treatment as an inmate – hard labour and no luxuries such as books. In this extract, Wilde compares treatment in prison with the very crimes committed by prisoners.

I know not whether Laws be right,
 Or whether Laws be wrong;
All that we know who lie in gaol
 Is that the wall is strong;
And that each day is like a year,
 A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law
 That men have made for Man,
Since first Man took his brother's life,
 And the sad world began,
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
 With a most evil fan.

This too I know – and wise it were
 If each could know the same –
That every prison that men build
 Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
 How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
  And blind the goodly sun;
And they do well to hide their Hell,
  For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of Man
  Ever should look upon!

26 May ✶ Full Moon ✶ Vita Sackville-West

Vita Sackville-West was part of the illustrious Bloomsbury Group – a collective of writers, artists and intellectuals in the early twentieth century that included Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and the economist John Maynard Keynes. There is a sense of both gaiety and mystery in this poem; we do not know what the brightly coloured woman is running to in the night, but we know she is carefree and in high spirits.

She was wearing coral taffeta trousers
Someone had brought her from Isfahan,
And the little gold coat with pomegranate blossoms,
And the coral-hafted feather fan,
But she ran down a Kentish lane in the moonlight,
And skipped in the pool of moon as she ran.

She cared not a rap for all the big planets,
For Betelgeuse or Aldebaran,
And all the big planets cared nothing for her,
That small impertinent charlatan,
But she climbed on a Kentish stile in the moonlight,
And laughed at the sky through the sticks of her fan.

27 May ✶ God's Grandeur ✶
Gerard Manley Hopkins

Whitsun, or Whit Sunday, falls on the seventh Sunday after Easter. It commemorates the Holy Spirit's descent upon the disciples of Jesus. In the north of England, there are parades known as 'Whit Walks' on and around Whitsun. Hopkins's extraordinary lines describe the 'Holy Ghost' as it hangs above the world, and they form a tight and knotty poem that should be read aloud for full effect.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
  It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
  It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
  And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
  And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
  There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
  Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
  World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

28 May ✶ I Am! ✶ John Clare

This poem, one of Clare's most popular, was written during his second period in a mental asylum. It is full of anguish and self-pity, perhaps even self-loathing. However, the poem's opening words – 'I am' – are defiant, and no matter what has happened in the past, and no matter what Clare wishes for the future, one thing remains certain in his troubled mind: he still exists.

I am: yet what I am none cares or knows,
  My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
I am the self-consumer of my woes,
  They rise and vanish in oblivious host,
Like shades in love and death's oblivion lost;
And yet I am, and live with shadows tost

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
  Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life nor joys,
  But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
And e'en the dearest – that I loved the best –
Are strange – nay, rather stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod,
  A place where woman never smiled or wept;
There to abide with my Creator, God,
  And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept:
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below – above the vaulted sky.

29 May ✶ *from* Everest Climbed ✶ Ian Serraillier

On this day in 1953, the New Zealander Edmund Hillary and the Nepalese Tenzing Norgay became the first confirmed climbers to have reached the summit of Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world. Everest sits on the border of Nepal and China, and its summit is 8,848 metres above sea-level – for comparison, the highest point in England, Scafell Pike is 978 metres. The first full ascent of Everest remains one of the most remarkable moments in human exploration, comparable with reaching the North Pole or walking on the moon. And yet Hillary's notes from the summit are quite plain: 'We made seats for ourselves in the snow, and sitting there in reasonable comfort we ate with relish a bar of mint cake.'

And now with a sickening shock
They saw before them a towering wall
Of smooth and holdless rock.
O ghastly fear – with the goal so near
To find the way was blocked!
On one side darkly the mountain dropped,
On the other two plunging miles of peak
Shot from the dizzy skyline down
In a silver streak.

'No hope of turning the bluff to the west,'
Said Hillary. 'What's that I see to the east?
A worm-wide crack between cornice and rock –
Will it hold? I can try it at least.'

He called to Tenzing, 'Draw in the slack!'
Then levered himself right into the crack
And, kicking his spikes in the frozen crust,
Wriggled up with his back.
With arms and feet and shoulders he fought,
Inch by sweating inch, then caught
At the crest and grabbed for the light of day.
There was time, as he struggled for breath, to pray
For all the might that a man could wish –
Then he heaved at the rope till over the lip
Brave Tenzing, hauled from the deep, fell flop
Like a monstrous gaping fish.

Was the summit theirs? – they puffed and panted –
No, for the ridge still upward pointed.
On they plodded, Martian-weird
With pouting mask and icicle beard
That cracked and tinkled, broke and rattled,
As on with pound hearts they battled,
On to the summit –
Till at last the ridge began to drop.
Two swings, two whacks of Hillary's axe,
And they stoop at the top.

This tale of heroes is ended, the trumpets all
Have sounded. Soon, in the glass of history, we shall see
Their triumph – no boyish adventure, no trick of vanity
    fulfilled,
But a march in man's long progress to the stars.
And their glory shines in being, not in doing –
In courage, humanity, and valour uncomplaining.
It is the tale of Man himself, who made
The sea his highroad and the lonely sky his wing-way,
Who defied the world's highest stronghold and won
Her crown of snow.

30 May ✶ Life Doesn't Frighten Me ✶
Maya Angelou

Because she lived such a full life herself, Angelou sets an authoritative example when she writes that life is nothing to fear. But it is a young child in this poem who is so defiant and unfrightened.

Shadows on the wall
Noises down the hall
Life doesn't frighten me at all
Bad dogs barking loud
Big ghosts in a cloud
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Mean old Mother Goose
Lions on the loose
They don't frighten me at all
Dragons breathing flame
On my counterpane
That doesn't frighten me at all.

I go boo
Make them shoo
I make fun
Way they run
I won't cry
So they fly
I just smile
They go wild
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Tough guys fight
All alone at night
Life doesn't frighten me at all
Panthers in the park
Strangers in the dark
No, they don't frighten me at all.

That new classroom where
Boys all pull my hair
(Kissy little girls
With their hair in curls)
They don't frighten me at all.

Don't show me frogs and snakes
And listen for my scream,
If I'm afraid at all
It's only in my dreams.

I've got a magic charm
That I keep up my sleeve,
I can walk the ocean floor
And never have to breathe.

Life doesn't frighten me at all
Not at all
Not at all.
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

31 May ✶ The Man He Killed ✶ Thomas Hardy

The second Boer War, which started in 1899, ended on this day in 1902. It was a bloody war, fought in what is now South Africa between the British and the Boer armies. Around the world, opposition to the war was strong, and there were many British citizens who objected to it. Hardy's poem, published during the war, reflects on the absurdity and mindlessness of armed conflict.

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

'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 –
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 –
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,
Or help to half-a-crown.'

June

1 June ✶ *from* Greensleeves ✶ Anon.

On 1 June 1533 Anne Boleyn married Henry VIII – his second wife – and became queen of England. It is a popular notion that the song 'Greensleeves' was written around this time by Henry for his new wife. It became something of a hit, and by 1597 it was popular enough to be referenced in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Anne's popularity with Henry, unfortunately, wasn't so enduring. Less than three years later he had her beheaded at the Tower of London.

Alas, my love, ye do me wrong,
    To cast me off discourteously:
And I have lovèd you so long,
    Delighting in your company!
Greensleeves was all my joy,
    Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
    And who but Lady Greensleeves.

I have been ready at your hand,
    To grant whatever you would crave;
I have both wagèd life and land,
    Your love and good-will for to have.
Greensleeves was all my joy,
    Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
    And who but Lady Greensleeves.

I bought thee kerchers to thy head,
That were wrought fine and gallantly;
I kept thee both at board and bed,
Which cost my purse well-favour'dly.
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves.

I bought thee petticoats of the best,
The cloth so fine as it might be;
I gave thee jewels for thy chest,
And all this cost I spent on thee.
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves.

Thy smock of silk, both fair and white,
With gold embroider'd gorgeously;
Thy petticoat of sendal right,
And these I bought thee gladly.
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves.

Thy girdle of the gold so red,
With pearls bedeckèd sumptuously,
The like no other lasses had:
And yet thou wouldst not love me!
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves.

Greensleeves, now farewell! adieu!
God I pray to prosper thee!
For I am still thy lover true:
Come once again and love me!
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight;
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves.

2 June ✶ Bee! I'm Expecting You! ✶
Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson's many short verses make use of a vast range of forms and perspectives. This little poem acts as a letter between two unexpected correspondents, wittily bringing the category of nature poetry into the world of human behaviour.

Bee! I'm expecting you!
Was saying Yesterday
To Somebody you know
That you were due –

The Frogs got Home last Week –
Are settled, and at work –
Birds, mostly back –
The Clover warm and thick –

You'll get my Letter by
The seventeenth; Reply
Or better, be with me –
Yours, Fly.

3 June ✶ *from* Childe Harold's Pilgrimage ✶ George Gordon, Lord Byron

Lord Byron was in many sense the first modern celebrity. He was controversial and outrageous, spending fortunes on his lavish lifestyle and attracting a large number of female admirers. Though he remained always a man of leisure, he was an extremely accomplished swimmer and boxer (not to mention poet), and he eventually died fighting for the Greek army. The long, episodic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was a bestseller in its day, and it tells fictionalized versions of many of Byron's own travelling tales.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean – roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin – his control
Stops with the shore; – upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.

His steps are not upon thy paths, – thy fields
Are not a spoil for him, – thou dost arise
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray
And howling, to his Gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth: – there let him lay.

4 June ✶ Coming ✶ Charlotte Perkins Gilman

On this day in 1913, Emily Davison threw herself under the king's horse at the Epsom Derby, dying four days later from her injuries. Davison was a key part of the suffragette movement, the group that demanded the vote for women. It remains unclear if Davison had meant to kill herself or if an attempt to bring attention to the movement had gone wrong, but either way she has gone down in history as a martyr for the important cause of women's rights. The vote was given to women who met certain qualifications in 1918, five years after the incident; women were given full voting rights in 1928. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the writer of this poem, is best known for 'The Yellow Wallpaper' – a short story regarded as one of the most important feminist texts in the English language.

Because the time is ripe, the age is ready,
Because the world her woman's help demands,
Out of the long subjection and seclusion
Come to our field of warfare and confusion
The mother's heart and hands.

Long has she stood aside, endured and waited,
While man swung forward, toiling on alone;
Now, for the weary man, so long ill-mated,
Now, for the world for which she was created,
Comes woman to her own.

Not for herself! though sweet the air of freedom;
Not for herself, though dear the new-born power;
But for the child, who needs a nobler mother,
For the whole people, needing one another,
Comes woman to her hour.

5 June ✶ Balloons ✶ Sylvia Plath

4 and 5 June 1783 marked the first public demonstration of a hot air balloon by the French Montgolfier brothers – for the first time, men soared up into the sky and saw the world from a completely new perspective! The poet Sylvia Plath is known for heavy and serious poems, but here both the writing as well as the subject are lighter than air.

Since Christmas they have lived with us,
Guileless and clear,
Oval soul-animals,
Taking up half the space,
Moving and rubbing on the silk

Invisible air drifts,
Giving a shriek and pop
When attacked, then scooting to rest, barely trembling.
Yellow cathead, blue fish—
Such queer moons we live with

Instead of dead furniture!
Straw mats, white walls
And these traveling
Globes of thin air, red, green,
Delighting

The heart like wishes or free
Peacocks blessing
Old ground with a feather
Beaten in starry metals.
Your small

Brother is making
His balloon squeak like a cat.
Seeming to see
A funny pink world he might eat on the other side of it,
He bites,

Then sits
Back, fat jug
Contemplating a world clear as water.
A red
Shred in his little fist.

6 June ✶ Song of the Dying Gunner AA1 ✶ Charles Causley

6 June 1944 was 'D-Day', the day of the Normandy landings during the Second World War. 160,000 British, American, and Canadian troops landed on the coast of Nazi-occupied France and fought their way up the beaches, in what is now remembered as the largest seaborne assault in history. An estimated 19,000 soldiers from both sides lost their lives on that one day.

Oh mother my mouth is full of stars
As cartridges in the tray
My blood is a twin-branched scarlet tree
And it runs all runs away.

Oh 'Cooks to the galley' is sounded off
And the lads are down in the mess
But I lie down by the forrard gun
With a bullet in my breast.

Don't send me a parcel at Christmas time
Of socks and nutty and wine
And don't depend on a long weekend
By the Great Western Railway line.

Farewell, Aggie Weston, the Barracks at Guz,
Hang my tiddley suit on the door
I'm sewn up neat in a canvas sheet,
And I shan't be home no more.

7 June ✶ The Throstle ✶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Summer is coming! Alfred Tennyson (ennobled as Lord Tennyson) remains the longest-serving Poet Laureate in history, occupying the role from 1850 to his death in 1892. His writing is characteristic of the Victorian era – formal, refined, rigorously metrical – and he was a favourite poet of Queen Victoria herself, who found his poems soothing after the death of her beloved husband Albert.

'Summer is coming, summer is coming.
  I know it, I know it, I know it.
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again,'
  Yes, my wild little Poet.

Sing the new year in under the blue.
  Last year you sang it as gladly.
'New, new, new, new'! Is it then *so* new
  That you should carol so madly?

'Love again, song again, nest again, young again,'
  Never a prophet so crazy!
And hardly a daisy as yet, little friend,
  See, there is hardly a daisy.

'Here again, here, here, here, happy year'!
  O warble unchidden, unbidden!
Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,
  And all the winters are hidden.

8 June ✶ A London Plane-Tree ✶ Amy Levy

Amy Levy was a radical in her day. A 'new woman', she lived a progressive life ahead of her times. In this poem, both the poet and the tree are cooped up in the city; the 'she' in the final stanza could refer to either.

Green is the plane-tree in the square,
  The other trees are brown;
They droop and pine for country air;
  The plane-tree loves the town.

Here, from my garret-pane, I mark
  The plane-tree bud and blow,
Shed her recuperative bark,
  And spread her shade below.

Among her branches, in and out,
  The city breezes play;
The dun fog wraps her round about;
  Above, the smoke curls grey.

Others the country take for choice,
  And hold the town in scorn;
But she has listened to the voice
  On city breezes borne.

9 June ✶ I Lost a World – the Other Day! ✶ Emily Dickinson

It is not clear what, precisely, Emily Dickinson has lost in this poem – it could be anything from a book to a lover. What it makes clear, though, is that what is precious to one person might not be at all valuable to another.

I lost a World – the other day!
Has Anybody found?
You'll know it by the Row of Stars
Around its forehead bound.

A Rich man – might not notice it –
Yet – to my frugal Eye,
Of more Esteem than Ducats –
Oh find it – Sir – for me!

10 June ✶ My Shadow ✶ Robert Louis Stevenson

Stevenson's poem takes a child's perspective on his or her own shadow – a shadow that seems to have a life of its own. It is strange to think that this is by the author of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, a book in which the evil Hyde is like the shadowy side of the virtuous Jekyll.

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow –
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.

He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.

11 June ✶ The End ✶ A. A. Milne

This is one of Milne's best-known poems, and it is another about his son, Christopher Robin. Its message is simple: that age is all a matter of perspective.

When I was One,
I had just begun.

When I was Two,
I was nearly new.

When I was Three,
I was hardly me.

When I was Four,
I was not much more.

When I was Five,
I was just alive.

But now I am Six, I'm as clever as clever
So I think I'll be six now for ever and ever.

12 June ✶ On Turning Ten ✶ Billy Collins

Whereas A. A. Milne's poem, yesterday, took a very straightforward approach to age, Billy Collins complicates the emotions of growing older. Like Milne's poem, it counts and catalogues age, but for Collins everything looks different to the adult's eye.

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light –
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I could shine.
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

13 June ✶ The Pleasures of Friendship ✶ Stevie Smith

Poems can be thousands of lines long, involving epic battles or describing fantastic worlds, like Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Homer's *Odyssey*. But some poems, like this one, are just a handful of words about one particularly special moment.

The pleasures of friendship are exquisite,
How pleasant to go to a friend on a visit!
I go to my friend, we walk on the grass,
And the hours and moments like minutes pass.

14 June ✶ The Battle of Naseby ✶
Thomas Babington Macaulay

The Battle of Naseby, on 14 June 1645, was a turning point in the English Civil War. The war was between Charles I and his Royalist supporters, and Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentarian forces. The Royalists lost most of their army, and much of their supplies – their catastrophic defeat at Naseby led to the eventual execution of Charles I, and the rise of Cromwell as Lord Protector of England.

Oh! wherefore come ye forth in triumph from the north,
With your hands, and your feet, and your raiment all red?
And wherefore doth your rout send forth a joyous shout?
And whence be the grapes of the wine-press that ye tread?

Oh! evil was the root, and bitter was the fruit,
And crimson was the juice of the vintage that we trod;
For we trampled on the throng of the haughty and the strong,
Who sate in the high places and slew the saints of God.

It was about the noon of a glorious day of June,
That we saw their banners dance and their cuirasses shine,
And the man of blood was there, with his long essenced hair,
And Astley, and Sir Marmaduke, and Rupert of the Rhine.

Like a servant of the Lord, with his bible and his word,
The general rode along us to form us for the fight;
When a murmuring sound broke out, and swell'd into a shout
Among the godless horsemen upon the tyrant's right.

And hark! like the roar of the billows on the shore,
The cry of battle rises along their charging line:
For God! for the cause! for the Church! for the laws!
For Charles, king of England, and Rupert of the Rhine!

The furious German comes, with his clarions and his drums,
His bravoes of Alsatia and pages of White-hall;
They are bursting on our flanks! Grasp your pikes! Close your ranks!
For Rupert never comes, but to conquer, or to fall.

They are here – they rush on – we are broken – we are gone –
Our left is borne before them like stubble on the blast.
O Lord, put forth Thy might! O Lord, defend the right!
Stand back to back, in God's name! and fight it to the last!

Stout Skippon hath a wound – the centre hath given ground.
Hark! hark! what means the trampling of horsemen on our rear?
Whose banner do I see, boys? 'T is he! thank God! 't is he, boys!
Bear up another minute! Brave Oliver is here!

Their heads all stooping low, their points all in a row:
Like a whirlwind on the trees, like a deluge on the dikes,
Our cuirassiers have burst on the ranks of the Accurst,
And at a shock have scatter'd the forest of his pikes

Fast, fast, the gallants ride, in some safe nook to hide
Their coward heads, predestin'd to rot on Temple Bar;
And he—he turns! he flies! shame on those cruel eyes
That bore to look on torture, and dare not look on war!

Ho, comrades! scour the plain; and ere ye strip the slain,
First give another stab to make your search secure;
Then shake from sleeves and pockets their broad-pieces
and lockets,
The tokens of the wanton, the plunder of the poor.

Fools! your doublets shone with gold, and your hearts were
gay and bold,
When you kiss'd your lily hands to your lemans to-day;
And to-morrow shall the fox from her chambers in the
rocks
Lead forth her tawny cubs to howl about the prey.

Where be your tongues, that late mock'd at heaven and hell
and fate?
And the fingers that once were so busy with your blades?
Your perfum'd satin clothes, your catches and your oaths?
Your stage-plays and your sonnets, your diamonds and your
spades?

Down, down, for ever down with the mitre and the crown,
With the Belial of the court, and the Mammon of the Pope!
There is woe in Oxford halls, there is wail in Durham's
stalls;
The Jesuit smites his bosom, the bishop rends his cope.

And she of the seven hills shall mourn her children's ills,
And tremble when she thinks on the edge of England's
sword;
And the kings of earth in fear shall shudder when they hear
What the hand of God hath wrought for the Houses and the
Word!

15 June ✶ Prayer Before Birth ✶ Louis MacNeice

Poetry has the potential to offer us otherwise impossible perspectives, taking us inside the thoughts of those of other people and things. In this poem, it is an unborn baby who acts as narrator.

I am not yet born; O hear me.
Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat or the stoat or the
    club-footed ghoul come near me.

I am not yet born, console me.
I fear that the human race may with tall walls wall me,
  with strong drugs dope me, with wise lies lure me,
    on black racks rack me, in blood-baths roll me.

I am not yet born; provide me
With water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk
  to me, sky to sing to me, birds and a white light
    in the back of my mind to guide me.

I am not yet born; forgive me
For the sins that in me the world shall commit, my words
  when they speak me, my thoughts when they think me,
    my treason engendered by traitors beyond me,
      my life when they murder by means of my
        hands, my death when they live me.

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take when
  old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector me, mountains
    frown at me, lovers laugh at me, the white
      waves call me to folly and the desert calls
        me to doom and the beggar refuses
          my gift and my children curse me.

I am not yet born; O hear me,
Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God
come near me.

I am not yet born; O fill me
With strength against those who would freeze my
humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton,
would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with
one face, a thing, and against all those
who would dissipate my entirety, would
blow me like thistledown hither and
thither or hither and thither
like water held in the
hands would spill me.

Let them not make me a stone and let them not spill me.
Otherwise kill me.

16 June ✶ Ecce Puer ✶ James Joyce

The events of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* all take place on one day, 16 June. For this reason, Dubliners and fans of literature commemorate the date, known as 'Bloomsday', by reading aloud and publicly performing parts of the work. The title of this poem 'Behold the boy' in Latin – is a play on the phrase 'Ecce Homo', Latin for 'Behold the man': the words spoken by Pontius Pilate as he presents Jesus to a crowd before his death on the cross. The poem marked both the birth of Joyce's grandson and the death of his own father. Joyce failed to return to Ireland when his father was dying, and in the final lines of 'Ecce Puer' he addresses his father and asks him to forgive him.

Of the dark past
A child is born.
With joy and grief
My heart is torn.

Calm in his cradle
The living lies.
May love and mercy
Unclose his eyes!

Young life is breathed
On the glass;
The world that was not
Comes to pass.

A child is sleeping:
An old man gone.
O, father forsaken,
Forgive your son!

17 June ✶ The Way Things Are ✶ Roger McGough

The third Sunday in June is Father's Day in the UK and the USA. It is a relatively new holiday, having only been invented after the Second World War – but don't use that as an excuse for forgetting it!

No, the candle is not crying, it cannot feel pain.
Even telescopes, like the rest of us, grow bored.
Bubblegum will not make the hair soft and shiny.
The duller the imagination, the faster the car,
I am your father and this is the way things are.

When the sky is looking the other way,
do not enter the forest. No, the wind
is not caused by the rushing of clouds.
An excuse is as good a reason as any.
A lighthouse, launched, will not go far,
I am your father and this is the way things are.

No, old people do not walk slowly
because they have plenty of time.
Gardening books when buried will not flower.
Though lightly worn, a crown may leave a scar,
I am your father and this is the way things are.

No, the red woolly hat has not been
put on the railing to keep it warm.
When one glove is missing, both are lost.
Today's craft fair is tomorrow's car boot sale.
The guitarist gently weeps, not the guitar,
I am your father and this is the way things are.

Pebbles work best without batteries.
The deckchair will fail as a unit of currency.
Even though your shadow is shortening
It does not mean you are growing smaller.
Moonbeams, sadly, will not survive in a jar,
I am your father and this is the way things are.

For centuries the bullet remained quietly confident
that the gun would be invented.
A drowning surrealist will not appreciate
the concrete life belt.
No guarantee my last goodbye is au revoir,
I am your father and this is the way things are.

Do not become a prison officer unless you know
what you're letting someone else in for.
The thrill of being a shower curtain will soon pall.
No trusting hand awaits the falling star,
I am your father, and I am sorry,
but this is the way things are.

18 June ✶ *from* The Field of Waterloo ✶ Sir Walter Scott

The Battle of Waterloo – the climactic moment of the Napoleonic wars, took place on 18 June 1815. Napoleon's army was defeated by British and Prussian armies, and the battle ended his long campaign to rule over all of Europe. These stanzas are from 'The Field of Waterloo' by the Scottish poet Sir Walter Scott. Scott created the poem out of descriptions of the battle given to him by those who fought there, with the aim of donating profits from the poem's sale to the soldiers. However, not everyone was impressed by his poem, as these scathing lines from a critic make clear: 'On Waterloo's ensanguin'd plain / Lie tens of thousands of the slain; / But none, by sabre or by shot, / Fell half so flat as Walter Scott.'

Forgive, brave Dead, the imperfect lay!
Who may your names, your numbers, say?
What high-strung harp, what lofty line,
To each the dear-earned praise assign,
From high-born chiefs of martial fame
To the poor soldier's lowlier name?
Lightly ye rose that dawning day,
From your cold couch of swamp and clay,
To fill, before the sun was low,
The bed that morning cannot know. –
Oft may the tear the green sod steep,
And sacred be the heroes' sleep,
    Till time shall cease to run;
And ne'er beside their noble grave,
May Briton pass and fail to crave
A blessing on the fallen brave
    Who fought with Wellington!

Farewell, sad Field! whose blighted face
Wears desolation's withering trace;
Long shall my memory retain
Thy shatter'd huts and trampled grain,
With every mark of martial wrong,
That scathe thy towers, fair Hougomont!
Yet though thy garden's green arcade
The marksman's fatal post was made,
Though on thy shattered beeches fell
The blended rage of shot and shell,
Though from thy blacken'd portals torn,
Their fall thy blighted fruit-trees mourn,
Has not such havoc bought a name
Immortal in the rolls of fame?
Yes – Agincourt may be forgot,
And Cressy be an unknown spot,
And Blenheim's name be new;
But still in story and in song,
For many an age remember'd long,
Shall live the towers of Hougomont,
And fields of Waterloo.

