

A Poison Tree

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	I was angry with my friend;
	2	I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
	3	I was angry with my foe:
	4	I told it not, my wrath did grow.
2	5	And I watered it in fears,
	6	Night & morning with my tears:
	7	And I sunned it with smiles,
	8	And with soft deceitful wiles.
3	9	And it grew both day and night.
	10	Till it bore an apple bright.
	11	And my foe beheld it shine,
	12	And he knew that it was mine.
4	13	And into my garden stole,
	14	When the night had veild the pole;
	15	In the morning glad I see;
	16	My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

Belfast Confetti

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	Suddenly as the riot squad moved in it was raining exclamation
	2	marks,
	3	Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And
	4	the explosion
	5	Itself – an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst
	6	of rapid fire ...
	7	I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept
	8	stuttering,
	9	All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and
	10	colons.
2	11	I know this labyrinth so well – Balaklava, Raglan, Inkerman,
	12	Odessa Street –
	13	Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea Street.
	14	Dead end again.
	15	A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon fae-shield. Walkie-
	16	talkies. What is
	17	My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going?
	18	A fusillade of question-marks.

Catrin

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	I can remember you, child,
	2	As I stood in a hot, white
	3	Room at the window watching
	4	The people and cars taking
	5	Turn at the traffic lights.
	6	I can remember you, our first
	7	Fierce confrontation, the tight
	8	Red rope of love which we both
	9	Fought over. It was a square
	10	Environmental blank, disinfected
	11	Of paintings or toys. I wrote
	12	All over the walls with my
	13	Words, coloured the clean squares
	14	With the wild, tender circles
	15	Of our struggle to become
	16	Separate. We want, we shouted,
	17	To be two, to be ourselves.
2	18	Neither won nor lost the struggle
	19	In the glass tank clouded with feelings
	20	Which changed us both. Still I am fighting
	21	You off, as you stand there
	22	With your straight, strong, long
	23	Brown hair and your rosy,
	24	Defiant glare, bringing up
	25	From the heart's pool that old rope,
	26	Tightening about my life,
	27	Trailing love and conflict,
	28	As you ask may you skate

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	29	In the dark, for one more hour.

Cousin Kate

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	I was a cottage maiden
	2	Hardened by sun and air,
	3	Contented with my cottage mates,
	4	Not