19 June ✶ Father's Hands ✶ Paul Cookson

Paul Cookson is a British performance poet who writes mainly for children. Here he offers a child's perspective on the adult world, by focusing on one point of fascination: the father's hands.

Father's hands
large like frying pans
broad as shovel blades
strong as weathered spades.

Father's hands
finger ends ingrained with dirt
permanently stained from work
ignoring pain and scorning hurt.

I once saw him walk boldly up to a swan
that had landed in next door's drive and wouldn't move.
The police were there because swans are a protected species
but didn't do anything, but my dad walked up to it,
picked it up and carried it away. No problem.
Those massive wings that can break a man's bones
were held tight, tight by my father's hands
and I was proud of him that day, really proud.

Father's hands
tough as leather on old boots
firmly grasping nettle shoots
pulling thistles by their roots.

Father's hands
gripping like an iron vice
never numb in snow and ice
nails and screws are pulled and prised.

He once found a kestrel with a broken wing
and kept it in our garage until it was better.
He'd feed it by hand with scraps of meat or dead mice
and you could see where its beak and talons
had taken bits of skin from his finger ends.
It never seemed to hurt him at all, he just smiled
as he let it claw and peck.

Father's hands
lifting bales of hay and straw
calloused, hardened, rough and raw
building, planting, painting . . . more.

Father's hands
hard when tanning my backside
all we needed they supplied
and still my hands will fit inside

Father's hands
large like frying pans
broad as shovel blades
strong as weathered spades.

And still my hands will fit inside
my father's hands.

20 June ✶ Refugees ✶ Brian Bilston

20 June is World Refugee Day, a day on which to show support for those who have fled their homes and their countries because of violence, terror and war. At first, Brian Bilston's poem seems to offer an unsympathetic view of refugees, telling the reader not to help them – but try reading the poem again, this time from bottom to top, and see if another view of the world might emerge.

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or I
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(Now read from bottom to top)

21 June ✶ *from* A Midsummer Night's Dream ✶ William Shakespeare

In the Northern Hemisphere, 21 June is the Summer Solstice – Midsummer Day, when the earth's tilt is most inclined towards the sun. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* preserves the magic and mystery with which the day has been enshrouded for thousands of years. Here Duke Theseus delivers a meditation on what it means to dream – or to imagine.

More strange than true! I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!

22 June ✶ Recessional ✶ Rudyard Kipling

On 22 June 1897, Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. It marked her sixtieth year on the throne, and meant that she surpassed George III as the longest ever reigning monarch of Great Britain – a record overtaken by Queen Elizabeth II in 2015. This poem by Kipling was written for Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. A 'recessional' is a type of hymn, and the poem is accordingly more solemn than it is celebratory. The poem, which expresses some pride in the British Empire, suggests that even the longest reigns must end, and it repeats the now-famous phrase 'Lest we forget'.

God of our fathers, known of old,
  Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
  Dominion over palm and pine –
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;
  The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
  An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;
  On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
  Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
  Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
  Or lesser breeds without the Law –
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust
  In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
  And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word –
Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!

Amen.

23 June ✶ The Land of the Bumbley Boo ✶ Spike Milligan

23 June 2016, was the day on which the British public voted to exit the European Union. Spike Milligan's poem might seem like complete nonsense, but it might not be. In a land where the people are red, white and blue – the colours of the Union Jack – Bumbley Boo might be closer to home than we at first think.

In the Land of the Bumbley Boo
The People are red white and blue,
They never blow noses,
Or ever wear closes,
What a sensible thing to do!

In the Land of the Bumbley Boo
You can buy Lemon pie at the Zoo;
They give away Foxes
In little Pink Boxes
And Bottles of Dandylion Stew.

In the Land of the Bumbley Boo
You never see a Gnu,
But thousands of cats
Wearing trousers and hats
Made of Pumpkins and Pelican Glue!

Oh, the Bumbley Boo! the Bumbley Boo!
That's the place for me and you!
So hurry! Let's run!
The train leaves at one!
For the Land of the Bumbley Boo!
The wonderful Bumbley Boo-Boo-Boo!
The Wonderful Bumbley BOO!!!

24 June ✶ The Fiddler of Dooney ✶ W. B. Yeats

Yeats's fiddler has proven such a popular figure that there is a real 'Fiddler of Dooney Competition' held each year in Sligo, the town mentioned in the poem that sits alongside Dooney Rock hill. In the spirit of the poem, it is a celebration of the joy of traditional folk music and dancing.

When I play my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My cousin is a priest in Kilvarnet,
My brother in Mocharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:
They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come to the end of time
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save for an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With 'Here is the fiddler of Dooney!'
And dance like a wave of the sea.

25 June ✶ My Mother Saw a Dancing Bear ✶ Charles Causley

On this day in 1824, the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals, or RSPCA, was founded in a coffee shop. It was the first animal charity in the world. At first it wasn't 'royal' at all, until Queen Victoria granted it royal status in 1840. Causley's poem about a dancing bear (or bruin), and how it dreams for its far-off home, offers no overt judgement about the scene but makes a quiet statement about animal cruelty.

My mother saw a dancing bear
By the schoolyard, a day in June.
The keeper stood with chain and bar
And whistle-pipe, and played a tune.

And bruin lifted up its head
And lifted up its dusty feet,
And all the children laughed to see
It caper in the summer heat.

They watched as for the Queen it died.
They watched it march. They watched it halt.
They heard the keeper as he cried,
'Now, roly-poly!' 'Somersault!'

And then, my mother said, there came
The keeper with a begging-cup,
The bear with burning coat of fur,
Shaming the laughter to a stop.

They paid a penny for the dance,
But what they saw was not the show;
Only, in bruin's aching eyes,
Far-distant forests, and the snow.

26 June ✶ The Naming of Cats ✶ T. S. Eliot

It can seem surprising that Eliot, a writer of long, philosophic poems, also wrote *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* – the book that inspired the musical *Cats*. Eliot seems to be in part making fun of his usual poetic style, not least because the names from classical philosophy and mythology are deemed 'sensible' and 'everyday'.

The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,
  It isn't just one of your holiday games;
You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter
When I tell you, a cat must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.
First of all, there's the name that the family use daily,
  Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James,
Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey –
  All of them sensible everyday names.
There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,
  Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames:
Such as Plato, Admetus, Electra, Demeter –
  But all of them sensible everyday names.
But I tell you, a cat needs a name that's particular,
  A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular,
  Or spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,
  Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo, or Coricopat,
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum –
  Names that never belong to more than one cat.
But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
  And that is the name that you never will guess;
The name that no human research can discover –
  But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.
When you notice a cat in profound meditation,

The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
His ineffable effable
Effanineffable
Deep and inscrutable singular Name.

27 June ✶ The Land of Blue ✶ Laura Mucha

In this compassionate poem, the poet Laura Mucha conjures up 'The Land of Blue': an imaginary place which characterizes how it might feel if you, or someone you know, feels sad or blue.

Across the valley, it waits for you,
a place they call The Land of Blue.

It's far and near, it's strange yet known –
and in this land, you'll feel alone,
you might feel tears roll down your cheek,
you might feel wobbly, weary, weak.

I know this won't sound fun to you –
it's not – this is The Land of Blue.
It's blue – not gold or tangerine,
it's dark – not light, not bright or clean.

It's blue – and when you leave, you'll see
the crackly branches of the tree,
the golden skies, the purring cat,
the piercing eyes, the feathered hat
and all the other things that come
when you escape from feeling glum.

Across the valley, it waits for you,
a place they call The Land of Blue
and going there will help you know
how others feel when they feel low.

28 June ✶ A Bird Came Down the Walk ✶ Emily Dickinson

This poem is an excellent example of Dickinson's brilliant use of poetic metres to create a songlike effect. There are six pairs of unstressed and stressed syllables to each line, and she divides these into groups, or stanzas, of four lines. Dickinson also coins the imaginative word 'plashless' at the end to describe a butterfly swimming in air rather than water.

A Bird came down the Walk –
He did not know I saw –
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass –
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass –

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around –
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought –
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home –

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam –
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.

29 June ✶ Originally ✶ Carol Ann Duffy

Here is a poem by the current Poet Laureate, this time on the subject of moving home. Collecting the memories of relocating, as a youngster, from Glasgow, Scotland to Stafford in England, Duffy comes to reflect that 'All childhood is an emigration' – we are always on the move as we grow up.

We came from our own country in a red room
which fell through the fields, our mother singing
our father's name to the turn of the wheels.
My brothers cried, one of them bawling, *Home,*
Home, as the miles rushed back to the city,
the street, the house, the vacant rooms
where we didn't live any more. I stared
at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,
leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue
where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.
Your accent wrong. Corners, which seem familiar,
leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boys
eating worms and shouting words you don't understand.
My parents' anxiety stirred like a loose tooth
in my head. *I want our own country*, I said.

But then you forget, or don't recall, or change,
and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only
a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue
shedding its skin like a snake, my voice
in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think
I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space
and the right place? Now, *Where do you come from?*
strangers ask. *Originally?* And I hesitate.

30 June ✶ Ulysses ✶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson

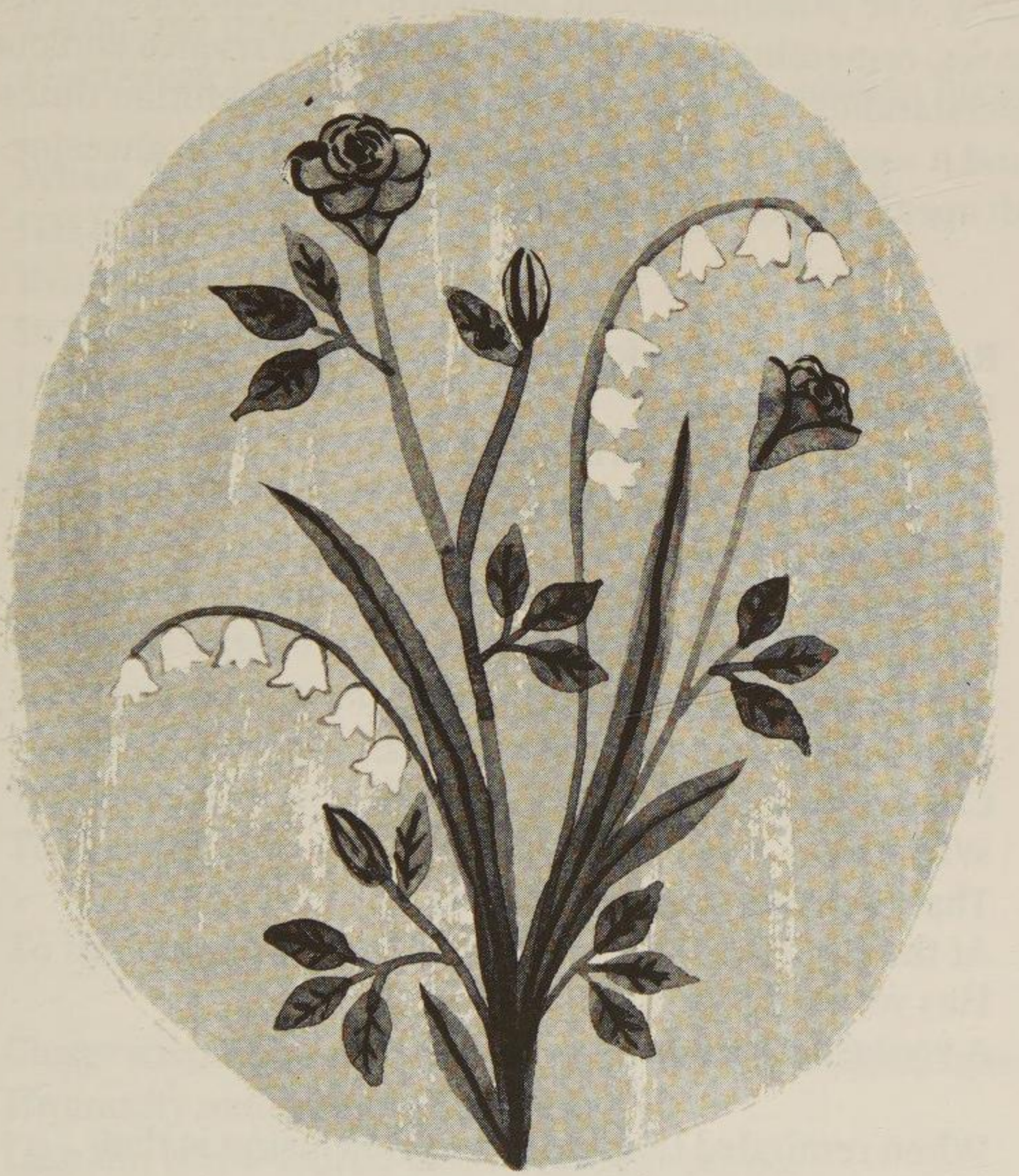
Like yesterday's poem by Carol Ann Duffy, this one by Tennyson is also about home. 'Ulysses' is the Latin name for Odysseus, the hero of one of the oldest poems in the world, the *Odyssey* by Homer. Homer's work follows Odysseus on his long and dangerous return home to Ithaca after the Trojan War. In Tennyson's poem, the heroic Ulysses finds he is not fit to be at home, and he yearns to head out on another adventure. The final, very beautiful, lines are particularly famous – they even feature in the James Bond film, *Skyfall*!

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,

To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
  This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle, –
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
  There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with
    me –
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads – you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

July



1 July ✶ Remembered More for His Beard Now ✶ Philip Ardagh

On 1 July 1858, Charles Darwin presented his and Alfred Russel Wallace's Theory of Evolution to a London scientific society. The presentation led Darwin to write *On the Origin of Species*, cementing his place in the history of science and our understanding of ourselves. Not everyone in Victorian times found it easy to accept that man shared a common ancestor with apes – nor that we were not created by God.

Remembered more for his beard now,
Bushy and white.
A touch of Father Christmas
On a face as stern as sandpaper
Taking no prisoners.
Never young.

Misremembered as having stated
That Man is descended from apes,
Causing some to query
Why it is
That the mating pair of gorillas
At the Royal Zoological Gardens
Has yet to give birth to
A young accountant.

When reminded that his actual conclusion is that
We share a common ancestry with apes,
There is outrage in SW19,
Where the only thing 'common' about them,
Or so they claim,
Is to be found as a patch of greenery in Wimbledon
(Since overrun with Wombles).

Reviled by those of faith,
Or those who hide behind it,
Darwin is also needled by those scientists
Who question his assertion as to
The Survival of the Fittest.
But soon his theories evolve into
The accepted norm,
Trampling detractors underfoot,
Their weak protestations taking one final, gasping breath.

When, at the behest of Her Majesty's Royal Mail,
His home village of Down
Evolves into Downe with a tail
In the form of a letter 'e',
Darwin stands firm.
His residence, Down House,
Remains unchanged.

Not unlike a dinosaur, with eyes tight shut,
A clawed finger in either ear; and humming loudly,
He attempts to postpone the inevitable,
Simply by denying that he can see it coming.
Yet Down House, with no 'e', it remains
To this day.

To the victor the spoils.

Closer inspection of Darwin's portraits reveals kind eyes.
Humanity amongst the facial hair,
Like the white-haired God of Sunday school.
Both worshipped by different congregations.
Forever and ever.
Charles Darwin.

2 July ✶ Amelia Earhart ✶ Mandy Coe

Amelia Earhart was an American pilot who, in 1932, became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. On 2 July 1937 she disappeared during an attempt to fly around the globe, losing radio contact and vanishing somewhere over the Pacific. No trace was ever found of her or her plane.

'. . . fears are paper tigers.'

A ribbon in her hair and mud on her dress
Amelia climbs too high
then, like any child in a tree,
blinks at the dizzying ground and sky.

Amelia spreads the map on her knees
to light the Atlantic with her torch.
She taps the fuel gauge, adjusts her course.
The stars seemed near enough to touch.

Amelia's red Vega roars around
a world of cloud and sun and time,
and whenever a child defeats
her fears, Amelia still climbs.

3 July ✶ Solitude ✶ Ella Wheeler Wilcox

This poem is considered by many to be Ella Wheeler Wilcox's finest, and its opening lines are often quoted, often parodied, and highly memorable.

Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone;
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air;
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.

Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go;
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all, –
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall.

Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by.
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a large and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.

4 July ✶ For You O Democracy ✶ Walt Whitman

4 July is American Independence Day. On this day in 1776, during the Revolutionary War against Great Britain, the Declaration of Independence was signed and passed in Philadelphia, marking the birth of the United States of America. People now celebrate the day with firework displays, parades and family reunions. Whitman's poem is a celebration of togetherness and companionship, the glue that holds together American democracy.

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.

5 July ✶ The Tables Turned ✶ William Wordsworth

As the school year comes to a close, you might need to be reminded to stop studying (or you might not). In Wordsworth's poem, the narrator teaches his friend that it can be good to close your textbooks, and to learn from the book of nature instead. The poem is known for the much-quoted criticism of science, 'We murder to dissect', and the description of dull books as 'those barren leaves' was used as the title of a novel by Aldous Huxley, the author of *Brave New World*.

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you'll grow double:
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun above the mountain's head,
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread,
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless –
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: –
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

6 July ✶ Rain in Summer ✶
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Summer rain after a hot, dry spell is always welcome. Longfellow was enchanted by it, and catalogues the many reasons why we should welcome it. The scope of the poem begins small, with a few raindrops, but expands to cover heaven and earth and the river of Time itself!

How beautiful is the rain!
After the dust and heat,
In the broad and fiery street,
In the narrow lane,
How beautiful is the rain!

How it clatters along the roofs,
Like the tramp of hoofs
How it gushes and struggles out
From the throat of the overflowing spout!

Across the window-pane
It pours and pours;
And swift and wide,
With a muddy tide,
Like a river down the gutter roars
The rain, the welcome rain!

The sick man from his chamber looks
At the twisted brooks;
He can feel the cool
Breath of each little pool;
His fevered brain
Grows calm again,
And he breathes a blessing on the rain.

From the neighboring school
Come the boys,
With more than their wonted noise
And commotion;
And down the wet streets
Sail their mimic fleets,
Till the treacherous pool
Ingulfs them in its whirling
And turbulent ocean.

In the country, on every side,
Where far and wide,
Like a leopard's tawny and spotted hide,
Stretches the plain,
To the dry grass and the drier grain
How welcome is the rain!

In the furrowed land
The toilsome and patient oxen stand;
Lifting the yoke encumbered head,
With their dilated nostrils spread,
They silently inhale
The clover-scented gale,
And the vapors that arise
From the well-watered and smoking soil.
For this rest in the furrow after toil
Their large and lustrous eyes
Seem to thank the Lord,
More than man's spoken word.

Near at hand,
From under the sheltering trees,
The farmer sees
His pastures, and his fields of grain,
As they bend their tops
To the numberless beating drops
Of the incessant rain.
He counts it as no sin
That he sees therein
Only his own thrift and gain.

These, and far more than these,
The Poet sees!
He can behold
Aquarius old
Walking the fenceless fields of air;
And from each ample fold
Of the clouds about him rolled
Scattering everywhere
The showery rain,
As the farmer scatters his grain.

He can behold
Things manifold
That have not yet been wholly told,–
Have not been wholly sung nor said.
For his thought, that never stops,
Follows the water-drops
Down to the graves of the dead,
Down through chasms and gulfs profound,
To the dreary fountain-head
Of lakes and rivers under ground;
And sees them, when the rain is done,
On the bridge of colors seven
Climbing up once more to heaven,
Opposite the setting sun.

Thus the Seer,
With vision clear,
Sees forms appear and disappear,
In the perpetual round of strange,
Mysterious change
From birth to death, from death to birth,
From earth to heaven, from heaven to earth;
Till glimpses more sublime
Of things, unseen before,
Unto his wondering eyes reveal
The Universe, as an immeasurable wheel
Turning forevermore
In the rapid and rushing river of Time.

7 July ✶ Checking Out Me History ✶ John Agard

On 7 July 1801, Toussaint Louverture became governor-general of Saint-Domingue (later renamed Haiti), having successfully led the enslaved people of the island to freedom. Agard's poem is about Louverture, but it is also about the fact that the history of marginalized people largely went untaught in British schools.

Dem tell me
Dem tell me
Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history
Blind me to me own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat
dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat
But Toussaint L'Ouverture
no dem never tell me bout dat

Toussaint
a slave
with vision
lick back
Napoleon
battalion
and first Black
Republic born
Toussaint de thorn
to de French
Toussaint de beacon
of de Haitian Revolution

Dem tell me bout de man who discover de balloon
and de cow who jump over de moon
Dem tell me bout de dish ran away with de spoon
But dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

Nanny
see-far woman
of mountain dream
fire-woman struggle
hopeful stream
to freedom river

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo
but dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492
but what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp
and how Robin Hood used to camp
Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul
but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

From Jamaica
she travel far
to the Crimean War
she volunteer to go
and even when de British said no
she still brave the Russian snow
a healing star
among the wounded
a yellow sunrise
to the dying

Dem tell me
Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me
But now I checking out me own history
I carving out me identity

8 July ✶ Miracles ✶ Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman was associated with the philosophical movement of Transcendentalism, which believed that people were by nature born good. This poem illustrates Whitman's desire to see a spiritual goodness at work in everyday experiences, where anything and everything can start to seem miraculous.

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with
the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.

To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim – the rocks – the motion of the
waves – the ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?

9 July ✶ Travel ✶ Edna St Vincent Millay

Edna St Vincent Millay was a celebrated American poet and a feminist activist, living in the first half of the twentieth century. This short lyric, arranged into three rhyming quatrains, expresses the writer's *wanderlust* – the desire to travel far and wide.

The railroad track is miles away,
  And the day is loud with voices speaking,
Yet there isn't a train goes by all day
  But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,
  Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming,
But I see its cinders red on the sky,
  And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,
  And better friends I'll not be knowing;
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
  No matter where it's going.

10 July ✶ The Magic of the Mind ✶ Clive Webster

In yesterday's poem, the narrator wanted to travel far away. This poem by Clive Webster is about the power of books and the imagination to make those journeys for us.

I've read in books of magic lands
So very far away,
Where genies pop up out of lamps
And magic creatures play.
Where wizards weave their magic spells
And dragons breathe out fire,
Where just one wish gives young and old
Their every heart's desire.

Those lands, of course, are just in books,
But if you try real hard,
Those magic places come to life
Right in your own back yard.
For sitting quietly in the sun
On a lazy Summer's day
You can sit and smile and dream you're there
In those lands so far away.

And as the sunshine warms your mind
You're in those golden lands,
With wizards, genies, dragons, spells,
And cut-throat pirate bands.
You're saving damsels in distress,
You're fighting deadly duels,
You're banqueting in marbled halls,
You're decked in priceless jewels.

You're there, you're there, no need for books,
So real and oh so clear,
So marvellous and so magical,
To touch and smell and hear,
just sitting there in golden sun
You leave your cares behind,
And go to magic places
In the Magic of your Mind.

11 July ✶ The Duel ✶ Eugene Field

11 July 1804 was the date of the notorious duel between American politicians Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton. Burr was then Vice President of the United States; Hamilton was Secretary of the Treasury. Their rivalry was fierce and famous, and, after a series of public exchanges, Burr challenged Hamilton to an 'affair of honour' – pistols at dawn. Burr killed Hamilton and was charged with murder, though the charges were later dropped. Eugene Field's duel is an altogether more humorous affair: through gossip told by household objects, the story is narrated of a great fight between a cat and a dog.

The gingham dog and the calico cat
Side by side on the table sat;
'T was half-past twelve, and (what do you think!)
Nor one nor t' other had slept a wink!
The old Dutch clock and the Chinese plate
Appeared to know as sure as fate
There was going to be a terrible spat.
(*I wasn't there; I simply state*
What was told to me by the Chinese plate!)

The gingham dog went 'Bow-wow-wow!'
And the calico cat replied 'Mee-ow!'
The air was littered, an hour or so,
With bits of gingham and calico,
While the old Dutch clock in the chimney-place
Up with its hands before its face,
For it always dreaded a family row!
(*Now mind: I'm only telling you*
What the old Dutch clock declares is true!)

The Chinese plate looked very blue,
And wailed, 'Oh, dear! what shall we do!'
But the gingham dog and the calico cat
Wallowed this way and tumbled that,
    Employing every tooth and claw
    In the awfullest way you ever saw –
And, oh! how the gingham and calico flew!
        (*Don't fancy I exaggerate –*
        I got my news from the Chinese plate!)

Next morning, where the two had sat
They found no trace of dog or cat;
And some folks think unto this day
That burglars stole that pair away!
    But the truth about the cat and pup
    Is this: they ate each other up!
Now what do you really think of that!
        (*The old Dutch clock it told me so,*
        And that is how I came to know.)

12 July ✶ Jerusalem (*from* Milton) ✶ William Blake

On 12 July 1770, James Hargreaves applied for a patent for his invention, the spinning jenny. The device was used to manufacture cloth, and it greatly reduced the amount of work and the cost of making clothing and fabrics. Its invention was a key moment in the Industrial Revolution, and it helped change the shape of Britain. Though Blake did write a very long poem called 'Jerusalem', his famous 'Jerusalem Hymn', sung to music at the Last Night of the Proms, is actually from the older poem 'Milton'. Blake is well known for his worries about industrial progress, captured in the image of the 'dark Satanic Mills' of the poem.

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 those 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.

13 July ✶ The Argument of His Book ✶
Robert Herrick

Herrick uses the word 'argument' in the title of this poem in its older sense, meaning the theme of the work. The 'theme' is poetry itself, and the narrator sings and composes about some of the traditional themes of lyric poetry. The 'court of Mab' refers to Queen Mab, a popular fairy figure who was first referred to by Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*.

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,
Of April, May, of June, and July flowers.
I sing of May-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal-cakes.
I write of youth, of love, and have access
By these to sing of cleanly wantonness.
I sing of dews, of rains, and piece by piece
Of balm, of oil, of spice, and ambergris.
I sing of Time's trans-shifting; and I write
How roses first came red, and lilies white.
I write of groves, of twilights, and I sing
The court of Mab, and of the fairy king.
I write of Hell; I sing (and ever shall)
Of Heaven, and hope to have it after all.

14 July ✶ La Belle Dame Sans Merci ✶ John Keats

14 July is Bastille Day, when the French remember and celebrate the storming of the Bastille fortress in 1789. It was a key moment in the French Revolution, when the common people took control of the nation away from the monarchy, and it was only a little over a month before the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' was established, marking France's evolution into a modern republic. Keats's ballad, the title of which means 'The Beautiful Lady without Mercy', is a supernatural tale of romance and rejection, and though it doesn't directly relate to the storming of the Bastille, it does serve as a reminder about the heavy weight of history.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
    Full beautiful – a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
    And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
    And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
    And made sweet moan

I set her on my pacing steed,
    And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
    A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
    And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said –
    'I love thee true.'

She took me to her Elfin grot,
    And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
    With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,
    And there I dreamed – Ah! woe betide! –
The latest dream I ever dreamt
    On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
    Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried – 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
    Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
    With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
    On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
    Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
    And no birds sing.

15 July ✶ Seven Times One: Exultation ✶ Jean Ingelow

Jean Ingelow was a Victorian poet, extremely popular in her day. 'Exultation', about a child's seventh birthday, is the first in a series of lifetime poems by Ingelow that chart every seven years of a life; the others are themed around 'romance' at fourteen, 'love' at twenty-one, and, at the age of forty-nine, 'longing for home'.

There's no dew left on the daisies and clover,
  There's no rain left in heaven:
I've said my 'seven times' over and over,
  Seven times one are seven.

I am old, so old, I can write a letter;
  My birthday lessons are done;
The lambs play always, they know no better;
  They are only one times one.

O moon! in the night I have seen you sailing
  And shining so round and low.
You were bright! ah bright! but your light is failing –
  You are nothing now but a bow.

You moon! have you done something wrong in heaven
  That God has hidden your face?
I hope if you have you will soon be forgiven,
  And shine again in your place.

O velvet bee, you 're a dusty fellow,
  You've powdered your legs with gold!
O brave marsh marybuds, rich and yellow,
  Give me your money to hold!

O columbine, open your folded wrapper,
  Where two twin turtle-doves dwell!
O cuckoopint, toll me the purple clapper
  That hangs in your clear green bell!

And show me your nest with the young ones in it;
  I will not steal them away;
I am old! you may trust me, linnet, linnet –
  I am seven times one today.

16 July ✶ Particle Poems: 3 ✶ Edwin Morgan

On 16 July 1885, after ten days of treatment, the French scientist Louis Pasteur successfully inoculated a child against rabies for the first time. The principles of vaccination that Pasteur developed have saved countless lives – millions would be a conservative estimate. Edwin Morgan's poem is a celebration of the apparently mystical principles that scientific discoveries are built upon.

Three particles lived in mystical union.
They made knife, fork, and spoon,
and earth, sea, and sky.
They made animal, vegetable, and mineral,
and faith, hope, and charity.
They made stop, caution, go,
and hickory, dickory, dock.
They made yolk, white, and shell,
and hook, line, and sinker.
They made pounds, shillings, and pence,
and Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia.
They made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
and game, set, and match.

A wandering particle captured one of them,
and the two that were left made day and night,
and left and right, and right and wrong,
and black and white, and off and on,
but things were never quite the same,
and two will always yearn for three.
They're after you, or me.

17 July ✶ The School Boy ✶ William Blake

Here is another of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, a song about enjoying the summer of our lives. Blake's schoolboy asks why we must turn over our 'spring' years to dull education, and waste our finest years.

I love to rise in a summer morn
When the birds sing on every tree;
The distant huntsman winds his horn,
And the sky-lark sings with me.
O! what sweet company.

But to go to school in a summer morn,
O! it drives all joy away;
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day
In sighing and dismay.

Ah! then at times I drooping sit,
And spend many an anxious hour,
Nor in my book can I take delight,
Nor sit in learning's bower,
Worn thro' with the dreary shower.

How can the bird that is born for joy
Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child, when fears annoy,
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring?

O! father & mother, if buds are nip'd
And blossoms blown away,
And if the tender plants are strip'd
Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and care's dismay,

How shall the summer arise in joy,
Or the summer fruits appear?
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
Or bless the mellowing year,
When the blasts of winter appear?

18 July ✶ To You ✶ Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes is remembered as a pioneer of the American 'jazz poetry' movement, which is built upon jazz-like movements in rhythm, repetitive phrasing, and the appearance of improvisation. Hughes was a key part of the New York-based Harlem Renaissance movement, in which African-American poets developed a sense of defiant racial pride into revolutionary jazz poetry. In this poem, Hughes uses dashes at the ends of lines to create a sense that he is pausing, or changing direction in his thoughts, as if he is turning over a problem in his mind.

To sit and dream, to sit and read,
To sit and learn about the world
Outside our world of here and now—
    Our problem world—
To dream of vast horizons of the soul
Through dreams made whole,
Unfettered, free—help me!
All you who are dreamers too,
    Help me to make
    Our world anew.
I reach out my dreams to you.

19 July ✶ Harlem Hopscotch ✶ Maya Angelou

From the Harlem Renaissance to Harlem hopscotch. Harlem is an area in the north of Manhattan, New York, and since the mass-migration movements of 1905 it has had a largely African-American population. Alongside its vibrant cultural history, however, Harlem has another history – one of poverty and deprivation. In Angelou's poem, there is hardship and heartache, but the poem ends on a note of hope.

One foot down, then hop! It's hot.
Good things for the ones that's got.
Another jump, now to the left.
Everybody for hisself.

In the air, now both feet down.
Since you black, don't stick around.
Food is gone, the rent is due,
Curse and cry and then jump two.

All the people out of work,
Hold for three, then twist and jerk.
Cross the line, they count you out.
That's what hopping's all about.

Both feet flat, the game is done.
They think I lost. I think I won.

20 July ✶ Morning Song ✶ Sara Teasdale

On 20 July, 1969, the American Apollo 11 spacecraft, carrying astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins, safely landed on the moon. Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon's surface. This poem depicts the moon one morning, seemingly alone in the sky.

A diamond of a morning
Waked me an hour too soon;
Dawn had taken in the stars
And left the faint white moon.

O white moon, you are lonely,
It is the same with me,
But we have the world to roam over,
Only the lonely are free.

21 July ✶ Little White Lily ✶ George MacDonald

The Scottish poet George Macdonald is less read today than he was in his own time, but he was a big influence on other writers, including his friend Lewis Carroll. Around this time of year, in the warmer months, we see the flowering of lilies.

Little white Lily
  Sat by a stone,
Drooping and waiting
  Till the sun shone.
Little white Lily
  Sunshine has fed;
Little white Lily
  Is lifting her head.

Little white Lily
  Said: 'It is good:
Little white Lily's
  Clothing and food!
Little white Lily
  Drest like a bride!
Shining with whiteness,
  And crownèd beside!'

Little white Lily
  Droopeth in pain,
Waiting and waiting
  For the wet rain.
Little white Lily
  Holdeth her cup;
Rain is fast falling,
  And filling it up.

Little white Lily
  Said: 'Good again,
When I am thirsty
  To have nice rain!
Now I am stronger,
  Now I am cool;
Heat cannot burn me,
  My veins are so full!'

Little white Lily
  Smells very sweet:
On her head sunshine,
  Rain at her feet.
'Thanks to the sunshine!
  Thanks to the rain!
Little white Lily
  Is happy again!'

22 July ✶ The Law of the Jungle ✶
Rudyard Kipling

This poem appears in Kipling's *The Second Jungle Book*. While the phrase 'the law of the jungle' tends to mean 'survival of the fittest', here it refers to actual laws and codes of practice held by a pack of wolves.

Now this is the Law of the Jungle – as old and as true as the sky;
And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die.

As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk, the Law runneth forward and back –
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

Wash daily from nose-tip to tail-tip; drink deeply, but never too deep;
And remember the night is for hunting, and forget not the day is for sleep.

The Jackal may follow the Tiger, but, Cub, when thy whiskers are grown,
Remember the Wolf is a hunter – go forth and get food of thy own.

Keep peace with the Lords of the Jungle – the Tiger, the Panther, the Bear;
And trouble not Hathi the Silent, and mock not the Boar in his lair.

When Pack meets with Pack in the Jungle, and neither will go from the trail,
Lie down till the leaders have spoken – it may be fair words shall prevail.

When ye fight with a Wolf of the Pack, ye must fight him alone and afar,
Lest others take part in the quarrel and the Pack be diminished by war.

The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, and where he has made him his home,
Not even the Head Wolf may enter, not even the Council may come.

The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, but where he has digged it too plain,
The Council shall send him a message, and so he shall change it again.

If ye kill before midnight, be silent, and wake not the woods with your bay,
Lest ye frighten the deer from the crops, and thy brothers go empty away.

Ye may kill for yourselves, and your mates, and your cubs as they need, and ye can;
But kill not for pleasure of killing, and *seven times never kill Man.*

If ye plunder his Kill from a weaker, devour not all in thy pride;
Pack-Right is the right of the meanest; so leave him the head and the hide.

The Kill of the Pack is the meat of the Pack. Ye must eat where it lies;
And no one may carry away of that meat to his lair, or he dies.

The Kill of the Wolf is the meat of the Wolf. He may do what he will,
But, till he has given permission, the Pack may not eat of that Kill.

Cub-Right is the right of the Yearling. From all of his Pack he may claim.
Full-gorge when the killer has eaten; and none may refuse him the same.

Lair-Right is the right of the Mother. From all of her year she may claim
One haunch of each kill for her litter, and none may deny her the same.

Cave-Right is the right of the Father – to hunt by himself for his own:
He is freed from all calls to the Pack; he is judged by the Council alone.

Because of his age and his cunning, because of his gripe and his paw,
In all that the law leaveth open, the word of the Head Wolf is Law.

Now these are the Laws of the Jungle, and many and mighty are they;
But the head and the hoof of the Law and the haunch and the hump is – Obey!

23 July ✶ The Mermaid ✶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson

This poem is one of a pair by Tennyson. Taken together, the poems of the mermaid and merman represent male and female characteristics and – because they are daydreams – human desires. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, both the mermaid and merman are extraordinarily vain!

I

Who would be
A mermaid fair,
Singing alone,
Combing her hair
Under the sea,
In a golden curl
With a comb of pearl,
On a throne?

II

I would be a mermaid fair;
I would sing to myself the whole of the day;
With a comb of pearl I would comb my hair;
And still as I comb'd I would sing and say,
'Who is it loves me? who loves not me?'
I would comb my hair till my ringlets would fall
Low adown, low adown,
From under my starry sea-bud crown
Low adown and around,
And I should look like a fountain of gold
Springing alone
With a shrill inner sound,
Over the throne
In the midst of the hall;

Till that great sea-snake under the sea
From his coiled sleeps in the central deeps
Would slowly trail himself sevenfold
Round the hall where I sate, and look in at the gate
With his large calm eyes for the love of me.
And all the mermen under the sea
Would feel their immortality
Die in their hearts for the love of me.

III

But at night I would wander away, away,
I would fling on each side my low-flowing locks,
And lightly vault from the throne and play
With the mermen in and out of the rocks;
We would run to and fro, and hide and seek,
On the broad sea-wolds in the crimson shells,
Whose silvery spikes are nighest the sea.
But if any came near I would call and shriek,
And adown the steep like a wave I would leap
From the diamond-ledges that jut from the dells;
For I would not be kiss'd by all who would list,
Of the bold merry mermen under the sea.
They would sue me, and woo me, and flatter me,
In the purple twilights under the sea;
But the king of them all would carry me,
Woo me, and win me, and marry me,
In the branching jaspers under the sea.
Then all the dry-pied things that be
In the hueless mosses under the sea
Would curl round my silver feet silently,
All looking up for the love of me.
And if I should carol aloud, from aloft
All things that are forked, and horned, and soft
Would lean out from the hollow sphere of the sea,
All looking down for the love of me.

24 July ✶ The Merman ✶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Where the speaker in the first poem imagined being a mermaid so beautiful that men forgot to think of themselves and became slaves to her appearance, this poem presents a masculine form of vanity: a man who imagines himself as bold and powerful, and who kisses mermaids until they kiss him back – he takes what he wants, and seems unpleasant for it.

I

Who would be
A merman bold,
Sitting alone,
Singing alone
Under the sea,
With a crown of gold,
On a throne?

II

I would be a merman bold,
I would sit and sing the whole of the day;
I would fill the sea-halls with a voice of power;
But at night I would roam abroad and play
With the mermaids in and out of the rocks,
Dressing their hair with the white sea-flower;
And holding them back by their flowing locks
I would kiss them often under the sea,
And kiss them again till they kiss'd me
Laughingly, laughingly;
And then we would wander away, away,
To the pale-green sea-groves straight and high,
Chasing each other merrily.

III

There would be neither moon nor star;
But the wave would make music above us afar –
Low thunder and light in the magic night –
    Neither moon nor star.
We would call aloud in the dreamy dells,
Call to each other and whoop and cry
    All night, merrily, merrily.
They would pelt me with starry spangles and shells,
Laughing and clapping their hands between,
    All night, merrily, merrily,
But I would throw to them back in mine
Turkis and agate and almondine;
Then leaping out upon them unseen
I would kiss them often under the sea,
And kiss them again till they kiss'd me
    Laughingly, laughingly.
O, what a happy life were mine
Under the hollow-hung ocean green!
Soft are the moss-beds under the sea;
We would live merrily, merrily.

25 July ✶ Annabel Lee ✶ Edgar Allan Poe

There is nothing more summery than a trip to the seaside on a sunny day. However, Edgar Allan Poe has a reputation for dark, gothic poems, and this one is about a youthful romance cut short by the death of a young woman.

It was many and many a year ago,
  In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
  By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
  Than to love and be loved by me.

She was a child and I was a child,
  In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love –
  I and my Annabel Lee –
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
  Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
  In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud by night
  Chilling my Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
  And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
  In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
  Went envying her and me:
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
  In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud, chilling
  And killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
  Of those who were older than we –
  Of many far wiser than we –
And neither the angels in Heaven above
  Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
  Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams
  Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
  Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride,
  In her sepulchre there by the sea –
  In her tomb by the side of the sea.

26 July ✶ Watching My Dog Sleep ✶ Kate Tempest

Kate Tempest's talent for focusing intently on everyday things shines forth in this poem. The narrator cannot know what the dog is really thinking or dreaming about, but by imposing his or her own concerns about the past on to the dog, the poem surprises us with the anguish of the final lines.

after Dermot Healy

Murphy is dreaming:
his muscles are twitching,
his ears are alive,
his paws scrape the air.

He's dreaming of yesterday,
stones thrown into waves.
The heartbreak of chasing
what's no longer there.

27 July ✶ *from* Psalm 137

At the end of July falls Tisha B'Av, a period of fasting within the Jewish calendar. It commemorates several ancient tragedies, including the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. The lines of this 'psalm', which comes from a Greek word for lyrical music or poetry, express the grief of the Jewish people in exile.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

28 July ✶ 'next to of course god america i' ✶ E. E. Cummings

The First World War began on this date in 1914, and lasted until November 1918. The absurd tragedy of the war is unspeakable, but E. E. Cummings conveys a small sense of it through these deeply ironic lines about patriotism, in which the fallen are the 'heroic happy dead'.

'next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?'

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

29 July ✶ The Dug-Out ✶ Siegfried Sassoon

So awful were the horrors of the First World War, that soldiers sought to express their experiences in any way they could. For some, this meant poetry, and Siegfried Sassoon, who fought on the Western Front, is remembered for his powerful wartime writings.

Why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled,
And one arm bent across your sullen, cold,
Exhausted face? It hurts my heart to watch you,
Deep-shadowed from the candle's guttering gold;
And you wonder why I shake you by the shoulder;
Drowsy, you mumble and sigh and turn your head . . .
You are too young to fall asleep for ever;
And when you sleep you remind me of the dead.

30 July ✶ Heat ✶ H. D.

Hilda Doolittle, who published under the name H. D., was an American modernist poet – notable for her avant-garde and experimental style.

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air –
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat –
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

31 July ✶ A Flea and a Fly ✶ Ogden Nash

When two words are pronounced the same but are spelt differently, they are called homophones – meaning 'same sound'. This poem makes use of the same and of similar sounds to create an amusing effect in a conversation between a flea and a fly.

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
Said the fly, 'Let us flee!'
'Let us fly!' said the flea
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

August

1 August ✶ Casabianca ✶ Felicia Hemans

The Battle of the Nile, between the British Navy and Napoleon's French Navy, took place on 1–3 August 1798. The poet Felicia Hemans is not as well known today as she was during her lifetime in the early nineteenth century, but the first line of this poem has become very famous indeed! This much-copied, much-parodied line actually describes a real scene from the Battle of the Nile. Hemans wrote this note explaining the poem: 'Young Casabianca, a boy about thirteen years old, son to the Admiral of the Orient, remained at his post (in the Battle of the Nile) after the ship had taken fire, and all the guns had been abandoned; and perished in the explosion of the vessel, when the flames had reached the powder.'

The boy stood on the burning deck
    Whence all but he had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's wreck
    Shone round him o'er the dead.

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
    As born to rule the storm –
A creature of heroic blood,
    A proud, though child-like form.

The flames rolled on – he would not go
    Without his father's word;
That father, faint in death below,
    His voice no longer heard.

He called aloud – 'Say, Father, say
    If yet my task is done!'
He knew not that the chieftain lay
    Unconscious of his son.

'Speak, Father!' once again he cried,
    'If I may yet be gone!'
And but the booming shots replied,
    And fast the flames rolled on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath,
    And in his waving hair,
And looked from that lone post of death
    In still yet brave despair;

And shouted but once more aloud,
    'My father! must I stay?'
While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud,
    The wreathing fires made way.

They wrapt the ship in splendour wild,
    They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child,
    Like banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound –
    The boy – oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
    With fragments strewed the sea! –

With mast, and helm, and pennon fair,
    That well had borne their part;
But the noblest thing which perished there
    Was that young faithful heart!

2 August ✶ Casabianca (A Parody) ✶ Spike Milligan

Hemans's 'Casabianca' has given rise, as I mention above, to many imitations and parodies, all of which play with the opening image of the boy on the burning deck. Spike Milligan's is among the best known, in part because it so abruptly and so comically comes to a halt.

> The boy stood on the burning deck
> Whence all but he had fled –
> The twit!

3 August ✶ On the Grasshopper and Cricket ✶ John Keats

Keats, in this sonnet about summer and winter, finds that there is poetry in the sounds of his environment. The grasshopper chirrups throughout summer, the cricket sings his song in the colds of winter, but all the year round the poet finds joy in the music of the natural world.

The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's – he takes the lead
In summer luxury, – he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

4 August ✶ Minnie and Winnie ✶
Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Tennyson wrote tightly metrical verse, but he was still a great experimenter in different kinds of metre. Both the lines 'Pink was the shell within' and 'Two bright stars' have three stressed, or heavy, syllables (*Pink*, *shell*, *-in*; *two*, *Bright*, *stars*), but the first line has double the total syllables of the second. This is testament to how skilled Tennyson was at hearing the sounds of words, and it lends a playful tone to this poem about two ladies asleep in a seashell.

Minnie and Winnie
  Slept in a shell.
Sleep, little ladies!
  And they slept well.

Pink was the shell within,
  Silver without;
Sounds of the great sea
  Wander'd about.

Sleep, little ladies!
  Wake not soon!
Echo on echo
  Dies to the moon.

Two bright stars
  Peep'd into the shell.
'What are you dreaming of?
  Who can tell?'

Started a green linnet
  Out of the croft;
Wake, little ladies,
  The sun is aloft!

5 August ✶ Meg Merrilies ✶ John Keats

Compared to 'Minnie and Winnie', this poem by Keats has a very regular rhythm of unstressed and stressed syllables. Down, up, down, up, down, up. It follows in a long tradition of poems that sketch a portrait of an individual life, often an unusual one, before surprising us at the end with the fact that the subject of the poem has passed away.

Old Meg she was a Gipsy,
    And liv'd upon the Moors:
Her bed it was the brown heath turf,
    And her house was out of doors.

Her apples were swart blackberries,
    Her currants pods o' broom;
Her wine was dew of the wild white rose,
    Her book a churchyard tomb.

Her Brothers were the craggy hills,
    Her Sisters larchen trees –
Alone with her great family
    She liv'd as she did please.

No breakfast had she many a morn,
    No dinner many a noon,
And 'stead of supper she would stare
    Full hard against the Moon.

But every morn of woodbine fresh
    She made her garlanding,
And every night the dark glen Yew
    She wove, and she would sing.

And with her fingers old and brown
She plaited Mats o' Rushes,
And gave them to the Cottagers
She met among the Bushes.

Old Meg was brave as Margaret Queen
And tall as Amazon:
An old red blanket cloak she wore;
A chip hat had she on.
God rest her aged bones somewhere –
She died full long agone!

6 August ✶ The Horses ✶ Edwin Muir

At 8.15 a.m. on 6 August 1945, the US Air Force dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. A few days later, a second bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered shortly after. The total death toll has been estimated to be 126,000, and the two bombings remain the only instances of the use of a nuclear weapon in warfare. This poem by Edwin Muir imagines a nuclear war that silences human society, yet nature returns to the damaged world in the form of the horses.

Barely a twelvemonth after
The seven days war that put the world to sleep,
Late in the evening the strange horses came.
By then we had made our covenant with silence,
But in the first few days it was so still
We listened to our breathing and were afraid.
On the second day
The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer.
On the third day a warship passed us, heading north,
Dead bodies piled on the deck. On the sixth day
A plane plunged over us into the sea. Thereafter
Nothing. The radios dumb;
And still they stand in corners of our kitchens,
And stand, perhaps, turned on, in a million rooms
All over the world. But now if they should speak,
If on a sudden they should speak again,
If on the stroke of noon a voice should speak,
We would not listen, we would not let it bring
That old bad world that swallowed its children quick
At one great gulp. We would not have it again.
Sometimes we think of the nations lying asleep,
Curled blindly in impenetrable sorrow,
And then the thought confounds us with its strangeness.

The tractors lie about our fields; at evening
They look like dank sea-monsters couched and waiting.
We leave them where they are and let them rust:
'They'll moulder away and be like other loam.'
We make our oxen drag our rusty ploughs,
Long laid aside. We have gone back
Far past our fathers' land.
And then, that evening
Late in the summer the strange horses came.
We heard a distant tapping on the road,
A deepening drumming; it stopped, went on again
And at the corner changed to hollow thunder.
We saw the heads
Like a wild wave charging and were afraid.
We had sold our horses in our fathers' time
To buy new tractors. Now they were strange to us
As fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield.
Or illustrations in a book of knights.
We did not dare go near them. Yet they waited,
Stubborn and shy, as if they had been sent
By an old command to find our whereabouts
And that long-lost archaic companionship.
In the first moment we had never a thought
That they were creatures to be owned and used.
Among them were some half-a-dozen colts
Dropped in some wilderness of the broken world,
Yet new as if they had come from their own Eden.
Since then they have pulled our ploughs and borne our
loads,
But that free servitude still can pierce our hearts.
Our life is changed; their coming our beginning.

7 August ✶ The Meadow Mouse ✶
Theodore Roethke

The great nature poet Wordsworth wrote how 'love of nature' led him to 'love of Mankind'. In this spirit, Roethke's experience looking after a helpless field mouse leads the poet to reflect on all innocent things and beings. Against his will, he builds a strong devotion to a creature as humble as the mouse.

I

In a shoe box stuffed in an old nylon stocking
Sleeps the baby mouse I found in the meadow,
Where he trembled and shook beneath a stick
Till I caught him up by the tail and brought him in,
Cradled in my hand,
A little quaker, the whole body of him trembling,
His absurd whiskers sticking out like a cartoon-mouse,
His feet like small leaves,
Little lizard-feet,
Whitish and spread wide when he tried to struggle away,
Wriggling like a minuscule puppy.

Now he's eaten his three kinds of cheese and drunk from
his bottle-cap watering-trough –
So much he just lies in one corner,
His tail curled under him, his belly big
As his head; his bat-like ears
Twitching, tilting toward the least sound.

Do I imagine he no longer trembles
When I come close to him?
He seems no longer to tremble.

II

But this morning the shoe-box house on the back porch
is empty.
Where has he gone, my meadow mouse,
My thumb of a child that nuzzled in my palm? –
To run under the hawk's wing,
Under the eye of the great owl watching from the elm-tree,
To live by courtesy of the shrike, the snake, the tom-cat.

I think of the nestling fallen into the deep grass,
The turtle gasping in the dusty rubble of the highway,
The paralytic stunned in the tub, and the water rising, –
All things innocent, hapless, forsaken.

8 August ✶ *from* A Song About Myself ✶ John Keats

The schoolboy in Keats's poem expects to find everything completely different in another country, but instead he finds it pretty much exactly the same. Perhaps he is learning, as Maya Angelou teaches, that we are more alike than unalike after all.

There was a naughty boy,
And a naughty boy was he,
He ran away to Scotland
The people for to see –
Then he found
That the ground
Was as hard,
That a yard
Was as long,
That a song
Was as merry,
That a cherry
Was as red,
That lead
Was as weighty,
That fourscore
Was as eighty,
That a door
Was as wooden
As in England –
So he stood in his shoes
And he wondered,
He wondered,
He stood in his
Shoes and he wondered.

9 August ✶ The Fairy School under the Loch ✶ John Rice

Poetry can make everyday experiences seem fantastic, and it can make the fantastic seem everyday. In this beautiful imagining of a school for fairies, hidden away beneath the surface of a loch, classes go on as normal despite being held deep underwater.

The wind sings its gusty song.
The bell rings its rusty ring.
The underwater fairy children
dive and swim through school gates.
They do not get wet.

The waves flick their flashing spray.
A school of fish wriggles its scaly way.
The underwater fairy children
learn their liquidy lessons.
Their reading books are always dry.

The seals straighten in a stretchy mass.
Teresa the Teacher flits and floats from class to class.
The underwater fairy children
count, play, sing and recite,
their clothes not in the least bit damp.

The rocks creak in their cracking skin.
A fairy boat drifts into a loch of time.
The underwater fairy children
lived, learned and left this life –
their salty stories now dry as their cracked wings.

10 August ✶ I'd Love to Be a Fairy's Child ✶ Robert Graves

Robert Graves was a prolific novelist and poet, most famous for the fictional autobiography of the Roman Emperor Claudius, *I, Claudius*. In this poem, the speaker jealously imagines how wonderful it would be to have fairies for parents – that way he'd have more pocket money than he could ever dream of!

Children born of fairy stock
Never need for shirt or frock,
Never want for food or fire,
Always get their heart's desire:
Jingle pockets full of gold,
Marry when they're seven years old,
Every fairy child may keep
Two strong ponies and ten sheep;
All have houses, each his own,
Built of brick or granite stone;
They live on cherries, they run wild –
I'd love to be a fairy's child.

11 August ✶ Verses written to the Queen of England ✶ Mary, Queen of Scots

On 11 August 1586, Mary, Queen of Scots, was arrested for her involvement in the Babington Plot – a plot to assassinate Mary's cousin, Elizabeth I. Mary was beheaded under Elizabeth's orders the following year. These lines, attributed to Mary and supposedly sent to Elizabeth, express Mary's awareness of, and anxiety about, the likelihood of her own execution.

A single thought which benefits and harms me
Bitter and sweet alternate endlessly in my heart.
Between hope and fear this thought weighs down on me
So much that peace and rest flee from me

So, dear sister, if this paper reiterates
My pressing desire to see you;
It is because I see in pain and sorrow
The immediate outcome if this request should fail.

I have seen the ship blown by contrary winds
On the high seas, near to the harbour mouth
And the calm turning to troubled water

Likewise (sister) I live in fear and terror
Not on account of you, but because there are times
When Fortune can destroy sail and rigging at once.

12 August ✶ Manly Sports ✶ Marion Bernstein

12 August is known as the 'Glorious Twelfth', and it marks the start of the shooting season for grouse. Here, the radical feminist poet Marion Bernstein mocks the cruelty of hunting by presenting it ironically as a daring and manly sport. Hovering beneath Bernstein's false praise is the sense that she views hunting as merely the killing of defenceless animals.

How brave is the hunter who nobly will dare
On horseback to follow the small timid hare;
Oh! ye soldiers who fall in defence of your flag,
What are you to the hero who brings down the stag?

Bright eyes glance admiring, soft hearts give their loves
To the knight who shoots best in 'the tourney of doves';
Nothing else with such slaughtering feats can compare,
To win manly applause, or the smiles of the fair.

A cheer for fox-hunting! Come all who can dare
Track this dangerous animal down to its lair;
'Tis first trapped, then set free for the huntsmen to follow
With horses and hounds, and with heartstirring halloo!

The brave knights on the moor when the grouse are a-drive,
Slay so many, you'd think, there'd be none left alive;
Oh! the desperate daring of slaughtering grouse,
Can only be matched in a real slaughterhouse.

The angler finds true Anglo-Saxon delight,
In trapping small fish, who so foolishly bite,
He enjoys the wild terror of creatures so weak,
And what manlier pleasures can any one seek?

13 August ✶ Shakespeare at School ✶ Wendy Cope

Here is another sonnet, this time following directly in the footsteps of its subject: Shakespeare. Though Cope characterizes Shakespeare's wordplay as 'idiotic' punning, she is clearly in awe of the great playwright – after all, her sonnet ends with its own pun!

Forty boys on benches with their quills,
Six days a week through almost all the year,
Long hours of Latin with relentless drills
And repetition, all enforced by fear.
I picture Shakespeare sitting near the back,
Indulging in a risky bit of fun
By exercising his prodigious knack
Of thinking up an idiotic pun,
And whispering his gem to other boys,
Some of whom could not suppress their mirth –
Behaviour that unfailingly annoys
Any teacher anywhere on earth.
The fun was over when the master spoke:
Will Shakespeare, come up here and share the joke.

14 August ✶ *from* Macbeth ✶ William Shakespeare

On or around 14 August 1040, King Duncan I of Scotland was murdered by his cousin Macbeth – the historical source for Shakespeare's great play. At this point in the play, Macbeth has killed Duncan, and is now focused on his next target, Banquo, as Macbeth fears that according to the witches' prophecy, it is Banquo's heirs ('issue'), not Macbeth's own, who will become kings hereafter.

To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
And to that dauntless temper of his mind
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and under him
My genius is rebuked, as it is said
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sisters
When first they put the name of king upon me,
And bade them speak to him. Then, prophet-like,
They hailed him father to a line of kings.
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
And put a barren sceptre in my grip,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind,
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
Rather than so, come Fate into the list,
And champion me to th' utterance.

15 August ✶ *from* The Rime of the Ancient Mariner ✶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Coleridge's long poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is a masterpiece of poetry. It draws on archaic language and the traditional ballad form to tell the sorry story of a sailor who kills an albatross and thus curses himself and his crew to a terrible fate. The critic William Hazlitt called it 'unquestionably a work of genius – of wild, irregular, overwhelming imagination'. It has given us such famous phrases as 'water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink', and 'a sadder and a wiser man'.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

16 August ✶ Musée des Beaux Arts ✶
W. H. Auden

This poem by the Anglo-American poet Auden is an example of 'ekphrasis' – a Greek term for when a visual work of art, like a painting, is described in a textual work of art, like a poem. If it's true that a picture can paint a thousand words, then how should words go about painting a picture? The painting is *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, which Auden saw in Brussels. It depicts the myth of Icarus, in which an over-ambitious boy flies with wings held together with wax too close to the sun; the wings melt, and he plummets to his death. Yet in spite of the extraordinary sight of a boy falling from the sky, the other figures in the painting continue with life as normal, calmly ignoring the tragic event.

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's
horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

17 August ✶ My Last Duchess ✶ Robert Browning

This poem by Robert Browning is another example of ekphrasis. It's thought to be about a portrait of 'Lucrezia de' Medici'. The poem is a dramatic monologue, spoken by a 'Ferrara' – the 5th Duke of Ferrara, who married Lucrezia in 1558. Only a few years into their married life, the Duke abandoned his young wife; she died shortly afterwards. While most historians claim that Lucrezia died of tuberculosis, some believe that she was poisoned – possibly by her own husband.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat.' Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – which I have not – to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse –
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

18 August ✶ Don't Let That Horse ✶
Lawrence Ferlinghetti

This is another ekphrastic poem. This time, though, ekphrasis is used to comic effect: Marc Chagall's *Equestrienne* – a very strange painting in which a couple ride a horse who is munching, bizarrely, on a violin – is transformed into a story about the painter himself. The poem builds to a delicious pun.

Don't let that horse
eat that violin

cried Chagall's mother

But he
kept right on
painting

And became famous

And kept on painting
The Horse With Violin In Mouth
And when he finally finished it
he jumped up upon the horse
and rode away
waving the violin

And then with a low bow gave it
to the first naked nude he ran across

And there were no strings
attached

19 August ✶ And Death Shall Have No Dominion ✶ Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas wrote this poem in 1933, after the horrors of the First World War and during the political tensions that were mounting towards the Second. The title is taken from the book of Romans in the New Testament.

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead man naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;
Where blew a flower may a flower no more
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.

20 August ✶ How Many Seconds in a Minute? ✶ Christina Rossetti

This poem by Christina Rossetti is about the things we can add up, and the things we cannot. Her couplets guide us through larger and larger spans of time, before she reaches the limit: how big is time itself? For that question, she jokes, there is no way of completing the rhyme.

How many seconds in a minute?
Sixty, and no more in it.

How many minutes in an hour?
Sixty for sun and shower.

How many hours in a day?
Twenty-four for work and play.

How many days in a week?
Seven both to hear and speak.

How many weeks in a month?
Four, as the swift moon runn'th.

How many months in a year?
Twelve the almanack makes clear.

How many years in an age?
One hundred says the sage.

How many ages in time?
No one knows the rhyme.

21 August ✶ Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth ✶ Arthur Hugh Clough

Arthur Hugh Clough was a Victorian poet, but he was also the secretarial assistant to the founder of modern nursing Florence Nightingale, his wife's cousin. The message of this poem is one of hope. Through the metaphors of a battlefield, the ocean's waves, and the rising sun, Clough is saying: don't give up, keep fighting – better things are on the way.

Say not the struggle nought availeth,
  The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
  And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
  It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
  And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
  Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making
  Comes silent, flooding in, the main,

And not by eastern windows only,
  When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
  But westward, look, the land is bright.

22 August ✶ Who Would True Valour See ✶
John Bunyan

On this day in 1642, the English Civil War broke out. Battles were fought between the Parliamentarians and Royalists until 1651. John Bunyan, a Puritan preacher and writer, spent three years fighting for the Parliamentarian army. He is best remembered for the religious allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Who would true Valour see
Let him come hither;
One here will Constant be,
Come Wind, come Weather.
There's no Discouragement,
Shall make him once Relent,
His first avow'd Intent,
To be a Pilgrim.

Who so beset him round,
With dismal Stories,
Do but themselves Confound;
His Strength the more is.
No Lyon can him fright,
He'l with a Gyant Fight,
But he will have a right,
To be a Pilgrim.

Hobgoblin, nor foul Fiend,
Can daunt his Spirit:
He knows, he at the end,
Shall Life Inherit.
Then Fancies fly away,
He'll fear not what men say,
He'll labour Night and Day,
To be a Pilgrim.

23 August ✶ The Rainy Day ✶
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Unfortunately, summer can't last forever – soon strawberries and trips to the seaside will be replaced by falling leaves and chestnuts and that old British favourite: rain! Longfellow's poem treats the start of autumn as a mental state, but the narrator's dejection soon passes as if it were itself a rain shower.

The day is cold, and dark, and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
The vine still clings to the mouldering wall,
But at every gust the dead leaves fall,
And the day is dark and dreary.

My life is cold, and dark, and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
My thoughts still cling to the mouldering Past,
But the hopes of youth fall thick in the blast,
And the days are dark and dreary.

Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

24 August ✶ So, We'll Go No More a-Roving ✶ George Gordon, Lord Byron

Byron is known for his often outrageous writings and misadventures – Lady Caroline Lamb called him 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know', a phrase that has been attached to his name ever since.

So, we'll go no more a-roving
  So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
  And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
  And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
  And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
  And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
  By the light of the moon.

25 August ✶ The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls (*from* The Princess) ✶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson

This song-like poem by Tennyson seems to act out the 'wild echoes' which it describes. The poet conjures up images of a beautiful realm in which the horns of Elfland echo across hills and lakes, growing louder forever. Unsurprisingly, given these horn calls in Tennyson's poem, the composer Benjamin Britten set this to music in his Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings.

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

26 August ✶ Fear No More the Heat o' the Sun ✶ William Shakespeare

This extract from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is actually a burial song, but its words act as a tribute to the passing of the seasons and the movements of the year.

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
  Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
  Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great;
  Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;
Care no more to clothe and eat,
  To thee the reed is as the oak.
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,
  Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
  Thou hast finished joy and moan.
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

No exorcizer harm thee!
Nor no witchcraft charm thee!
Ghost unlaid forbear thee!
Nothing ill come near thee!
Quiet consummation have,
And renownèd be thy grave!

27 August ✶ Trees ✶ Mark Haddon

Mark Haddon is best known for his novels, including the celebrated *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. You probably walk past dozens of trees every day – but do you ever really notice them? Stop and think about them and, like Mark Haddon, you might just be struck by how extraordinarily beautiful trees are.

They stand in parks and graveyards and gardens.
Some of them are taller than department stores,
yet they do not draw attention to themselves.

You will be fitting a heated towel rail one day
and see, through the louvre window,
a shoal of olive-green fish changing direction
in the air that swims above the little gardens.

Or you will wake at your aunt's cottage,
your sleep broken by a coal train on the empty hill
as the oaks roar in the wind off the channel.

Your kindness to animals, your skill at the clarinet,
these are accidental things.
We lost this game a long way back.
Look at you. You're reading poetry.
Outside the spring air is thick
with the seeds of their children.

28 August ✶ *from* The Task ✶ William Cowper

On 28 August 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed. Though it did not immediately end slavery in British colonies, it was the beginning of its end. Part of the reasoning that inspired the act – beyond the major ethical arguments against all forms of slavery in general – was that slavery was not tolerated in Britain, and therefore should not be tolerated in British colonies. This is an argument expressed many years earlier, in Cowper's epic poem from 1785, *The Task*.

I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earn'd.
No: dear as freedom is, and in my heart's
Just estimation priz'd above all price,
I had much rather be myself the slave
And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.
We have no slaves at home. – Then why abroad?
And they themselves, once ferried o'er the wave
That parts us, are emancipate and loos'd.
Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free;
They touch our country and their shackles fall.
That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud
And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,
And let it circulate through ev'ry vein
Of all your empire; that where Britain's pow'r
Is felt, mankind may feel her mercy too.

29 August ✶ No More Auction Block ✶ Anon.

The lyrics to the song 'No More Auction Block' date back to the American Civil War, when it was a marching song sung by African-American soldiers. The lyrics reject various aspects of a slave's life and with frequent use of repetition for emphasis, the song broadcasts a powerful message.

No more auction block for me
No more, no more
No more auction block for me
Many thousand gone.

No more peck of corn for me
No more, no more
No more peck of corn for me
Many thousand gone.

No more driver's lash for me
No more, no more
No more driver's lash for me
Many thousand gone.

No more pint of salt for me
No more, no more
No more pint of salt for me
Many thousand gone.

No more hundred lash for me
No more, no more
No more hundred lash for me
Many thousand gone.

No more mistress' call for me
No more, no more
No more mistress' call for me
Many thousand gone.

30 August ✶ Blowin' in the Wind ✶ Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan is one of the most successful songwriters of the last century, and is especially noted for his many songs on social and political themes. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, the first time the prize had been won by a popular musician.

How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

How many years can a mountain exist
Before it's washed to the sea?
Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head
Pretending he just doesn't see?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

How many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

31 August ✶ Fly Away, Fly Away Over the Sea ✶ Christina Rossetti

As August comes to a close, so do the summer months. In Rossetti's poem, the swallow carries the season away with it, as it starts its journey south for the winter.

Fly away, fly away over the sea,
  Sun-loving swallow, for summer is done;
Come again, come again, come back to me,
  Bringing the summer and bringing the sun.

September

1 September ✶ Bomber's Moon ✶ Mike Harding

The Second World War began on 1 September 1939. It would last almost exactly six years, ending on 2 September 1945. In this poem it is the indifferent face of the moon that bears witness to the awfulness of airborne conflict. A 'bomber's moon' is an especially bright full moon that lights up the landscape as if by daylight. Such natural light was an aid to military bombing campaigns during the war, and the sight of a 'bomber's moon' was a source of fear for many.

'44 in Bomber County
Young men waiting for the night,
In the hedgerows birds are singing,
Singing in the falling light.

And the captain says, 'Tonight there'll be a bomber's moon,
We'll be there and back underneath a bomber's moon.
A thousand bombers over the northern sea
Heading out, out for Germany.'

Chalkey White stands at the dartboard,
Curly Thompson writes to his wife,
Nobby Clarke and Jumbo Johnson
Are playing cards and smoking pipes;

And over the hangars rises a bomber's moon,
Full and clear rising, as the engines croon,
And the planes they taxi out on to runway five
And sail off out into the silvery night.

Sandy Campbell checks his oil gauge,
The Belgian coast is coming soon;
Curly Thompson lifts his sextant,
Lines up on a bomber's moon

And waves are shining there below the bomber's moon.
The Lancasters flying high below the bomber's moon
Coming in along the Belgian coast
A thousand silver-shrouded ghosts.

Flak flies up around the city,
Jumbo Johnson banks his plane,
Goes in low and drops his payload,
Turns to join the pack again.

And people are dying there below the bomber's moon,
The city's a raging hell below the bomber's moon,
And the planes head out towards the northern sea:
Young men coming home from victory.

Over Belgium came the fighters,
Flying high against the night;
Curly Thompson saw them coming,
Closing in before he died.

And the young men shot them down below the bomber's moon,
Shot them down in flames below the bomber's moon;
Young men sending young men to their graves
Saw them down into the North Sea waves.

'83 in Bomber County
Mrs White dusts the picture and she cries:
Chalkey White in uniform
Looking as he did the day he died.

And for God's sake no more bomber's moons,
No more young men going out to die too soon,
Old men sending young men out to die,
Young men dying for a politician's lies.

For God's sake no more bomber's moons,
No more young men going out to die too soon,
Old men sending young men out to kill.
If we don't stop them then they never will.

No more no more bomber's moons.

No more no more bomber's moons.

No more no more bomber's moons.

No more no more bomber's moons.

2 September ✶ But I Can't ✶ W. H. Auden

Written in 1940, this poem expresses the uncertainties of everyday life in wartime. Not only is the future unknown, but the reasoning behind the war seems as uncertain as the source of the wind. The poem takes the unusual form of a villanelle.

Time will say nothing but I told you so,
Time only knows the price we have to pay;
If I could tell you I would let you know.

If we should weep when clowns put on their show,
If we should stumble when musicians play,
Time will say nothing but I told you so.

There are no fortunes to be told, although,
Because I love you more than I can say,
If I could tell you I would let you know.

The winds must come from somewhere when they blow,
There must be reason why the leaves decay;
Time will say nothing but I told you so.

Perhaps the roses really want to grow,
The vision seriously intends to stay;
If I could tell you I would let you know.

Suppose the lions all get up and go,
And the brooks and soldiers run away;
Will Time say nothing but I told you so?
If I could tell you I would let you know.

3 September ✶ This is the House That Jack Built ✶ Anon.

'This is the House That Jack Built' is a popular nursery rhyme, the origins of which most likely lie in the sixteenth century. It is often sung as a 'cumulative poem', meaning that the line 'That lay in the house that Jack built' is repeated after each new line before the song begins again – so that the poem unfolds into a more and more complex structure: like the building of a house.

This is the farmer sowing his corn,
That kept the cock that crowed in the morn,
That waked the priest all shaven and shorn,
That married the man all tattered and torn,
That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
That tossed the dog,
That worried the cat,
That killed the rat,
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.

4 September ✶ Hornbeacon High ✶
Sarah Crossan

The start of September and the end of the Summer Holidays mean one thing to schoolchildren across the country – a thing that fills some hearts with terror: Back To School. This poem about school is actually an extract from a verse novel called *One*. It tells the story of two sisters who are conjoined twins.

The building is white,
ivy eating its way up the broken walls,
windows small
and scratched.

Most students are
pulling at one another and squealing,
basking in their easy friendly reunions.

But I
study those
who are alone,
at the edge of this noise,
the kids holding their school bags close,
keeping their eyes down,

so I can
impersonate their
invisibility.

5 September ✶ Please Mrs Butler ✶ Allan Ahlberg

This poem by the children's writer Allan Ahlberg is a comical story about life in the classroom – it is not just the children who get fed up with being interrogated!

Please Mrs Butler
This boy Derek Drew
Keeps copying my work, Miss.
What shall I do?

Go and sit in the hall, dear.
Go and sit in the sink.
Take your books on the roof, my lamb.
Do whatever you think.

Please Mrs Butler
This boy Derek Drew
Keeps taking my rubber, Miss.
What shall I do?

Keep it in your hand, dear.
Hide it up your vest.
Swallow it if you like, love.
Do what you think best.

Please Mrs Butler
This boy Derek Drew
Keeps calling me rude names, Miss.
What shall I do?

Lock yourself in the cupboard, dear.
Run away to sea.
Do whatever you can, my flower.
But *don't ask me!*

6 September ✶ Reading the Classics ✶
Brian Patten

A story, if well told, can last a lifetime or longer. Brian Patten's poem pays homage to great works of children's literature that continue to give, and to live a life of their own.

The Secret Garden will never age;
The tangled undergrowth remains as fresh
As when the author put down her pen.
Its mysteries are as poignant now as then.

Though Time's a thief it cannot thieve
One page from the world of make-believe.

On the track the Railway Children wait;
Alice still goes back and forth through the glass;
In Tom's Midnight Garden Time unfurls,
And children still discover secret worlds.

At the Gates of Dawn Pan plays his pipes;
Mole and Ratty still float in awe downstream.
The weasels watch, hidden in the grass.
None cares how quickly human years pass.

Though Time's a thief it cannot thieve
One page from the world of make-believe.

7 September ✶ The Lesson ✶ Edward Lucie-Smith

Anyone who has ever lost a loved one will know that grief is a complex emotion. Sometimes, consolation can come in the form of merely knowing that grief, even in its strangest forms, is a normal part of dealing with loss. In this remarkable poem by Edward Lucie-Smith, grief carries with it guilt, shame, relief, shock, and even pride.

'Your father's gone,' my bald headmaster said.
His shiny dome and brown tobacco jar
Splintered at once in tears. It wasn't grief.
I cried for knowledge which was bitterer
Than any grief. For there and then I knew
That grief has uses – that a father dead
Could bind the bully's fist a week or two;
And then I cried for shame, then for relief.

I was a month past ten when I learnt this:
I still remember how the noise was stilled
in school-assembly when my grief came in.
Some goldfish in a bowl quietly sculled
Around their shining prison on its shelf.
They were indifferent. All the other eyes
Were turned towards me. Somewhere in myself
Pride, like a goldfish, flashed a sudden fin.

8 September ✶ An Attempt at Unrhymed Verse ✶ Wendy Cope

Modern poets often turn away from rhyme schemes and from metre, preferring free verse. But in this amusing poem by Wendy Cope, the freedom of free verse proves a stretch too far for the poet, and she cannot quite shake her compulsion to think in rhymes.

People tell you all the time,
Poems do not have to rhyme.
It's often better if they don't
And I'm determined this one won't.
                Oh dear.

Never mind, I'll start again.
Busy, busy with my pen . . . cil.
I can do it if I try –
Easy, peasy, pudding and gherkins.

Writing verse is so much fun,
Cheering as the summer weather,
Makes you feel alert and bright,
'Specially when you get it more or less the way you want it.

9 September ✶ Take a Poem ✶ James Carter

Since earliest times, poetry was celebrated as a great gift of memory; the ancient Greeks even invoked the goddess Mnemosyne, meaning 'memory', at the start of their poems. We usually write words down or else we store them in our computers, but sometimes it is good to memorize a poem; that way, we truly own it, and can carry its words with us always.

Why not take a poem
wherever you go?
pop it in your pocket
nobody will know

Take it to your classroom
stick it on the wall
tell them all about it
read it in the hall

Take it to the bathroom
tuck it up in bed
take the time to learn it
keep it in your head

take it for a day trip
take it on a train
fold it as a hat
when it starts to rain

Take it to a river
fold it as a boat
pop it in the water
hope that it will float

Take it to a hilltop
fold it as a plane
throw it up skywards
  time and time again

Take it to a post box
send it anywhere
out into the world with
tender
    loving
        care

10 September ✶ Pleasant Sounds ✶ John Clare

It might be said that many of the great nature poets are in some respects compilers of lists – cataloguers of flowers and trees and animals. Perhaps something of the sort crossed Clare's mind when he sat down to write 'Pleasant Sounds', which is a poem in the form of a list of autumn images which cleverly captures a sense of the sound of nature.

The rustling of leaves under the feet in woods and under hedges;
The crumping of cat-ice and snow down wood-rides, narrow lanes, and every street causeway;
Rustling through a wood or rather rushing, while the wind halloos in the oak-toop like thunder;
The rustle of birds' wings startled from their nests or flying unseen into the bushes;
The whizzing of larger birds overhead in a wood, such as crows, puddocks, buzzards;
The trample of robins and woodlarks on the brown leaves, and the patter of squirrels on the green moss;
The fall of an acorn on the ground, the pattering of nuts on the hazel branches as they fall from ripeness;
The flirt of the groundlark's wing from the stubbles – how sweet such pictures on dewy mornings, when the dew flashes from its brown feathers.

11 September ✶ The Right Word ✶ Imtiaz Dharker

11 September marks one of the darkest days in recent history. On this day in 2001, terrorists hijacked four planes, and flew them towards targets in the United States. Two planes hit the World Trade Center in New York, and one flew into the Pentagon building in Washington; the fourth plane came down in a field after passengers tried to intervene. The Pakistan-born British poet Imtiaz Dharker wrote this poem amid the public confusion following the attacks, when hostility was shown towards Middle Eastern people, and when the words 'freedom fighter' and 'terrorist' became highly contested labels.

Outside the door,
lurking in the shadows,
is a terrorist.

Is that the wrong description?
Outside that door,
taking shelter in the shadows,
is a freedom-fighter.

I haven't got this right.
Outside, waiting in the shadows
is a hostile militant.

Are words no more
than waving, wavering flags?
Outside your door,
watchful in the shadows,
is a guerrilla warrior.

God help me.
Outside, defying every shadow,
stands a martyr.
I saw his face.

No words can help me now.
Just outside the door,
lost in shadows,
is a child who looks like mine.

One word for you.
Outside my door,
his hand too steady,
his eyes too hard,
is a boy who looks like your son, too.

I open the door.
Come in, I say.
Come in and eat with us.

The child steps in
and carefully, at my door,
takes off his shoes.

12 September ✶ The Red Wheelbarrow ✶ William Carlos Williams

This famous poem by William Carlos Williams is the perfect example of an 'imagist' poem, taking as its focal point a single snapshot of life. The poet's feelings and thoughts do not interfere with the act of observation. As a poem, it pushes the category of poetry itself to its limits.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

13 September ✶ Plums ✶ Gillian Clarke

Across late summer and early autumn, plums are in season. The Welsh poet Gillian Clarke traces plums from the sweet ripeness of summer fruits to the skeletal form of a plum-tree in winter.

When their time comes they fall
without wind, without rain.
They seep through the trees' muslin
in a slow fermentation.

Daily the low sun warms them
in a late love that is sweeter
than summer. In bed at night
we hear heartbeat of fruitfall.

The secretive slugs crawl home
to the burst honeys, are found
in the morning mouth on mouth,
inseparable.

We spread patchwork counterpanes
for a clean catch. Baskets fill,
never before such harvest,
such a hunters' moon burning

the hawthorns, drunk on syrups
that are richer by night
when spiders pitch
tents in the wet grass.

This morning the red sun
is opening like a rose
on our white wall, prints there
the fishbone shadow of a fern.

The early blackbirds fly
guilty from a dawn haul
of fallen fruit. We too
breakfast on sweetnesses.

Soon plum trees will be bone,
grown delicate with frost's
formalities. Their black
angles will tear the snow.

14 September ✶ *from* Annus Mirabilis ✶
John Dryden

John Dryden was the very first Poet Laureate of Great Britain, and he is considered to be one of the finest poets of Restoration England, the period following Charles II's return to the throne in 1660. 'Annus Mirabilis' is a Latin phrase meaning 'wonderful year' or 'year of miracles', although the year Dryden writes of – 1666 – was marked by disasters throughout. The miracle, for Dryden, is that the world didn't end altogether, given that the date contained '666', the devilish 'number of the beast'. This extract recounts the tragedy of what became known as the Great Fire of London.

Such was the Rise of this prodigious fire,
Which, in mean Buildings first obscurely bred,
From thence did soon to open Streets aspire,
And straight to Palaces and Temples spread.

The diligence of Trades and noiseful Gain,
And luxury, more late, asleep were laid:
All was the night's, and in her silent reign
No sound the rest of Nature did invade.

In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,
Those seeds of Fire their fatal Birth disclose;
And first, few scatt'ring Sparks about were blown,
Big with the flames that to our Ruin rose.

Then in some close-pent Room it crept along,
And, smould'ring as it went, in silence fed;
Till th' infant Monster, with devouring strong,
Walk'd boldly upright with exalted head.

Now like some rich or mighty Murderer,
Too great for Prison, which he breaks with Gold,
Who fresher for new Mischiefs does appear
And dares the World to tax him with the old:

So 'scapes th' insulting Fire his narrow Jail,
And makes small outlets into open air:
There the fierce Winds his tender Force assail,
And beat him downward to his first repair.

The Winds, like crafty Courtesans, withheld
His Flames from burning, but to blow them more:
And every fresh attempt he is repell'd
With faint Denials, weaker than before.

And now no longer letted of his Prey,
He leaps up at it with enrag'd desire:
O'erlooks the Neighbours with a wide survey,
And nods at every House his threat'ning Fire.

15 September ✶ The Mummy ✶ Edwin Morgan

Edwin Morgan's poem imagines a conversation between the mummified body of Rameses II, an Egyptian pharaoh, and a modern specialist in the preservation of museum artefacts. Morgan's poem is comic, and draws freely on the literary legacy of Rameses, also known as Ozymandias (Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote a famous poem called 'Ozymandias', alluded to by Morgan). However, the events were also amusing in real life: to be flown to France, the mummy was issued an Egyptian passport that listed his occupation as 'King (deceased)'. The body was welcomed as a great head of state, and received by a military guard.

(The Mummy *[of Rameses II]* was met at Orly airport
by Mme Saunier-Seïté. – *News item, Sept. 1976)*

— May I welcome Your Majesty to Paris.

— Mm.

— I hope the flight from Cairo was reasonable.

— Mmmmm.

— We have a germ-proof room at the Museum of Man
where we trust Your Majesty will have peace and quiet.

— Unh-unh.

— I am sorry, but this is necessary.
You Majesty's person harbours a fungus.

— Fng fng's, hn?

— Well, it is something attacking your cells.
Your Majesty is gently deteriorating
after nearly four thousand years
becalmed in masterly embalmment.
We wish to save you from the worm.

— Wrm hrm! Mgh-mgh-mgh.

— Indeed I know it must be distressing
to a pharaoh and a son of Ra,
to the excavator of Abu Simbel
that glorious temple in the rock,
to the perfecter of Karnak hall,
to the hammer of the Hittites,
to the colossus whose colossus
raised in red granite at holy Thebes
sixteen-men-high astounds the desert
shattered, as Your Majesty in life
shattered the kingdom and oppressed the poor
with such lavish grandeur and panache,
to Ramses, to Ozymandias,
to the Louis Quatorze of the Nile,
how bitter it must be to feel
a microbe eat your camphored bands.
But we are here to help Your Majesty.
We shall encourage you to unwind.
You have many useful years ahead.

— M' n'm 'z 'zym'nidas, kng'v kngz!

— Yes yes. Well, Shelley is dead now.
He was not embalmed. He will not write
about Your Majesty again.

— T't'nkh'm'n? H'tsh'ps't?
'khn't'n? N'f'rt'ti? Mm? Mm?

— The hall of fame has many mansions.
Your Majesty may rest assured
your deeds will always be remembered.

— Youmm w'm'nn. B't'f'lll w'm'nnnn.
No w'm'nnn f'r th'zndz y'rz.

— Your Majesty, what are you doing?

— Ng! Mm. Mhm. Mm? Mm? Mmmmm.

— Your Majesty, Your Majesty! You'll break you stitches!

— Fng st'chez fng's wrm hrm.

— I really hate to have to use
a hypodermic on a mummy,
but we cannot have you strain yourself.
Remember your fungus, Your Majesty.

— Fng. Zzzzzzzz.

— That's right.

— Aaaaaaaah.

16 September ✶ Old Ironsides ✶
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote this poem, about the eighteenth-century naval frigate USS *Constitution*, on 16 September 1830. She remains in Boston to this day, and is the oldest commissioned ship afloat in the world!

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!
  Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
  That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
  And burst the cannon's roar; –
The meteor of the ocean air
  Shall sweep the clouds no more!

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,
  Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood
  And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor's tread,
  Or know the conquered knee; –
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
  The eagle of the sea!

O, better that her shattered hulk
  Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
  And there should be her grave;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
  Set every thread-bare sail,
And give her to the god of storms,
  The lightning and the gale!

17 September ✶ Harriet Tubman ✶
Eloise Greenfield

On this day in 1849, Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in Maryland, before returning to rescue her family. Eventually her efforts led to the freeing of dozens of slaves. Later in life she fought for the Union Army in the American Civil War, and led a campaign to free over 700 slaves from a camp. Regarded as an exemplar of courage and spirit, and as a leading advocate of human rights, Tubman's portrait is to grace the new twenty-dollar bill in recognition of her heroic life.

Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
Wasn't scared of nothing neither
Didn't come in this world to be no slave
And wasn't going to stay one either

'Farewell!' she sang to her friends one night
She was mighty sad to leave 'em
But she ran away that dark, hot night
Ran looking for her freedom
She ran to the woods and she ran through the woods
With the slave catchers right behind her
And she kept on going till she got to the North
Where those mean men couldn't find her

Nineteen times she went back South
To get three hundred others
She ran for her freedom nineteen times
To save Black sisters and brothers
Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
Wasn't scared of nothing neither
Didn't come in this world to be no slave
And didn't stay one either

And didn't stay one either

18 September ✶ Joy ✶ Hugo Williams

Autumn is the season for picking blackberries out of wild hedgerows. For many, the memory of picking berries is associated both with their sweet taste, but also with bramble scratches and nettle stings. Hugo Williams here reflects on joy as a kind of comfortable lack of extremes, where all experiences sit between being stung and relieving the sting.

Not so much a sting
as a faint burn

not so much a pain
as the memory of pain

the memory of tears
flowing freely down cheeks

in a sort of joy
that there was nothing

worse in the world
than stinging nettle stings

and nothing better
than cool dock leaves.

19 September ✶ Prologue ✶ Patience Agbabi

Today begins a sequence of poems about words and language – the very stuff of poetry. Patience Agbabi grew up in London, the daughter of Nigerian parents. This poem is a veritable feast of wordplay and puns, all centring on the word 'word'.

Give me a word
any word
let it roll across your tongue
like a dolly mixture.
Open your lips
say it loud
let each syllable vibrate like a transistor
Say it again again again again again
till it's a tongue twister
till its meaning is in tatters
till its meaning equals sound
now write it down,
letter by letter
loop the loops
till you form a structure.
Do it again again again again again
till it's a word picture.
Does this inspire?
Is your consciousness on fire?
Then let me take you higher.

Give me a noun
give me a verb
and I'm in motion
cos I'm on a mission
to deliver information
so let me take you to the fifth dimension.
No fee, it's free,
you only gotta pay attention.

So sit back, relax,
let me take you back
to when you learnt to walk, talk,
learnt coordination
and communication,
mama
dada.
If you rub two words together you get friction
cut them in half, you get a fraction.
If you join two words you get multiplication.
My school of mathematics
equals verbal acrobatics
so let's make conversation.

Give me a preposition
give me an interjection
give me inspiration.
In the beginning was creation
I'm not scared of revelations
cos I've done my calculations.
I've got high hopes
on the tightrope,
I just keep talking.
I got more skills than i got melanin
I'm fired by adrenaline
if you wanna know what rhyme it is
it's feminine.
Cos I'm Eve on an Apple Mac
this is a rap attack
so rich in onomatopoeia
I'll take you higher than the ozone layer.
So give me Word for Windows
give me 'W' times three
cos I'm on a mission
to deliver information
that is gravity defying
and i'll keep on trying
till you lose your fear of flying.

Give me a pronoun
give me a verb
and I'm living in syntax.
You only need two words to form a sentence.
I am I am I am I am I am
bicultural and sometimes clinical
my mother fed me rhymes through the umbilical,
I was born waxing lyrical.
I was raised on Watch with Mother
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
and Fight the Power.
Now I have the perfect tutor
in my postmodern suitor,
I'm in love with me computer.
But let me shut down
before I touch down.

Give me a word
give me a big word
let me manifest
express in excess
The M I X
of my voice box.
Now I've eaten the apple
I'm more subtle than a snake is.
I wanna do poetic things in poetic places
Give me poetry unplugged
so I can counter silence.
Give me my poetic licence

and I'll give you metaphors that top eclipses
I'll give you megabytes and megamixes.

Give me a stage and I'll cut form on it
give me a page and I'll perform on it.

Give me a word
any word.

20 September ✶ Ars Poetica ✶ Archibald MacLeish

What should a poem be? For Archibald MacLeish in this poem about silence and absence, it is enough that it should simply 'be'.

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit,

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown –

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds.

*

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind –

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

*

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea –

A poem should not mean
But be.

21 September ✶ Shut Not Your Doors to Me, Proud Libraries ✶ Walt Whitman

This poem was written by Whitman, one of the most celebrated of American poets, not long after the American Civil War and the assassination of President Lincoln in 1865. The book in this poem is a very strange one – its words are entirely unimportant and it seems to be alive! It is, perhaps, a metaphor for life itself and the knowledge we can receive just by living life joyfully.

Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries,
For that which was lacking among you all, yet needed most,
  I bring;
A book I have made for your dear sake, O soldiers,
And for you, O soul of man, and you, love of comrades;
The words of my book nothing, the life of it everything;
A book separate, not link'd with the rest, nor felt by the
  intellect;
But you will feel every word, O Libertad! arm'd Libertad!
It shall pass by the intellect to swim the sea, the air,
With joy with you, O soul of man.

22 September ✶ An Old Woman of the Roads ✶ Padraic Colum

Padraic Colum was a celebrated Irish poet and playwright of the twentieth century. He corresponded with many great poets, including W. B. Yeats, and was a lifelong friend of the novelist James Joyce. This poem, told from the point of view of a homeless woman, asks us to appreciate the material things we take for granted – a clock, a hearth, and, above all, a roof above our heads.

O, to have a little house!
To own the hearth and stool and all!
The heaped up sods upon the fire,
The pile of turf against the wall!

To have a clock with weights and chains
And pendulum swinging up and down!
A dresser filled with shining delph,
Speckled and white and blue and brown!

I could be busy all the day
Clearing and sweeping hearth and floor,
And fixing on their shelf again
My white and blue and speckled store!

I could be quiet there at night
Beside the fire and by myself,
Sure of a bed and loth to leave
The ticking clock and the shining delph!

Och! but I'm weary of mist and dark,
And roads where there's never a house nor bush,
And tired I am of bog and road,
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!

And I am praying to God on high,
And I am praying Him night and day,
For a little house – a house of my own –
Out of the wind's and the rain's way.

23 September ✶ Digging ✶ Edward Thomas

Today is the autumn equinox, where, due to the tilt of the earth in relation to the sun, the length of night and day is almost exactly the same across the entire globe. The literal meaning of 'equinox' is 'equal night'. Edward Thomas's autumn poem is not about light and sight, though, but about the smells that we associate with this season.

Today I think
Only with scents, – scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field;

Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the roots of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke's smell, too,
Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns.

It is enough
To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

24 September ✶ Autumn Fires ✶
Robert Louis Stevenson

Autumn brings with it cold weather and the coming of darker nights, as we transition from the warmth of summer to the chill of winter. However, in this delightful poem, Stevenson finds 'something bright' in every season, as he celebrates the tradition of bonfires.

In the other gardens
  And all up the vale,
From the autumn bonfires
  See the smoke trail!

Pleasant summer over
  And all the summer flowers,
The red fire blazes,
  The grey smoke towers.

Sing a song of seasons!
  Something bright in all!
Flowers in the summer,
  Fires in the fall!

25 September ✶ Something Told the Wild Geese ✶ Rachel Field

At this time of year, many kinds of birds will migrate south, travelling from their breeding grounds in the north to a warm place for winter. Geese fly in a V-formation in order to reduce air resistance and help them conserve energy for their long flights, which can be many thousands of miles. Rachel Field's poem observes the way in which birds, seemingly mysteriously, know when the seasons are turning, and when they must migrate.

Something told the wild geese
  It was time to go.
Though the fields lay golden
  Something whispered, – 'Snow.'

Leaves were green and stirring,
  Berries, lustre-glossed,
But beneath warm feathers
  Something cautioned, – 'Frost.'

All the sagging orchards
  Steamed with amber spice,
But each wild breast stiffened
  At remembered Ice.

Something told the wild geese
  It was time to fly, –
Summer sun was on their wings,
  Winter in their cry.

26 September ✶ Wild Geese ✶ Mary Oliver

In this poem, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver uses the image of wild geese flying home as a metaphor for the way in which the world impacts on us – sounds and sights are like birds, flying home to us.

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

27 September ✶ The Railway Children ✶ Seamus Heaney

On this day in 1825, the engineer George Stephenson's steam engine *Locomotion* was taken out on the railways for the first time. It was the first passenger journey ever made by rail. Seamus Heaney, who died in 2013, was a great Irish poet, and the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. The title of this poem references Edith Nesbit's 1905 novel *The Railway Children*. It plays with the difference between knowledge and imagination: the children do not know how telegraphs work, but the narrator is enrapt as he thinks of words streaming down the wires.

When we climbed the slopes of the cutting
We were eye-level with the white cups
Of the telegraph poles and the sizzling wires.

Like lovely freehand they curved for miles
East and miles west beyond us, sagging
Under their burden of swallows.

We were small and thought we knew nothing
Worth knowing. We thought words travelled the wires
In the shiny pouches of raindrops,

Each one seeded full with the light
Of the sky, the gleam of the lines, and ourselves
So infinitesimally scaled

We could stream through the eye of a needle.

28 September ✶ Barrier ✶ Rachel Rooney

The theme of National Poetry Day 2017 was 'freedom', and this poem is a visual reminder of the power of words to overcome barriers.

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29 September ✶ Autumn Rain ✶ D. H. Lawrence

In this poem, D. H. Lawrence is at once speaking of the bitterness of autumn weather and the tragedy of warfare. The poem surprises us by introducing fallen men, but locks the two sets of images, of weather and war, together through its extraordinarily tight pattern of rhymes, which echo across the poem.

The plane leaves
fall black and wet
on the lawn;

the cloud sheaves
in heaven's fields set
droop and are drawn

in falling seeds of rain;
the seed of heaven
on my face

falling – I hear again
like echoes even
that softly pace

heaven's muffled floor,
the winds that tread
out all the grain

of tears, the store
harvested
in the sheaves of pain

caught up aloft:
the sheaves of dead
men that are slain

now winnowed soft
on the floor of heaven;
manna invisible

of all the pain
here to us given;
finely divisible
falling as rain.

30 September ✶ Thirty Days Hath September ✶ Anon.

This is a traditional 'mnemonic' – a poem used to remember facts, in this case the number of days in each month. It's perhaps most often recited without the last two lines, but versions of the full six-line poem have been around since the sixteenth century.

Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November;
All the rest have thirty-one,
Except for February alone,
And that has twenty-eight days clear
And twenty-nine in each leap year.

October

1 October ✶ The Road Not Taken ✶ Robert Frost

This is among the most popular of Frost's poems today, and its central image, of the road 'less traveled by' has entered into common language as an alternative phrase to 'off the beaten path'. The poem is a reflection on decisions and decision-making, and on the notion that life could have been different if we ourselves had chosen differently in the past.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

2 October ✶ Moonlit Apples ✶ John Drinkwater

Autumn is the season for apples. The poet and playwright John Drinkwater offers this poem about freshly picked apples, with an allusion to Robert Burns's 'To a Mouse' and his 'best laid plans of mice and men' (see 25 January).

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.

A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then
There is no sound at the top of the house of men
Or mice; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams;
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,
And quiet is the steep stair under.

In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep
On moon-washed apples of wonder.

3 October ✶ Crab-Apples ✶ Imtiaz Dharker

Have you ever smelt or eaten a particular food and found yourself suddenly thinking of people or places you'd entirely forgotten? Imtiaz Dharker, who was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and whose parents were both Pakistani, plays with ideas of place, home, and identity, as local ingredients are turned into nostalgic reminders of the past.

My mother picked crab-apples
off the Glasgow apple trees
and pounded them with chillies
to change
her homesickness
into green chutney.

4 October ✶ Santa Filomena ✶
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In October 1853 the Crimean War broke out, lasting until March 1856. It was fought between Russia on one side, and an alliance of Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Sardinia on the other. The war became notorious for tactical and medical blunders by all parties. 'The Lady of the Lamp' Florence Nightingale rose to prominence during the Crimean War through her use of groundbreaking nursing methods on the wounded, and through her activism of progressive and professional medical care. Nightingale features in this poem by Longfellow.

Whene'er a noble deed is wrought,
Whene'er is spoken a noble thought,
Our hearts, in glad surprise,
To higher levels rise.

The tidal wave of deeper souls
Into our inmost being rolls,
And lifts us unawares
Out of all meaner cares.

Honor to those whose words or deeds
Thus help us in our daily needs,
And by their overflow
Raise us from what is low!

Thus thought I, as by night I read
Of the great army of the dead,
The trenches cold and damp,
The starved and frozen camp, –

The wounded from the battle-plain,
In dreary hospitals of pain,
    The cheerless corridors,
    The cold and stony floors.

Lo! in that house of misery
A lady with a lamp I see
    Pass through the glimmering gloom,
    And flit from room to room.

And slow, as in a dream of bliss,
The speechless sufferer turns to kiss
    Her shadow, as it falls
    Upon the darkening walls.

As if a door in heaven should be
Opened, and then closed suddenly,
    The vision came and went,
    The light shone was spent.

On England's annals, through the long
Hereafter of her speech and song,
    That light its rays shall cast
    From portals of the past.

A Lady with a Lamp shall stand
In the great history of the land,
    A noble type of good,
    Heroic womanhood.

Nor even shall be wanting here
The palm, the lily, and the spear,
    The symbols that of yore
    Saint Filomena bore.

5 October ✶ Autumn ✶ T. E. Hulme

Hulme's poem on autumn stands out as an exemplar of the modernist movement in poetry: written in free-verse, without rhyme, and leaving the reader to make sense of its images. What kind of meaningful exchange can occur between the solitary walker and the bright night sky?

A touch of cold in the Autumn night –
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

6 October ✶ *from* The Tyndale Bible

The death by execution of William Tyndale took place in October 1536, and is commemorated on this day. A scholar and skilled writer, he was most notable for his translation of the Bible into English, the best part of a century before the King James Version which is based on his translation. Translations of the Bible into English at the time were strictly prohibited, and Tyndale was forced to flee; he lived for a while in Antwerp before he was tracked down by Henry VIII's men and brought back to England. He was charged with heresy and burnt at the stake – all for trying to make the Bible more accessible. His final words were said to be: 'Lord, open the king of England's eyes.' These lines come from his translation of the Book of Exodus and speak of the oppression of the Israelites.

And Moses and Aaron came in vnto Pharaoh, and saide vnto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrewes, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thy selfe before mee? let my people goe, that they may serue me.

7 October ✶ *from* 1777 ✶ Amy Lowell

This poem refers to the Battle of Saratoga which was fought on 7 October 1777, and marked a turning point in the American Revolutionary War, leading to America's freedom from the British Empire.

I – THE TRUMPET-VINE ARBOR

The throats of the little red trumpet-flowers are wide open,
And the clangor of brass beats against the hot sunlight.
They bray and blare at the burning sky.
Red! Red! Coarse notes of red,
Trumpeted at the blue sky.
In long streaks of sound, molten metal,
The vine declares itself.
Clang! – from its red and yellow trumpets;
Clang! – from its long, nasal trumpets,
Splitting the sunlight into ribbons, tattered and shot with noise.
I sit in the cool arbor, in a green and gold twilight.
It is very still, for I cannot hear the trumpets,
I only know that they are red and open,
And that the sun above the arbor shakes with heat.
My quill is newly mended,
And makes fine-drawn lines with its point.
Down the long white paper it makes little lines,
Just lines – up – down – criss-cross.
My heart is strained out at the pin-point of my quill;
It is thin and writhing like the marks of the pen.
My hand marches to a squeaky tune,
It marches down the paper to a squealing of fifes.

My pen and the trumpet-flowers,
And Washington's armies away over the smoke-tree to the southwest.
'Yankee Doodle,' my darling! It is you against the British,
Marching in your ragged shoes to batter down King George.
What have you got in your hat? Not a feather, I wager.
Just a hay-straw, for it is the harvest you are fighting for.
Hay in your hat, and the whites of their eyes for a target!
Like Bunker Hill, two years ago, when I watched all day from the housetop,
Through Father's spy-glass,
The red city, and the blue, bright water,
And puffs of smoke which you made.
Twenty miles away,
Round by Cambridge, or over the Neck,
But the smoke was white – white!
To-day the trumpet flowers are red – red –
And I cannot see you fighting;
But old Mr. Dimond has fled to Canada,
And Myra sings 'Yankee Doodle' at her milking.

The red throats of the trumpets bray and clang in the sunshine,
And the smoke-tree puffs dun blossoms into the blue air.

8 October ✶ Thumbprint ✶ Eve Merriam

No two thumbprints are the same, and here the poet expands this thought to celebrate the fact that we are all unique and have our own very individual role to play in history.

On the pad of my thumb
are whorls, whirls, wheels
in a unique design:
mine alone.
What a treasure to own!
My own flesh, my own feelings.
No other, however grand or base,
can ever contain the same.
My signature,
thumbing the pages of my time.
My universe key,
my singularity.
Impress, implant,
I am myself,
of all my atom parts I am the sum.
And out of my blood and my brain
I make my own interior weather,
my own sun and rain.
Imprint my mark upon the world
whatever I shall become.

9 October ✶ Malala ✶ Michaela Morgan

On 9 October, 2012, the Pakistani writer and activist Malala Yousafzai was shot by a Taliban gunman. At the time she was only fifteen. Though she was seriously injured, she lived, and her story was thrown into the centre of media attention. She went on to put all her energies into working for the right of all children to an education, and at the age of seventeen she became the youngest ever recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize.

A girl with a book.
A girl with a book.
That' s what has scared them –
A girl, with a book.

They get on to the bus.
They call out my name.
They aim. And they fire.
A shot to the brain.

Because a girl with a book,
A girl with a voice,
A girl with a brain,
A girl with a choice,
A girl with a plan
To have rights, like a man.
That' s what they're scared of
One girl, with a book.

A girl who has words.
A girl with a pen.
A girl to be heard
With support of her friends
Who want to live free –
That' s what they fear,
A girl just like me.

10 October ✶ Give ✶ Simon Armitage

10 October is World Homeless Day, an international day of awareness for the global problem of homelessness and extreme poverty. Simon Armitage, who currently holds the prestigious chair of Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, addresses in this poem the idea that other people's homelessness can seem like an inconvenience to us. But it is far worse, he tells us, to be the one without a home.

Of all the public places, dear,
to make a scene, I've chosen here.

Of all the doorways in the world
to choose to sleep, I've chosen yours.
I'm on the street, under the stars.

For coppers I can dance or sing.
For silver – swallow swords, eat fire.
For gold – escape from locks and chains.

It's not as if I'm holding out
for frankincense or myrrh, just change.

You give me tea. That's big of you.
I'm on my knees. I beg of you.

11 October ✶ Drummer Hodge ✶ Thomas Hardy

The Boer War, fought between the British and the Boer States of South Africa, began on this day in 1899. It would last for three years. In this poem, Hardy uses South African words for the landscape – 'kopje', a rocky outcrop; 'veldt', grasslands; 'karoo', semi-desert – to create a sense of unfamiliarity. And yet, because of the tragedy of war, Drummer Hodge himself is now a part of that 'unknown plain'.

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
    Uncoffined – just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
    That breaks the veldt around;
And foreign constellations west
    Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the drummer never knew –
    Fresh from his Wessex home –
The meaning of the broad Karoo,
    The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
    Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain
    Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
    Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
    His stars eternally.

12 October ✶ Lament of an Arawak Child ✶ Pamela Mordecai

On 12 October 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the continent now known as America. Though he described the continent as his 'discovery', he was far from the first person to step foot there. In poetry, as in common usage, a 'lament' is an outpouring of grief. Mordecai's poem refuses to focus on what Columbus and other colonial figures thought they had found, but instead gives voice to the people who lost what they once had.

Once I played with the hummingbirds
and sang songs to the sea
I told my secrets to the waves
and they told theirs to me.

Now there are no more hummingbirds
the sea's songs are all sad
for strange men came and took this land
and plundered all we had.

They made my people into slaves
they worked us to the bone
they battered us and tortured us
and laughed to hear us groan.

Today we'll take a long canoe
and set sail on the sea
we'll steer our journey by the stars
and find a new country.

13 October ✶ The Wild Swans at Coole ✶ W. B. Yeats

Yeats's poem, about watching swans one October evening, gives quiet expression to time, change, and ageing. The narrator counts his passing years, but the swans, he suspects, do not. His worry, at the end of the poem, is that he will one day wake up and find that beauty has left his life for good.

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

14 October ✶ William the Conqueror, 1066 ✶ Anon.

The Battle of Hastings was fought on this date in 1066 — now almost a thousand years ago! The French ruler William, Duke of Normandy (better known as William the Conqueror), defeated the Anglo-Saxon King Harold Godwinson, leading England into its period of Norman rule. These lines, a traditional and anonymous verse on the exploits of William, suggest that the only thing that ultimately stopped the Duke taking more territories for himself was his death.

William the Conqueror, 1066,
Said to his captains, 'I mean to affix
England to Normandy. Go out and borrow
Some bows and some arrows, we're starting tomorrow.'
So William went conquering hither and thither
'Til Angles and Saxons were all of a dither.
He conquered so quickly you couldn't keep count
Of the counties he conquered, I think they amount
To ten, or a doxen, or even a score,
And I haven't a doubt he'd have conquered some more,
But death put an end to the tactics, thanks Heaven,
Of William the Conqueror, 1087.

15 October ✶ At Senlac Hill, 15 October 1066 ✶ David Harmer

Following on from the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, this is a poem named after the hill on which the Anglo-Saxon army was deployed at the start of the battle.

Broken blades still bright with blood
fallen and flung far over the field,
the battered bodies of mangled men,
beaten by battle, bruised and bleeding
crying for care, or still as stones
their shields shattered, their spears scattered
their breathing butchered, spent and stopped,
lie heaped and piled in many mounds.

My sister and I searched for our father
killed or captured, we don't know
but missing since midnight,
like Harold our King, now carrion crows
swoop and swirl over the fallen
pecking for pickings, our mother moans
weeps in her hands and holds her hair
away from her face, missing her man
amongst the many, the stiff and the still
or those who groan from their war-wounds.

Yesterday we were Saxons, English and angry
ready for riot against her foes
now we are Normans, French and fatherless
dazed and despairing, lost with dead
already our masters make preparations
digging their ditches to raise their ramparts
our future is dreaded, dismal and dull
stretched out in front of us like a dark day.

16 October ✶ Not Only ✶ Brian Patten

This poem by the Liverpudlian writer Brian Patten pushes forward along a single track, a series of 'Nos', arriving at one emphatic 'But': the object of his affection.

Not only the leaf shivering with delight
No,
Not only the morning grass shrugging off the weight of frost
No,
Not only the wings of the crane fly consumed by fire
No,
Not only steam rising from the horse's back
No,
Not only the sound of the sunflower roaring
No,
Not only the golden spider spinning
No,
Not only the cathedral window deep inside the raindrop
No,
Not only the door opening at the back of the clouds
No,
Not only flakes of light settling like snow
No,
Not only the sky as blue and smooth as an egg
No,
Not only these things
No,
But without you none of these things

17 October ✶ The Secret Song ✶
Margaret Wise Brown

In this poem, the American writer Margaret Wise Brown imagines the world that humans don't see.

Who saw the petals
drop from the rose?
I, said the spider,
But nobody knows.

Who saw the sunset
flash on a bird?
I, said the fish,
But nobody heard.

Who saw the fog
come over the sea?
I, said the sea pigeon,
Only me.

Who saw the first
green light of the sun?
I, said the night owl,
The only one.

Who saw the moss
creep over the stone?
I, said the grey fox,
All alone.

18 October ✶ *from* Who Do You Think You Are? ✶ Carl Sandburg

The question that makes up the title of this poem is a good one: when it really comes down to it, who do you think you are? Sandburg's answer to this question is comically, and quite obsessively to catalogue every last speck of substance that makes up a living human body.

Who do you think you are
and where do you think you came from?
From toenails to the hair of your head you are mixed of the
earth, of the air,
Of compounds equal to the burning gold and amethyst lights
of the Mountains of the Blood of Christ at Santa Fé.
Listen to the laboratory man tell you what you are made of,
man, listen while he takes you apart.
Weighing 150 pounds you hold 3,500 cubic feet of gas –
oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen.
From the 22 pounds and 10 ounces of carbon in you is the
filling for 9,000 lead pencils.
In your blood are 50 grains of iron and in the rest of your
frame enough iron to make a spike that would hold
your weight.
From your 50 ounces of phosphorus could be made 800,000
matches and elsewhere in your physical premises are
hidden 60 lumps of sugar, 20 teaspoons of salt,
38 quarts of water, two ounces of lime, and scatterings
of starch, chloride of potash, magnesium, sulphur,
hydrochloric acid.
You are a walking drug store and also a cosmos and a
phantasmagoria treading a lonesome valley, one of the
people, one of the minions and myrmidons who would like an
answer to the question, 'Who and what are you?'

19 October ✶ Digging ✶ Seamus Heaney

Heaney's poem, about his father and his grandfather at work digging, ends as a reflection on his own craft. He is not a skilled digger but a writer, with his squat pen acting as no replacement for a spade. But the poet recognizes that he is not, after all, his father nor his grandfather, and he will go to do the work he knows best, pen in hand.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up

To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

20 October ✶ Diary of a Church Mouse ✶
John Betjeman

Betjeman's verse makes observations about British culture, attitudes and behaviour, and this witty poem ends on a comment about people who only attend church on religious festivals, and not as a point of faith.

Here among long-discarded cassocks,
Damp stools, and half-split open hassocks,
Here where the Vicar never looks
I nibble through old service books.
Lean and alone I spend my days
Behind this Church of England baize.
I share my dark forgotten room
With two oil-lamps and half a broom.
The cleaner never bothers me,
So here I eat my frugal tea.
My bread is sawdust mixed with straw;
My jam is polish for the floor.
  Christmas and Easter may be feasts
For congregations and for priests,
And so may Whitsun. All the same,
They do not fill my meagre frame.
For me the only feast at all
Is Autumn's Harvest Festival,
When I can satisfy my want
With ears of corn around the font.
I climb the eagle's brazen head
To burrow through a loaf of bread.
I scramble up the pulpit stair
And gnaw the marrows hanging there.
  It is enjoyable to taste
These items ere they go to waste,

But how annoying when one finds
That other mice with pagan minds
Come into church my food to share
Who have no proper business there.
Two field mice who have no desire
To be baptized, invade the choir.
A large and most unfriendly rat
Comes in to see what we are at.
He says he thinks there is no God
And yet he comes . . . it's rather odd.
This year he stole a sheaf of wheat
(It screened our special preacher's seat),
And prosperous mice from fields away
Come in to hear the organ play,
And under cover of its notes
Ate through the altar's sheaf of oats.
A Low Church mouse, who thinks that I
Am too papistical, and High,
Yet somehow doesn't think it wrong
To munch through Harvest Evensong,
While I, who starve the whole year through,
Must share my food with rodents who
Except at this time of the year
Not once inside the church appear.
  Within the human world I know
Such goings-on could not be so,
For human beings only do
What their religion tells them to.
They read the Bible every day
And always, night and morning, pray,
And just like me, the good church mouse,
Worship each week in God's own house.
  But all the same it's strange to me
How very full the church can be
With people I don't see at all
Except at Harvest Festival.

21 October ✶ The Night at Trafalgar ✶ Thomas Hardy

The Battle of Trafalgar, a sea battle between the British Navy and both the French and Spanish fleets, was fought on this day in 1805, as part of the ongoing Napoleonic Wars. Admiral Horatio Nelson led the British to a famous victory, though he was shot during the battle and died shortly after. He is commemorated atop Nelson's column at the centre of Trafalgar Square in London, as well as in this poem by Thomas Hardy.

I

In the wild October night-time, when the wind raved round
the land,
And the Back-sea met the Front-sea, and our doors were
blocked with sand,
And we heard the drub of Dead-man's Bay, where the bones of
thousands are,
We knew not what the day had done for us at Trafalgár.
Had done,
Had done,
For us at Trafalgár!

II

'Pull hard, and make the Nothe, or down we go!' one says, says he.
We pulled; and bedtime brought the storm; but snug at home slept we.
Yet all the while our gallants after fighting through the day,
Were beating up and down the dark, sou'-west of Cadiz Bay.
The dark,
The dark,
Sou'-west of Cadiz Bay!

III

The victors and the vanquished then the storm it tossed and tore,
As hard they strove, those worn-out men, upon that surly shore;
Dead Nelson and his half-dead crew, his foes from near and far,
Were rolled together on the deep that night at Trafalgár!
The deep,
The deep,
That night at Trafalgár!

22 October ✶ The Village Blacksmith ✶
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

According to Longfellow, this poem about working-class life was written as a tribute to an ancestor of his, a blacksmith named Stephen Longfellow. The man in the poem, however, was also modelled on a real blacksmith, a neighbour of the poet's. Longfellow transforms his life into a moral tale of decent living and of honest, hard work.

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
  The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
  With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
  Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
  His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
  He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
  For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
  You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
  With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
  When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
  Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
  And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
  Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
  And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
  He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
  And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
  Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
  How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
  A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling, – rejoicing, – sorrowing,
  Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
  Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
  Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
  For the lesson thou hast taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
  Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
  Each burning deed and thought.

23 October ✶ A Country Boy Goes to School ✶ George Mackay Brown

In this poem about school life, the Scottish poet George Mackay Brown plays off Romantic ideals with poetic reality. Specifically, he quotes the poet Wordsworth, who 'wandered lonely as a cloud', and who, on 5 July in this book, wrote 'Let Nature be your teacher'. The schoolboy wants to follow this course of education by listening to the lark, but instead winds up in trouble with his real teacher.

1

There he is, first lark this year
  Loud, between
That raincloud and the sun, lost
Up there, a long sky run, what peltings of song!
  (Six times 6, 36. Six times 7, 42
  Six times eight is . . .)
Oh, Mr Ferguson, have mercy at arithmetic time
  On peedie Tom o' the Glebe.

2

There's Gyre's ewe has 2 lambs.
  Snow on the ridge still.
How many more days do I have to take
This peat under my oxter
  For the school fire?
(James the Sixth, Charles the First . . . Who then?)
Oh, Mr Ferguson, I swear
  I knew all the Stewarts last night.

3

Yes, Mistress Wylie, we're all fine.
  A pandrop! Oh, thank you.
I must hurry, Mistress Wylie,
  Old Ferguson
Gets right mad if a boy's late.
I was late twice last week.
  Do you know this, Mistress Wylie,
The capital of Finland is Helsingfors . . .
  Yes, I'll tell Grannie
You have four fat feese this summer.

4

When I get to the top of the brae
I'll see the kirk, the school, the shop,
  Smithy and inn and boatyard.
I wish I was that tinker boy
Going on over the hill, the wind in his rags.

Look, the schoolyard's like a throng of bees.

5

I wish Willie Thomson
  Would take me on his creel-boat!
'Tom, there's been six generations of Corstons
  Working the Glebe,
And I doubt there'll never be fish-scales
On your hands, or salt in your boots . . .'

(Sixteen ounces, one pound. Fourteen pounds, one
  stone.)
A sack of corn's a hundredweight.
  I think a whale must be bigger than a ton.

6

Jimmo Spence, he told me
  Where the larks nest is.
  Besides a stone in his father's oatfield,
  The high granite corner.

('I wandered lonely as a cloud . . .' Oh where? What
  then?)
I could go up by the sheep track
  Now the scholars are in their pen
And *Scallop* and *Mayflower* are taking the flood
  And the woman of Fea
Is pinning her washing to the wind.

I could wait for the flutter of the lark coming down.

7

The school bell! Oh, my heart's
Pounding louder than any bell.

  A quarter of a mile to run.
  My bare feet
  Have broken three daffodils in the field.

Heart thunderings, last tremor of the bell
  And the lark wing-folded.

'Late again, Master Thomas Corston of the Glebe farm.
Enter, sir. With the greatest interest
  We all await your explanation
Of a third morning's dereliction.'

24 October ✶ Owl Poem ✶ John Hegley

John Hegley is a British performance poet and comedian, and the author of many books. This 'poem' is actually four acrostic poems – poems which spell out a word with the first letters of their lines. Oh, wholeheartedly literary, our witty lyricist!

On
Wards
Lofty

Oh,
Winged
Looker

Out
Witting
Low-life

Ooooh
Woooooooo
Language

25 October ✶ *from* Henry V ✶
William Shakespeare

The Battle of Agincourt took place on this day in 1415, marking a major English victory in the Hundred Years War. It fell on St Crispin's Day, which is 25 October, and which remembers the Christian martyrs Saints Crispin and Crispinian. Shakespeare's *Henry V* tells the tale of Agincourt, when the English army defeated a much larger French army in battle.

Now entertain conjecture of a time
When creeping murmur and the poring dark
Fills the wide vessel of the universe.
From camp to camp through the foul womb of night
The hum of either army stilly sounds,
That the fixed sentinels almost receive
The secret whispers of each other's watch:
Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames
Each battle sees the other's umber'd face;
Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs
Piercing the night's dull ear, and from the tents
The armourers, accomplishing the knights,
With busy hammers closing rivets up,
Give dreadful note of preparation.
The country cocks do crow, the clocks do toll,
And the third hour of drowsy morning name.
Proud of their numbers and secure in soul,
The confident and over-lusty French
Do the low-rated English play at dice;
And chide the cripple tardy-gaited night
Who, like a foul and ugly witch, doth limp
So tediously away. The poor condemnèd English,
Like sacrifices, by their watchful fires
Sit patiently and inly ruminate

The morning's danger, and their gesture sad,
Investing lank-lean cheeks and war-worn coats,
Presenteth them unto the gazing moon
So many horrid ghosts. O now, who will behold
The royal captain of this ruin'd band
Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,
Let him cry 'Praise and glory on his head!'
For forth he goes and visits all his host,
Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.
Upon his royal face there is no note
How dread an army hath enrounded him;
Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
Unto the weary and all-watchèd night,
But freshly looks and over-bears attaint
With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty,
That every wretch, pining and pale before,
Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks.
A largess universal, like the sun,
His liberal eye doth give to every one,
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all
Behold, as may unworthiness define,
A little touch of Harry in the night.
And so our scene must to the battle fly;
Where – O for pity! – we shall much disgrace
With four or five most vile and ragged foils
Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous
The name of Agincourt.

26 October ✶ Love After Love ✶ Derek Walcott

Born in St Lucia, Derek Walcott ranks amongst the finest of Caribbean poets. He died in 2017, leaving behind him a wealth of poems, plays and essays. His writings earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. This poem is about learning to love yourself again after the end of a relationship.

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror,
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

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.
Sit. Feast on your life.

27 October ✶ Paper Boats ✶ Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, and was a noted artist and musician as well as a poet. He was born and lived in Calcutta in India for his entire life, which was then under British rule. This poem is about quietly attempting to make contact with the universe outside of yourself. The paper boats themselves act like Tagore's poems – he does not know to whom they will travel, nor what they will mean to his readers, but in his dreams they take on a life of their own.

Day by day I float my paper boats one by one down the running stream.
In big black letters I write my name on them and the name of the village where I live.
I hope that someone in some strange land will find them and know who I am.
I load my little boats with shiuli flowers from our garden, and hope that these blooms of the dawn will be carried safely to land in the night.
I launch my paper boats and look into the sky and see the little clouds setting their white bulging sails.
I know not what playmate of mine in the sky sends them down the air to race with my boats!
When night comes I bury my face in my arms and dream that my paper boats float on and on under the midnight stars.
The fairies of sleep are sailing in them, and the lading is their baskets full of dreams.

28 October ✶ Western Wind, When Wilt Thou Blow? ✶ Anon.

These lyrics are part of a song written in the early sixteenth century, though they probably have their roots in medieval poetry. The words are designed to be chanted, and connect written poems to the oral history of poetry. Before poems were written down, they were sung and repeated, and passed from person to person, much like we still do today with nursery rhymes and football chants!

Western wind, when wilt thou blow,
The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again.

29 October ✶ Who Has Seen the Wind? ✶ Christina Rossetti

From Western Wind to the wind in this poem by Rossetti. These deceptively simple words communicate a sense of the invisible forces that animate the world – forces which we cannot see, but we know must be there.

Who has seen the wind?
    Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
    The wind is passing thro'.

Who has seen the wind?
    Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads,
    The wind is passing by.

30 October ✶ In the Dark, Dark Wood ✶ Anon.

This is the perfect poem for the run up to Halloween. When read aloud, the repetition of *dark, dark* builds tension through the poem up to the last word, which will make your audience jump!

In a dark, dark wood there was a dark, dark house,
and in that dark, dark house there was a dark, dark room,
and in that dark, dark room there was a dark, dark cupboard,
and in that dark, dark cupboard there was a dark, dark shelf,
and on that dark, dark shelf there was a dark, dark box,
and in that dark, dark box there was a . . . *GHOST*!

31 October ✶ *from* Hallowe'en ✶
John Kendrick Bangs

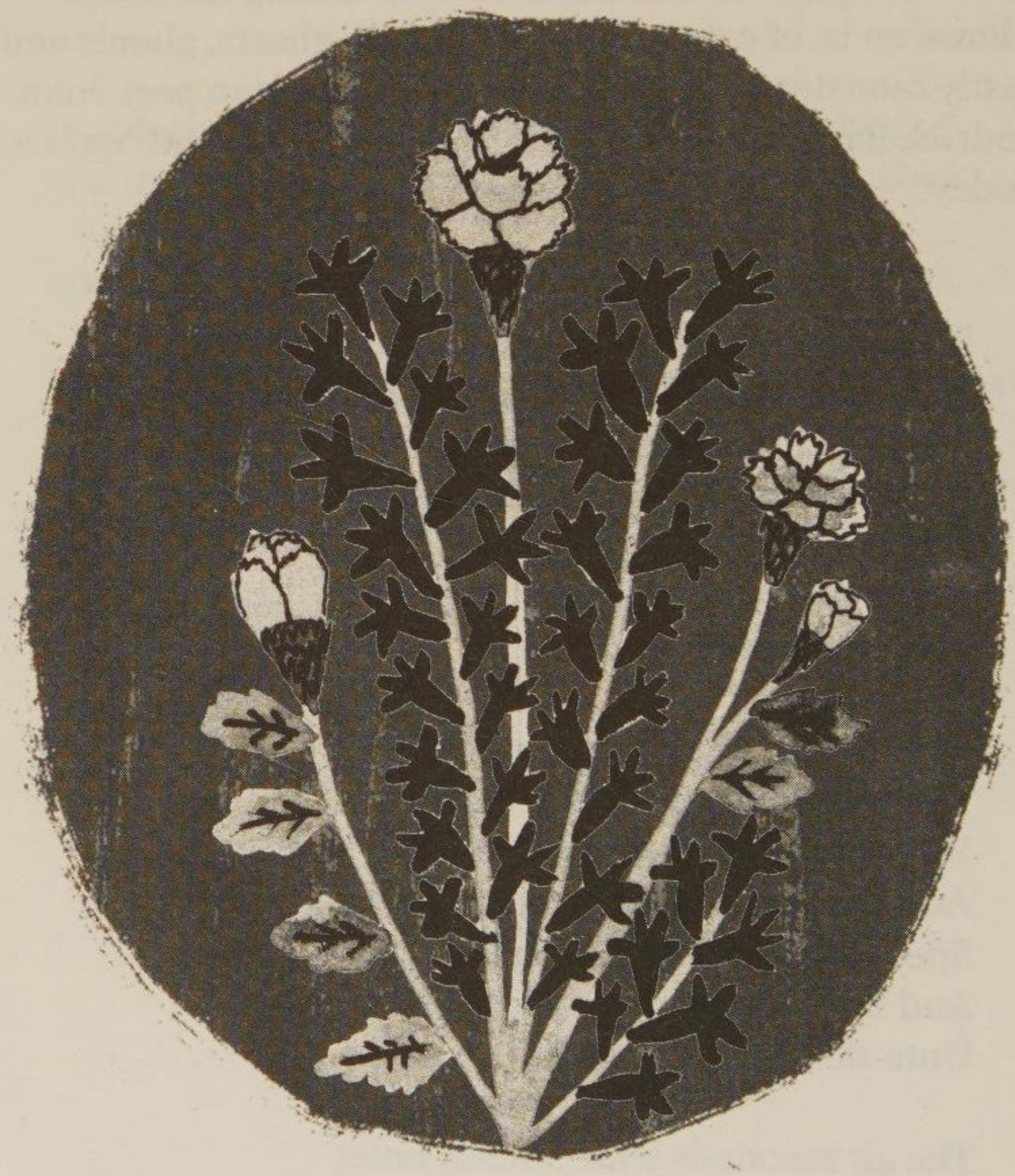
Today is All Hallows' Eve or All Saints' Eve, better known as Hallowe'en. It is a time for remembering the dead, but it is also, in popular culture, a time for raising the dead: Hallowe'en is, of course, associated with ghosts, ghouls and ghastly monsters. These words by the American poet John Kendrick Bangs are a tribute to Hallowe'en as we recognize it today.

The ghosts of all things, past parade,
Emerging from the mist and shade
That hid them from our gaze,
And full of song and ringing mirth,
In one glad moment of rebirth,
Again they walk the ways of earth,
As in the ancient days.

The beacon light shines on the hill,
The will-o'-wisps the forests fill
With flashes filched from noon;
And witches on their broomsticks spry
Speed here and yonder in the sky,
And lift their strident voices high
Unto the Hunter's moon.

The air resounds with tuneful notes
From myriads of straining throats,
All hailing Folly Queen;
So join the swelling choral throng,
Forget your sorrow and your wrong,
In one glad hour of joyous song
To honor Hallowe'en.

November



1 November ✶ *from* The Devil's Thoughts ✶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

This witty poem, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge with some help from his friend, the lesser known Romantic poet Robert Southey, sees the devil take a tour of late eighteenth-century England – and he finds kindred spirits among lawyers and booksellers alike. In notes that appeared under the printed poem, Coleridge explained that he was indebted to 'that most interesting of the Devil's biographers', John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*.

From his brimstone bed at break of day
A walking the Devil is gone,
To visit his little snug farm the earth,
And see how his stock goes on.

Over the hill and over the dale,
And he went over the plain,
And backward and forward he switched his long tail
As a gentleman switches his cane.

And how then was the Devil drest?
Oh! he was in his Sunday's best:
His jacket was red and his breeches were blue,
And there was a hole where the tail came through.

2 November ✶ Television ✶ Roald Dahl

The world's first high-definition television broadcast took place on this day in 1936, when BBC engineers set up a transmission mast at London's Alexandra Palace utilizing technology designed by John Logie Baird. Here is Roald Dahl's inimitable take on TV from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

The most important thing we've learned,
So far as children are concerned,
Is never, *NEVER*, NEVER let
Them near your television set –
Or better still, just don't install
The idiotic thing at all.
In almost every house we've been,
We've watched them gaping at the screen.
They loll and slop and lounge about,
And stare until their eyes pop out.
(Last week in someone's place we saw
A dozen eyeballs on the floor.)
They sit and stare and stare and sit
Until they're hypnotized by it,
Until they're absolutely drunk
With all that shocking ghastly junk.
Oh yes, we know it keeps them still,
They don't climb out the window sill,
They never fight or kick or punch,
They leave you free to cook the lunch
And wash the dishes in the sink –
But did you ever stop to think,
To wonder just exactly what
This does to your beloved tot?
IT ROTS THE SENSE IN THE HEAD!

IT KILLS IMAGINATION DEAD!
IT CLOGS AND CLUTTERS UP THE MIND!
IT MAKES A CHILD SO DULL AND BLIND
HE CAN NO LONGER UNDERSTAND
A FANTASY, A FAIRYLAND!
HIS BRAIN BECOMES AS SOFT AS CHEESE!
HIS POWERS OF THINKING RUST AND FREEZE!
HE CANNOT THINK – HE ONLY SEES!
'All right!' you'll cry. 'All right!' you'll say,
'But if we take the set away,
What shall we do to entertain
Our darling children? Please explain!'
We'll answer this by asking you,
'What used the darling ones to do?
How used they keep themselves contented
Before this monster was invented?'
Have you forgotten? Don't you know?
We'll say it very loud and slow:
THEY . . . USED . . . TO . . . READ! They'd
READ and READ,
AND READ and READ, and then proceed
TO READ some more. Great Scott! Gadzooks!
One half their lives was reading books!
The nursery shelves held books galore!
Books cluttered up the nursery floor!
And in the bedroom, by the bed,
More books were waiting to be read!
Such wondrous, fine, fantastic tales
Of dragons, gypsies, queens, and whales
And treasure isles, and distant shores
Where smugglers rowed with muffled oars,
And pirates wearing purple pants,
And sailing ships and elephants,
And cannibals crouching round the pot,
Stirring away at something hot.
(It smells so good, what can it be?

Good gracious, it's Penelope.)
The younger ones had Beatrix Potter
With Mr Tod, the dirty rotter,
And Squirrel Nutkin, Pigling Bland,
And Mrs Tiggy-Winkle and –
Just How The Camel Got His Hump,
And How the Monkey Lost His Rump,
And Mr Toad, and bless my soul,
There's Mr Rat and Mr Mole –
Oh, books, what books they used to know,
Those children living long ago!
So please, oh please, we beg, we pray,
Go throw your TV set away,
And in its place you can install
A lovely bookshelf on the wall.
Then fill the shelves with lots of books,
Ignoring all the dirty looks,
The screams and yells, the bites and kicks,
And children hitting you with sticks –
Fear not, because we promise you
That, in about a week or two
Of having nothing else to do,
They'll now begin to feel the need
Of having something good to read.
And once they start – oh boy, oh boy!
You watch the slowly growing joy
That fills their hearts. They'll grow so keen
They'll wonder what they'd ever seen
In that ridiculous machine,
That nauseating, foul, unclean,
Repulsive television screen!
And later, each and every kid
Will love you more for what you did.

3 November ✶ The First Men on Mercury ✶ Edwin Morgan

On this day in 1973, the NASA space probe Mariner 10 was launched from Cape Canaveral, with the goal of flying by the planets Mercury and Venus. After it successfully completed its missions, it was switched off on 24 March the following year. It is very likely still floating in a series of long orbits around the sun.

– We come in peace from the third planet.
Would you take us to your leader?

– Bawr stretter! Bawr. Bawr. Stretterhawl?

– This is a little plastic model
of the solar system, with working parts.
You are here and we are there and we
are now here with you, is this clear?

– Gawl horrop. Bawr Abawrhannahanna!

– Where we come from is blue and white
with brown, you see we call the brown
here 'land', the blue is 'sea', and the white
is 'clouds' over land and sea, we live
on the surface of the brown land,
all round is sea and clouds. We are 'men'.
Men come –

– Glawp men! Gawrbenner menko. Menhawl?

– Men come in peace from the third planet
which we call 'earth'. We are earthmen.

Take us earthmen to your leader.

– Thmen? Thmen? Bawr. Bawrhossop.
Yuleeda tan hanna. Harrabost yuleeda.

– I am the yuleeda. You see my hands,
we carry no benner, we come in peace.
The spaceways are all stretterhawn.

– Glawn peacemen all horrabhanna tantko!
Tan come at'mstrossop. Glawp yuleeda!

– Atoms are peacegawl in our harraban.
Menbat worrabost from tan hannahanna.

– You men we know bawrhossoptant. Bawr.
We know yuleeda. Go strawg backspetter quick.

– We cantantabawr, tantingko backspetter now!

– Banghapper now! Yes, third planet back.
Yuleeda will go back blue, white, brown
nowhanna! There is no more talk.

– Gawl han fasthapper?

– No. You must go back to your planet.
Go back in peace, take what you have gained
but quickly.

– Stretterworra gawl, gawl . . .

– Of course, but nothing is ever the same,
now is it? You'll remember Mercury.

4 November ✶ The Last Laugh ✶ Wilfred Owen

The war poet Wilfred Owen was killed in action on this day in 1918. He died exactly one week before Armistice Day, when hostilities finally ceased on the Western Front. His mother received a telegram with the news of his death the same day that Britain was celebrating peace in Europe. This poem, about a dying soldier in the trenches, is especially poignant in light of the poet's own death.

'O Jesus Christ! I'm hit,' he said; and died.
Whether he vainly cursed or prayed indeed,
The Bullets chirped – In vain, vain, vain!
Machine-guns chuckled – Tut-tut! Tut-tut!
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed, – 'O Mother, – mother, – Dad!'
Then smiled at nothing, childlike, being dead.
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud
Leisurely gestured, – Fool!
And the splinters spat, and tittered.

'My Love!' one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,
Till slowly lowered, his whole face kissed the mud.
And the Bayonets' long teeth grinned;
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;
And the Gas hissed.

5 November ✶ Please to Remember ✶
Walter de la Mare

'Remember, remember, the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason, and plot'. On 5 November 1605, Guy Fawkes was arrested for his part in a plot to assassinate James I by blowing up the House of Lords. In celebration of the King's survival, bonfires were lit around the country. This tradition has only grown over the last few centuries, with the addition of fireworks, and, of course, a Guy atop the bonfire.

Here am I,
A poor old Guy:
Legs in a bonfire,
Head in the sky;

Shoeless my toes,
Wild stars behind,
Smoke in my nose,
And my eye-peeps blind;

Old hat, old straw –
In this disgrace;
While the wildfire gleams
On a mask for my face.

Ay, all I am made of
Only trash is:
And soon – soon,
Will be dust and ashes.

6 November ✶ November Night ✶
Adelaide Crapsey

Adelaide Crapsey was the inventor of the lesser-known poetic form called the 'cinquain'. The name refers to the form's five lines, but there are other, extraordinarily compromising features to the form: the lines rise in syllable count from 2, 4, 6, 8, and back to 2 for the final line, and they follow a stress count of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 1 again for the last line. Whether you stop to count syllables and stresses or not, it lends the poem an undeniably pulsating rhythm.

Listen . . .
With faint dry sound,
Like steps of passing ghosts,
The leaves, frost-crisped, break from the trees
And fall.

7 November ✶ The Dead ✶ Rupert Brooke

This beautiful sonnet by Rupert Brooke was written shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. War often transforms humans into statistics. Individual lives become just part of a number of people who died in battle. Yet Brooke's poem stresses the unique experience of those who fought in the war – the music they heard, the friends they had, the moments they spent alone. Brooke himself died in 1915 from an insect bite, whilst serving on a British Naval vessel just off the coast of the Greek island of Skyros.

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
    Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
    And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
    Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
    Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.

There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
    Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
    Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.

8 November ✶ The Leader ✶ Roger McGough

Election Day in the United States of America falls on 'the first Tuesday after November 1'; President Donald Trump was elected on this day in 2016.

I wanna be the leader
I wanna be the leader
Can I be the leader?
Can I? I can?
Promise? Promise?
Yippee, I'm the leader
I'm the leader

OK what shall we do?

9 November ✶ Here Dead We Lie ✶ A. E. Housman

Like Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke, A. E. Housman wrote some of his most famous poetry during the Great War. This poem reminds us that many of the soldiers were very young.

Here dead we lie
Because we did not choose
To live and shame the land
From which we sprung.

Life, to be sure,
Is nothing much to lose,
But young men think it is,
And we were young.

10 November ✶ The African Lion ✶
A. E. Housman

On this day in 1871, the reporter Henry Morton Stanley met with the explorer and missionary David Livingstone in Zanzibar, in modern Tanzania. Livingstone had been out of contact with Britain for six years, and was presumed by many to be dead. During his years in Africa, Livingstone survived an attack from a lion escaping with only a broken arm. This poem by A.E. Housman is about a ferocious and ravenous lion – but the boys here aren't quite as lucky as Livingstone was!

To meet a bad lad on the African waste
 Is a thing that a lion enjoys;
But he rightly and strongly objects to the taste
 Of good and uneatable boys.

When he bites off a piece of a boy of that sort
 He spits it right out of his mouth,
And retires with a loud and dissatisfied snort
 To the east, or the west, or the south.

So lads of good habits, on coming across
 A lion, need feel no alarm
For they know they are sure to escape with the loss
 Of a leg, or a head, or an arm.

11 November ✶ In Flanders Fields ✶ John McCrae

The First World War ended on 11 November 1918 – a date which is now known as Armistice Day. Over 16 million people died in battle or were civilian casualties of the war. John McCrae was a Canadian doctor who served as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the war. The poem was published in 1915, and its immediate success led to it being quoted in propaganda as part of the war efforts. Its reference to the red poppies of Flanders led to the symbolic wearing of poppies on Remembrance Day each year. McCrae died of pneumonia during combat service in 1918, just eight months before the war ended.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
  That mark our place; and in the sky
  The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
  Loved and were loved, and now we lie
  In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
  The torch; be yours to hold it high.
  If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
  In Flanders fields.

12 November ✶ Dreamers ✶ Siegfried Sassoon

A common theme of Great War poetry is the inseparable association between soldiers and death. In the opening line of this poem by Siegfried Sassoon, for instance, the soldiers are already citizens of death's domain. And yet, when combat starts, the minds of the soldiers are on the comforts of home.

Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land,
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.
In the great hour of destiny they stand,
Each with his feuds, and jealousies, and sorrows.
Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win
Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives.
Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin
They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.

I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train.

13 November ✶ An Irish Airman Foresees his Death ✶ W. B. Yeats

Yeats wrote this poem in 1918, towards the end of the war. Ireland's involvement in the Great War was greatly complicated. Ireland, which was then part of the United Kingdom, initially offered unanimous support to England in the war; however, advocation of Irish independence from British rule led to the Easter Rising of 1916, when a band of armed activists seized key locations in Dublin and proclaimed Ireland a republic. Yeats's Irish airman captures a sense of this ambivalence; he neither hates his enemy nor loves his allies.

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public man, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

14 November ✶ My First Day at School ✶ Michaela Morgan

On this day in 1960, in New Orleans, Louisiana, a six-year-old girl named Ruby Bridges became the first African-American child to go to a previously all-white elementary school. She was escorted by armed guards who protected her from crowds of angry protesters. When we think back to our own first days at school, and the anxiety that comes from being a new face in any context, it becomes impossible to imagine how Ruby must have felt.

I remember . . .
Momma scrubbed my face, hard.
Plaited my hair, tight.
Perched a hopeful white bow on my head,
Like a butterfly hoping for flight.

She shone my shoes, black, shiny, neat.
Another hopeful bow, on each toe,
To give wings to my feet.

My dress was standing to attention, stiff with starch.
My little battledress.
And now, my march.

Two marshals march in front of me.
Two marshals march behind of me.
The people scream and jeer at me.
Their faces are red, not white.

The marshals tower above me, a grey-legged wall.
Broad of back, white of face and tall, tall, tall.
I only see their legs and shoes, as black and shiny as mine.
They march along, stern and strong. I try to march in time.

One hisses to another, 'Slow down it ain't a race.
She only take little bitty girlie steps.'
I quicken my pace.

Head up.
Eyes straight.
I march into school.
To learn like any other kid can.

And maybe to teach a lesson too.

15 November ✶ Sympathy ✶ Paul Laurence Dunbar

Paul Laurence Dunbar was an African-American poet, novelist, and playwright in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As one of the earliest internationally successful African-American writers, his work has proven to be hugely influential. Maya Angelou cites Dunbar as a major influence, and she took the title for her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, from this poem.

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals –
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting –
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, –
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings –
I know why the caged bird sings!

16 November ✶ *from* Epitaphs of the War ✶ Rudyard Kipling

'Epitaphs of the War' is a collection of short poems and fragments. Kipling's eighteen-year-old son John was killed in 1915. In the early months of the conflict, Kipling had been in favour of the British war effort, and he himself had pushed for John to join the army. Yet the bitter phrasing of 'Common Form' here expresses a deeply critical view both of the war and of Kipling's own actions as a father.

Batteries out of Ammunition

If any mourn us in the workshop, say
We died because the shift kept holiday.

Common Form

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

A Dead Statesman

I could not dig: I dared not rob:
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall serve me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young?

17 November ✶ Written with a Diamond on her Window at Woodstock ✶ Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I was crowned on 17 November 1558. Before Elizabeth's own reign, she was accused of conspiring against her sister, Mary I. Elizabeth was imprisoned in the Tower of London, and, after two months, she was moved to Woodstock, in Oxfordshire, where she was kept under the equivalent of house arrest. There she was said to have carved the following words into a windowpane, using the sharp point of a diamond. The lines were published in 1563 by the historian John Foxe.

Much suspected by me,
Nothing proved can be,
Quoth Elizabeth prisoner.

18 November ✶ Tell as a Marksman – were forgotten ✶ Emily Dickinson

On 18 November 1307, William Tell is said to have shot an arrow through an apple on top of his son's head. Tell is a figure of legend, much like Robin Hood, and is considered a liberation hero who refused to bow to the brutal Habsburg bailiff Gessler. The American poet Emily Dickinson takes this legendary tale of Tell as the subject of her powerful poem.

Tell as a Marksman – were forgotten
Tell – this Day endures
Ruddy as that coeval Apple
The Tradition bears –

Fresh as Mankind that humble story
Though a statelier Tale
Grown in the Repetition hoary
Scarcely would prevail –

Tell had a son – The ones that knew it
Need not linger here –
Those who did not to Human Nature
Will subscribe a Tear –

Tell would not bare his Head
In Presence
Of the Ducal Hat –
Threatened for that with Death – by Gessler –
Tyranny bethought

Make of his only Boy a Target
That surpasses Death –
Stolid to Love's supreme entreaty
Not forsook of Faith –

Mercy of the Almighty begging –
Tell his Arrow sent –
God it is said replies in Person
When the cry is meant –

19 November ✶ Abraham Lincoln ✶
Abraham Lincoln

On 19 November 1863, at the height of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln gave a speech at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, which has gone down as one of the most famous in American history. In just over two minutes, Lincoln brilliantly stated that the war efforts were not in vain, but were aimed towards the great cause of human equality. The Gettysburg Address ends with the rousing words: 'this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.' Lincoln was also a great reader of poetry, and he wrote the following lines when he was perhaps just fifteen years old, in the margin of a maths book.

Abraham Lincoln
his hand and pen
he will be good but
god knows When

20 November ✶ *from* The Prophet ✶ Kahlil Gibran

20 November is Children's Day: a day that celebrates children's education, health, rights and well-being around the world. Kahlil Gibran was a Lebanese-American poet and artist. This poem offers the powerful image of children as 'living arrows' sent forth.

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

21 November ✶ In Memoriam ✶ E. A. Mackintosh

This poem of the First World War was written after Mackintosh witnessed the death of one of his men. In the poem, he depicts his relationship with the men he commanded as one akin to a father and many sons – a personal and painful relationship to the dead. Eighteen months later Mackintosh was killed in battle.

So you were David's father,
And he was your only son,
And the new-cut peats are rotting
And the work is left undone,
Because of an old man weeping,
Just an old man in pain,
For David, his son David,
That will not come again.

Oh, the letters he wrote you,
And I can see them still,
Not a word of the fighting
But just the sheep on the hill
And how you should get the crops in
Ere the year get stormier,
And the Bosches have got his body,
And I was his officer.

You were only David's father,
But I had fifty sons
When we went up in the evening
Under the arch of the guns,
And we came back at twilight –
O God! I heard them call
To me for help and pity
That could not help at all.

Oh, never will I forget you,
My men that trusted me,
More my sons than your fathers',
For they could only see
The little helpless babies
And the young men in their pride.
They could not see you dying,
And hold you while you died.

Happy and young and gallant,
They saw their first-born go,
But not the strong limbs broken
And the beautiful men brought low,
The piteous writhing bodies,
They screamed 'Don't leave me, sir,'
For they were only your fathers
But I was your officer.

22 November ✶ Disabled ✶ Wilfred Owen

This poem by Wilfred Owen focuses on the figure of a man who has become permanently disabled through injuries in battle. He looks back at the reasons why he signed up to fight in the war – but now they don't seem anywhere near as convincing to him.

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

* * *

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light-blue trees,
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim, –
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands;
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

* * *

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

* * *

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join. – He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg;
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.
Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

* * *

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

* * *

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

23 November ✶ Signs of the Times ✶
Paul Laurence Dunbar

The fourth Thursday in November marks Thanksgiving Day in the USA. It has been a federal holiday in the States since the Civil War, when President Lincoln proclaimed a day of 'Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens'. The day is celebrated with televised parades and sports matches, family dinners with turkeys, and the presidential pardoning of one lucky turkey. This poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, written in southern slang, is a tribute to the day.

Air a-gittin' cool an' coolah,
  Frost a-comin' in de night,
Hicka' nuts an' wa'nuts fallin',
  Possum keepin' out o' sight.
Tu'key struttin' in de ba'nya'd,
  Nary step so proud ez his;
Keep on struttin', Mistah Tu'key,
  Yo' do' know whut time it is.

Cidah press commence a-squeakin'
  Eatin' apples sto'ed away,
Chillun swa'min' 'roun' lak ho'nets,
  Huntin' aigs ermung de hay.
Mistah Tu'key keep on gobblin'
  At de geese a-flyin' souf,
Oomph! dat bird do' know whut's comin';
  Ef he did he'd shet his mouf.

Pumpkin gittin' good an' yallah
  Mek me open up my eyes;
Seems lak it's a-lookin' at me
  Jes' a-la'in' dah sayin' 'Pies.'
Tu'key gobbler gwine 'roun' blowin',
  Gwine 'roun' gibbin' sass an' slack;
Keep on talkin', Mistah Tu'key,
  You ain't seed no almanac.

Fa'mer walkin' th'oo de ba'nya'd
  Seein' how things is comin' on,
Sees ef all de fowls is fatt'nin' –
  Good times comin' sho's you bo'n.
Hyeahs dat tu'key gobbler braggin',
  Den his face break in a smile –
Nebbah min', you sassy rascal,
  He's gwine nab you atter while.

Choppin' suet in de kitchen,
  Stonin' raisins in de hall,
Beef a-cookin' fu' de mince meat,
  Spices groun' – I smell 'em all.
Look hyeah, Tu'key, stop dat gobblin',
  You ain' luned de sense ob feah,
You ol' fool, yo' naik's in dangah,
  Do' you know Thanksgibbin's hyeah?

24 November ✶ Prayer for Earth ✶
Myra Cohn Livingston

Throughout much of the world, nature is under threat – forests are being cut down, rivers polluted, and animals dying. This short poem vividly captures two beautiful moments in nature, and offers a prayer: let this stay.

Last night
an owl
called from the hill.
Coyotes howled.
A deer stood still
nibbling at bushes far away.
The moon shone silver.
Let this stay.

Today
two noisy crows
flew by,
their shadows pasted on the sky.
The sun broke out
through clouds of grey.
An iris opened.
Let this stay.

25 November ✶ Benediction ✶ James Berry

This next short poem – or prayer – of thanks is penned by the Jamaican-born British poet James Berry. His acclaimed writings speak often both of his love of Jamaica and his anger at the injustice his forebears suffered at the hands of the colonialists. In this poem, the last two lines focus on unity.

Thanks to the ear
that someone may hear

Thanks for seeing
that someone may see

Thanks for feeling
that someone may feel

Thanks for touch
that someone may be touched

Thanks to flowering of white moon
and spreading shawl of black night
holding villages and cities together

26 November ✶ Immigrant ✶ Fleur Adcock

Fleur Adcock is a poet from New Zealand, who has lived much of her life in the UK. This short poem is about how we identify with a place. It's worth noting that Adcock doesn't tell us which accent she is putting to the test – her old New Zealand one or her new British one?

November '63: eight months in London.
I pause on the low bridge to watch the pelicans:
they float swanlike, arching their white necks
over only slightly ruffled bundles of wings,
burying awkward beaks in the lake's water

I clench cold fists in my Marks and Spencer's jacket
and secretly test my accent once again:
St James's Park, St James's Park, St James's Park.

27 November ✶ Nuns Fret Not at their Convent's Narrow Room ✶ William Wordsworth

Wordsworth was renowned for long blank verse poetry – the use of hundreds of lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter. In a sense, blank verse paved the way for modern free-verse – structureless, rhymeless modern poetry without metre. Wordsworth, however, was a great believer that composing against the constraints of poetry helps us to grapple with our thoughts. While the sonnet form might seem a prison at first glance, Wordsworth compares it to other contained spaces which produce things of beauty – such as nectar from foxglove bells or a wonderful carpet from a loom.

Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room;
And Hermits are contented with their Cells;
And Students with their pensive Citadels:
Maids at the Wheel, the Weaver at his Loom,
Sit blithe and happy; Bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness Fells,
Will murmur by the hour in Foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, into which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

28 November ✶ Sonnet 116 ✶ William Shakespeare

This is the date in 1582 when, it is thought, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. This sonnet, among Shakespeare's most well-known, is on the theme of marriage, and it is commonly read at weddings to this day.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

29 November ✶ Sports Report ✶ Gareth Owen

At this time of year the football season is in full swing, and it continues through the winter and spring – which you'll know, of course, if you're as football obsessed as the speaker of this poem!

Five o'clock of a Saturday night,
November out of doors,
We sit down to tea,
My family and me,
To hear the football scores.

I'm the one in our family who tries to listen but everyone else just talks and talks and talks.

Dad discusses his rose trees,
Stephen chokes on his bread,
Grandad moans
About the cold in his bones
And talks about who're dead.

Betty dreams about Terry,
'Who's handsome and ever so tall.'
When Mum joins in
There's such a din
You can't hear the scores at all.

Well a few, but the worst is only hearing half a result, that's very frustrating that is.

Did Fulham win at Fratton Park?
Did Millwall lose at the Den?
What happened to Blackpool at Boothferry Park?
Did Doncaster draw again?

Who dropped a point at Derby?
A fight in crowd at where?
'There's a terrible draught,
I'm freezing to death
And nobody seems to care.'

Who was sent off at Southampton?
Who was booked at West Ham?
'I'm pleased with that rose.'
'Stop picking your nose.'
'Will somebody pass me the jam.'

The Owls beat the Blades in a derby,
Cardiff beat Carlisle three-nil.
'He looks ever so young
With his hair all long.'
'Will someone fetch Grandad his pill.'

Someone lost at the Valley,
The Orient somehow got four.
'You're not to eat jam
With your fingers young man,
You get the knife from the drawer.'

Plymouth Argyle whipped Walsall,
Darlington managed a draw.
'Our Betty, stop dreamin'
And look after Stephen,
He's pouring the sauce on the floor.'

Wrexham romped home at The Racecourse,
The Sandgrounders' winger got three.
'With a touch of compost
And some luck with the frost
We might get some blooms on that tree.'

I've missed Albion and City and Chelsea,
Queens Park and Chester and Crewe.
'Get your grandad his scarf,
There's no need to laugh
We don't want him dying of flu.'

A sudden reversal at Reading,
A last minute winner at York.
'Turn down that radio!
D'you hear what I say to you
I can hardly hear myself talk.'

Yes, but you wait till she wants to listen to something,
I'm not even allowed to breathe. Just to be awkward
everybody goes quiet when the Scottish results come on.

Those strange-sounding teams up in Scotland,
Kilmarnock and Brechin and Clyde,
And players with names like Macintosh,
MacDonald, McNab and Macbride.

Who wants to know about Berwick
Or Forfar, Stranraer and Dundee,
That Hibernian were humbled and Hampden,
That Stirling slammed Celtic eight-three?

The only thing left to do is to go and get the paper.
Trouble is I haven't any money left.

Mum starts clearing the table,
Stacking the plates in the sink.
Would Dad think it funny
If I borrow some money
To buy the *Sporting Pink*?

While Mum's out of the room he slips me five pence.
I'll have to pay him back of course. He's very strict about things like that, my dad.

I race through the fog up to Jackson's,
Pumping out breath like steam.
I've got to find out
How United made out
They're my favourite team.

So I run my finger down the list of scores looking for the result.

United, United, United.
Never mind about the rest.
They've won, they've won,
Like they ought to have done,
Through a last minute header from Best.

When your team wins everything's all right.

I shuffle through leaves in the gutter,
Whistle a tune through my teeth,
Tightrope on walls,
Head imaginary balls,
My family's not bad underneath.

30 November ✶ Sing me a Song of a Lad that is Gone ✶ Robert Louis Stevenson

30 November is the feast day of Saint Andrew and is celebrated as a national holiday in Scotland.

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.

Mull was astern, Rum on the port,
Eigg on the starboard bow;
Glory of youth glowed in his soul;
Where is that glory now?

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.

Give me again all that was there,
Give me the sun that shone!
Give me the eyes, give me the soul,
Give me the lad that's gone!

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.

Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair,
All that was me is gone.

December

1 December ✶ Joseph Coelho ✶

Rosa Parks – 1st December 1955

Lillie Mae Bradford – 11th May 1955

Claudette Colvin – 2nd March 1955

On 1 December 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on an Alabama bus to a white passenger. In 1950s America, society was strictly segregated by skin colour, and there were black and white sections on buses. Parks was arrested for civil disobedience, but her actions became a symbol of defiance and resistance for decades to come. She worked with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a group which organized mass boycotts of buses around Alabama.

Not the first to sit.
Not the first to get arrested.
Not old (she was 42).
Not tired ('Just tired of giving in.').

One of many, unable to sit
with the injustice of years.
A rider on an old road
walked by millions on tired legs.

These riders fought for a seat,
years in the trudging,
of sole-worn protest
walked in frustrated miles
over landscapes of lives.

One day became thirteen months;
of continued mapping,
of hitchhiking and car pools
of walking and tattered shoes
because the bus
wasn't going anywhere they planned to go.

2 December ✶ Napoleon ✶ Miroslav Holub

On 2 December 1805, Napoleon fought the Battle of Austerlitz against a Russian and Austrian army, triumphing over them in what is now remembered as his greatest victory.

Children, when was
Napoleon Bonaparte born,
asks teacher.

A thousand years ago, the children say.
A hundred years ago, the children say.
Last year, the children say.
No one knows.

Children, what did
Napoleon Bonaparte do,
asks teacher.

Won a war, the children say.
Lost a war, the children say.
No one knows.

Our butcher had a dog
called Napoleon,
says Frantisek.
The butcher used to beat him and the dog died
of hunger
a year ago.

And all the children are now sorry
for Napoleon.

3 December ✶ The Raven ✶ Edgar Allan Poe

'The Raven' is very likely Edgar Allan Poe's most well-known work. Set on a dark December night, it is a tale of psychological horror: a man, pining for the woman he loves, is visited by a mysterious talking raven. The poem charts his descent into darkness and madness, while the raven repeats a single ominous word: 'nevermore'.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and
weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore –
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a
tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
''Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door –
Only this and nothing more.'

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the
floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; – vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow – sorrow for the lost
Lenore –
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name
Lenore –
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; –
This it is and nothing more.'

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
'Sir,' said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you' – here I opened wide the door; –
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore?'
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!' –
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
'Surely,' said I, 'surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore –
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; –
'Tis the wind and nothing more!'

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door –
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore –
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning – little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door –
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as 'Nevermore'.

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered – not a feather then he
fluttered –
Till I scarcely more than muttered 'Other friends have flown
before –
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown
before.'
Then the bird said 'Nevermore.'

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
'Doubtless,' said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden
bore –
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of "Never – nevermore".'

But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust
and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore –
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of
yore
Meant in croaking 'Nevermore.'

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee – by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil! –
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted –
On this home by Horror haunted – tell me truly, I implore –
Is there – is there balm in Gilead? – tell me – tell me, I implore!'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us – by that God we both
adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name
Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name
Lenore.'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'

'Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked,
upstarting –
'Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian
shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath
spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! – quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off
my door!'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is
dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on
the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the
floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore!

4 December ✶ The Witch ✶
Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

The 'witch' of the poem isn't so much a mystical or magical being as she is a tired old woman, suffering from exposure to the cold. By labelling her a witch, Coleridge seems to be making a comment about women's role in Victorian society, and their appearance in the eyes of suspicious outsiders.

I have walked a great while over the snow,
And I am not tall nor strong.
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,
And the way was hard and long.
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,
But I never came here before.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.
I dare not stand in the blast.
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,
And the worst of death is past.
I am but a little maiden still,
My little white feet are sore.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,
Who plead for their heart's desire.
She came – she came – and the quivering flame
Sunk and died in the fire.
It never was lit again on my hearth
Since I hurried across the floor,
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

5 December ✶ Mary Celeste ✶ Judith Nicholls

On 5 December 1872, the American ship *Mary Celeste* was discovered washed up on the shores of the Azores islands. The crew were nowhere to be seen, though their belongings and the ship's cargo remained undisturbed, and the ship itself was still seaworthy. None of the crew were ever seen or heard from again, and the fate of the *Mary Celeste*'s sailors remains a mystery to this very day.

Only the wind sings
in the riggings,
the hull creaks a lullaby;
a sail lifts gently
like a message
pinned to a vacant sky.
The wheel turns
over bare decks,
shirts flap on a line;
only the song of the lapping waves
beats steady time . . .

First mate,
off-duty from
the long dawn watch, begins
a letter to his wife, daydreams
of home.

The Captain's wife is late;
the child did not sleep
and breakfast has passed . . .
She, too, is missing home;
sits down at last to eat,
but can't quite force

the porridge down.
She swallows hard,
slices the top from her egg.

The second mate
is happy
A four-hour sleep,
full stomach
and a quiet sea
are all he craves

The child now sleeps, at last,
head firmly pressed into her pillow
in a deep sea-dream.

Then why are the gulls wheeling
like vultures in the sky?
Why was the child snatched
from her sleep? What drew
the Captain's cry?

Only the wind replies
in the rigging,
and the hull creaks and sighs,
a sail spells out its message
over silent skies.
The wheel still turns
over bare decks,
shirts blow on the line;
the siren-song of lapping waves
still echoes over time.

6 December ✶ On Raglan Road ✶
Patrick Kavanagh

On this date in 1921, the Irish Free State was formed as an independent state following the Irish War of Independence. It comprised 26 of the 32 Irish counties. The remainder formed Northern Ireland, and thus began the split between British-ruled Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

On Raglan Road on an autumn day I met her first and knew
That her dark hair would weave a snare that I might one day rue;
I saw the danger, yet I walked along the enchanted way,
And I said, let grief be a fallen leaf at the dawning of the day.

On Grafton Street in November we tripped lightly along the ledge
Of the deep ravine where can be seen the worth of passion's pledge,
The Queen of Hearts still making tarts and I not making hay –
O I loved too much and by such and such is happiness thrown away.

I gave her gifts of the mind, I gave her the secret sign that's known
To the artists who have known the true gods of sound and stone
And word and tint. I did not stint for I gave her poems to say.
With her own name there and her own dark hair like clouds over fields of May.

On a quiet street where old ghosts meet I see her walking now
Away from me so hurriedly my reason must allow
That I had wooed not as I should a creature made of clay –
When the angel woos the clay he'd lose his wings at the dawn of day.

7 December ✶ The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner ✶ Randall Jarrell

On this day in 1941, Japanese air forces bombed a US military base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. It was intended as a pre-emptive strike by the Japanese government, which was allied with the Nazis during the Second World War. As the first attack on American soil, it prompted American entry into the war. This poem, told from the perspective of a dead American aircraft gunner, is unflinching in its observations of the cruel realities of war.

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

8 December ✶ Embarkation, 1942 ✶ John Jarmain

This poem captures a quieter period during a soldier's experience of war. It tells of the night-time departure of the soldiers from familiar terrain to foreign shores. Tension mounts silently and slowly as they near the scene of combat, leaving 'the things we know', and not knowing what may await them.

In undetected trains we left our land
At evening secretly, from wayside stations.
None knew our place of parting; no pale hand
Waved as we went, not one friend said farewell.
But grouped on weed-grown platforms
Only a few officials holding watches
Noted the stealthy hour of our departing,
And, as we went, turned back to their hotel.

With blinds drawn down we left the things we know,
The simple fields, the homely ricks and yards;
Passed willows greyly bunching to the moon
And English towns. But in our blindfold train
Already those were far and long ago,
Stored quiet pictures which the mind must keep:
We saw them not. Instead we played at cards,
Or strangely dropped asleep.

Then in a callow dawn we stood in lines
Like foreigners on bare and unknown quays,
Till someone bravely into the hollow of waiting
Cast a timid wisp of song;
It moved along the lines of patient soldiers
Like a secret passed from mouth to mouth
And slowly gave us ease;
In our whispered singing courage was set free,
We were banded once more and strong.
So we sang as our ship set sail,
Sang our own songs, and leaning on the rail
Waved to the workmen on the slipping quay
And then again to us for fellowship.

9 December ✶ Some Questions You Might Ask ✶ Mary Oliver

If there's one thing poetry is good at, it is filling us with wonder anew, and forcing us to ask questions. Mary Oliver's poem on the nature of the soul performs a tightrope walk between silliness and seriousness – many of the questions might seem comical on the surface, but think about them for a few moments and you may find yourself taking them seriously . . .

Is the soul solid, like iron?
Or is it tender and breakable, like
the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?
Who has it, and who doesn't?
I keep looking around me.
The face of the moose is as sad
as the face of Jesus.
The swan opens her white wings slowly.
In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.
One question leads to another.
Does it have a shape?
Like an iceberg?
Like the eye of a hummingbird?
Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?
Why should I have it, and not the anteater
who loves her children?
Why should I have it, and not the camel?
Come to think of it, what about the maple trees?
What about the blue iris?
What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the
moonlight?
What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?
What about the grass?

10 December ✶ Refugee Blues ✶ W. H. Auden

Human Rights Day falls on 10 December every year. It is a United Nations campaign to defend the rights of those who are oppressed, disrespected or discriminated against. Auden's wartime poem conveys a sense of what it is like to have your most basic human rights denied, and to be an outsider wherever you go.

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in
holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no
place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go
there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports
can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said,
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead':
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still
alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where
shall we go to-day?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and
said;
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread':
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was
talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying, 'They must
die':
O we were in his mind, my dear, O we were in his
mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they
weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they
weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors:
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of
them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you
and me.

11 December ✶ Don't Quit ✶
John Greenleaf Whittier

On this day in 1936, Edward VIII abdicated. He had been king for just under a year when he gave up the throne in order to marry Wallis Simpson, a twice-divorced American woman. His abdication was the first entirely voluntary resignation of the throne of England in history.

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out,
Don't give up though the pace seems slow –
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out –
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far,
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

For all the sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'

12 December ✶ The Bells ✶ Edgar Allan Poe

When we think of sleigh bells, we might be thinking of cosy Christmassy images of pleasure-filled rides in the snow. But Poe, a great master of gothic poetry – that is, poetry that focuses on darkness and horror – does something quite different. Through the obsessive repetition of words, including the bells themselves, Poe's story of an icy winter night is a tale of madness and melancholy.

1

Hear the sledges with the bells –
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the Heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells –
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

2

Hear the mellow wedding bells –
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight! –

From the molten-golden notes,
And all in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells,
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells
On the Future! – how it tells
Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells! –
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells –
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

3

Hear the loud alarum bells –
Brazen bells!
What tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of Night
How they scream out their affright!
Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,
Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire –
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
Leaping higher, higher, higher,
With a desperate desire,
And a resolute endeavor
Now – now to sit, or never,
By the side of the pale-faced moon.
Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
What a tale their terror tells
Of despair!

How they clang and clash and roar!
What a horror they outpour
In the bosom of the palpitating air!
Yet the ear, it fully knows,
By the twanging,
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows: –
Yes, the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling,
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells –
Of the bells –
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells –
In the clamor and the clangour of the bells!

4

Hear the tolling of the bells –
Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
In the silence of the night
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy meaning of their tone!
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats
Is a groan.
And the people – ah, the people
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone –
They are neither man nor woman –

They are neither brute nor human,
They are Ghouls: –
And their king it is who tolls: –
And he rolls, rolls, rolls, rolls,
A Pæan from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the Pæan of the bells!
And he dances, and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the Pæan of the bells –
Of the bells: –
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells –
Of the bells, bells, bells –
To the sobbing of the bells: –
Keeping time, time, time,
As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
To the rolling of the bells –
Of the bells, bells, bells: –
To the tolling of the bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells –
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

13 December ✶ The Oxen ✶ Thomas Hardy

It is finally time to start thinking about Christmas. This poem by Hardy is a subtle discussion of the nature of faith; it might be far-fetched to imagine oxen kneeling to the new-born baby Jesus, but he still wants to believe it might be true.

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.

14 December ✶ Antarctica ✶ Derek Mahon

On 14 December 1911, an expedition led by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen became the first party to reach the South Pole. Polar exploration is notoriously dangerous, and this poem focuses on the death of Captain Lawrence Oates, who, in 1912, was part of Captain Scott's expedition to the South Pole. Knowing he was dying, he decided to walk into a lethal blizzard rather than slow down his companions. The first words of this poem are his immortal last words.

'I am just going outside and may be some time.'
The others nod, pretending not to know.
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

He leaves them reading and begins to climb,
Goading his ghost into the howling snow;
He is just going outside and may be some time.

The tent recedes beneath its crust of rime
And frostbite is replaced by vertigo:
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

Need we consider it some sort of crime,
This numb self-sacrifice of the weakest? No,
He is just going outside and may be some time –

In fact, for ever. Solitary enzyme,
Though the night yield no glimmer there will glow,
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

He takes leave of the earthly pantomime
Quietly, knowing it is time to go.
'I am just going outside and may be some time.'
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

15 December ✶ little tree ✶ E. E. Cummings

In this poem, Cummings takes on the voice of a child to hold an imaginary conversation with a Christmas tree. The shape of the words on the page seems to branch out like a fir tree, and the two strange gaps between words take on the appearance of shiny baubles.

little tree
little silent Christmas tree
you are so little
you are more like a flower

who found you in the green forest
and were you very sorry to come away?
see i will comfort you
because you smell so sweetly

i will kiss your cool bark
and hug you safe and tight
just as your mother would,
only don't be afraid

look the spangles
that sleep all the year in a dark box
dreaming of being taken out and allowed to shine,
the balls the chains red and gold the fluffy threads,

put up your little arms
and i'll give them all to you to hold
every finger shall have its ring
and there won't be a single place dark or unhappy

then when you're quite dressed
you'll stand in the window for everyone to see
and how they'll stare!
oh but you'll be very proud

and my little sister and i will take hands
and looking up at our beautiful tree
we'll dance and sing
'Noel Noel'

16 December ✶ Forecasts ✶ Jean Kenward

The narrator of this poem is looking for signs and symbols of things to come – forecasting. What begins as a hunt for signs of snow ends as something quite different: a search for signs of hope.

There are berries this year on the holly.
It wasn't always so.
They may be simply a forecast –
forecast of snow.

There's frost on the sill. I've seen it
glitter with diamond light.
It's slippery, too, the traveller
must watch his step tonight.

There's a moon as big as a melon,
and far-off – O, how far –
flickering on the horizon . . .
a fresh, and different, star . . .

In the heart of man is a coldness.
Through a crack in the stable door
there glimmers a new dominion.

Even ice can thaw.

17 December ✶ Christmas is Coming ✶ Anon.

This traditional nursery rhyme dates back to the nineteenth century at least, and centres around the image of a goose – a popular Christmas dinner for the Victorians. However, it is also a song about charity and sharing, the real spirit of Christmas.

Christmas is coming,
  The geese are getting fat,
Please to put a penny
  In the old man's hat.
If you haven't got a penny,
  A ha'penny will do;
If you haven't got a ha'penny,
  Then God bless you!

18 December ✶ The Computer's First Christmas Card ✶ Edwin Morgan

Computers have become more and more a part of our lives, and we are rarely away from screens these days. Computers can do all sorts of things for us, but, as Edwin Morgan makes clear, it's a very bad idea to trust them with writing your Christmas cards!

jollymerry
hollyberry
jollyberry
merryholly
happyjolly
jollyjelly
jellybelly
bellymerry
hollyheppy
jollyMolly
marryJerry
merryHarry
happyBarry
heppyJarry
bobbyheppy
berryjorry
jorryjolly
moppyjelly
Mollymerry
Jerryjolly
bellyboppy
jorryhoppy
hollymoppy
Barrymerry
Jarryhappy

happyboppy
boppyjolly
jollymerry
merrymerry
merrymerry
merryChris
ammerryasa
Chrismerry
asMERRYCHR
YSANTHEMUM

19 December ✶ O Little Town of Bethlehem ✶ Phillips Brooks

Phillips Brooks was an American priest, who wrote this popular carol in 1868 after having visited the holy town of Bethlehem three years earlier. The tune to which the carol is now sung was written by Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1903.

O little town of Bethlehem,
    how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep
    the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
    the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
    are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,
    and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
    their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together,
    proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king,
    and peace to all on earth!

How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!

20 December ✶ Winter-Time ✶
Robert Louis Stevenson

Winter is a season of short days and bitter weather. Yet in this poem Robert Louis Stevenson also conjures a sense of wonder – for there are jolly fires and trees sparkling beautifully with frost, too!

Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,
A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;
Blinks but an hour or two; and then,
A blood-red orange, sets again.

Before the stars have left the skies,
At morning in the dark I rise;
And shivering in my nakedness,
By the cold candle, bathe and dress.

Close by the jolly fire I sit
To warm my frozen bones a bit;
Or with a reindeer-sled, explore
The colder countries round the door.

When to go out, my nurse doth wrap
Me in my comforter and cap;
The cold wind burns my face, and blows
Its frosty pepper up my nose.

Black are my steps on silver sod;
Thick blows my frosty breath abroad;
And tree and house, and hill and lake,
Are frosted like a wedding cake.

21 December ✶ Puzzle ✶ Philip Waddell

On 21 December 1913, the world's first crossword puzzle was printed in the US paper the *New York World*. It had been invented by a man from Liverpool, Arthur Wynne. Wynne's designs caught on, and within a decade there were crossword puzzles in nearly all newspapers. Philip Waddell's poem feeds us cryptic clues, leading up to the puzzle itself.

Count three weeks and you'd be there
in the twelfth month of the year
before the Great War.
Readers saw the first appear
in a Sunday paper called
the *New York World*.
It wasn't a furious word, just cross,
and to this day they puzzle us.

22 December ✶ The Year's Midnight ✶
Gillian Clarke

Winter solstice – the darkest day of the year in the northern hemisphere – always falls between 21 to 23 December. The days will gradually lengthen again from this point onwards. Gillian Clarke's poem is a voice from the depths of darkness, but it is one that knows that daylight will come again.

The flown, the fallen,
the golden ones,
the deciduous dead, all gone
to ground, to dust, to sand,
borne on the shoulders of the wind.

Listen! They are whispering
now while the world talks,
and the ice melts,
and the seas rise.
Look at the trees!

Every leaf-scar is a bud
expecting a future.
The earth speaks in parables.
The burning bush. The rainbow.
Promises. Promises.

23 December ✶ Just Doing My Job ✶ Clare Bevan

December is a time for festive shows, from Christmas plays at school to Nativity scenes at Christingle services. This poem sums up the joy and chaos they entail.

I'm one of Herod's Henchmen.
We don't have much to say,
We just charge through the audience
In a Henchman sort of way.

We all wear woolly helmets
To hide our hair and ears,
And wellingtons sprayed silver
To match our tinfoil spears.

Our swords are made of cardboard
So blood will not be spilled
If we trip and stab a parent
When the hall's completely filled.

We don't look VERY scary,
We're mostly small and shy,
And some of us wear glasses,
But we give the thing a try.

We whisper Henchman noises
While Herod hunts for strangers,
And then we all charge out again
Like nervous Power Rangers.

Yet when the play is over
And Miss is out of breath
We'll charge like Henchmen through the hall
And scare our mums to death.

24 December ✶ Saturday Night at the Bethlehem Arms ✶ Gareth Owen

It does not need saying that today is Christmas Eve. This poem is about a pub landlord on a quiet night, not realizing that the first Christmas is taking place in his stable.

Very quiet really for a Saturday.
Just the old couple come to visit relations
Who took the double room above the yard
And were both of them in bed by half past nine.
Left me with that other one, the stranger.
Sat like he was set till Domesday at the corner of the bar
Sipping small beer dead slow and keeping mum,
Those beady, tax-collector's eyes of his
On my reflection in the glass behind the bar
Watching me, watching me.
And when he did get round to saying something
His talk was like those lines of gossamer
That fishermen send whispering across the water
To lure and hook unwary fish.
Not my type. And anyway I'd been on the go since five.
Deadbeat I was.
Some of us have a bed to go to, I thought to myself.
I was just about to call Time
When the knock came at the door.
At first I was for turning them away;
We only have two rooms see and both of them were taken.
But something desperate in the woman's eyes
Made me think again and I told them,
They could rough it in the barn
If they didn't mind the cows and mules for company.
I know, I know. Soft, that's me.

I yawned, locked up, turned out the lights,
Rinsed my hands to lose the smell of beer.
Went up to bed.
A day like any other.
That's how it is.
Nothing much ever happens here.

25 December ✶ I Saw a Stable ✶
Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Today is Christmas Day, a day for family, feasting, and festivities. Amid all the presents and parsnips, though, there is always time for a brief poem. Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's lines on the original meaning of Christmas is perfect for sharing.

I saw a stable, low and very bare,
  A little child in a manger.
The oxen knew Him, had Him in their care,
  To men He was a stranger.
The safety of the world was lying there,
  And the world's danger.

26 December ✶ Reindeer Report ✶ U. A. Fanthorpe

In the modern world, Christmas can seem like a small island of peace amid the hectic month of December and the run-up to the new year. On Boxing Day, U. A. Fanthorpe's poem helps us tick another successful Christmas off the list.

Chimneys: colder.
Flightpaths: busier.
Driver: Christmas (F)
Still baffled by postcodes.

Children: more
And stay up later.
Presents: heavier.
Pay: frozen.

Mission in spite
Of all this:
Accomplished.

27 December ✶ Dear True Love ✶ U. A. Fanthorpe

This poem is written as a reply to the popular carol 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. Just who needs six geese a-laying, anyway?

Leaping and dancing
Means to-ing and fro-ing;
Drummers and pipers –
Loud banging and blowing;
Even a pear-tree
Needs room to grow in.

Goose eggs and gold top
When I'm trying to slim?
And seven swans swimming?
Just where could they swim?

Mine is a small house,
Your gifts are grand;
One ring at a time
Is enough for this hand.

Hens, colly birds, doves,
A gastronome's treat.
But, love, I did tell you,
I've given up meat.

Your fairy-tale presents
Are wasted on me.
Just send me your love
And set all the birds free.

28 December ✶ *from* Paradise Lost ✶ John Milton

On this day in 1831, Charles Darwin set sail on the ship HMS *Beagle*. The voyage, which went clockwise around the world, lasted almost five years. The countless observations he made of great varieties of species of flora and fauna led to the establishment of his Theory of Evolution. Darwin took several books with him, including a copy of the epic poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton which he read obsessively. Here are the very last lines of the poem, describing Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden.

In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappeared.
They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitary way.

29 December ✶ The Year ✶ Ella Wheeler Wilcox

In these rhyming couplets, Ella Wheeler Wilcox offers both wit and wisdom on what we might expect from a new year.

What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That's not been said a thousand times?

The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know.

We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night.

We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.

We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreathe our prides, we sheet our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of a year.

30 December ✶ *from* The Tempest ✶ William Shakespeare

The theme of this extract from *The Tempest*, a speech given by the magician Prospero, is endings. The actors of the play disappear 'into thin air' – a phrase which was first coined by Shakespeare here. This passage would have especially resonated with an Elizabethan audience, as the 'great globe itself' is a neat pun on the Globe theatre, where Shakespeare's plays were performed.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd;
Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled:
Be not disturb'd with my infirmity:
If you be pleased, retire into my cell
And there repose: a turn or two I'll walk,
To still my beating mind.

31 December ✶ Ring Out, Wild Bells (*from* In Memoriam) ✶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson

New Year's Eve is a time for parties and festivities, singing and dancing, reflections on the past and resolutions for the future. On the threshold of the new year, it is a time to ring the bells of change, and to celebrate the life we have. This poem deals with the loss of one of Tennyson's dear friends, but here, in this climactic moment, he stands resolved to leave the darkness of the world behind him, and instead face the light of the future. In this moment, the bells ring with hope. A happy new year to you.

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
  The flying cloud, the frosty light:
  The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
  Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
  The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind
  For those that here we see no more;
  Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
  And ancient forms of party strife;
  Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
  The faithless coldness of the times;
  Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
  The civic slander and the spite;
  Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
  Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
  Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
  The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
  Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

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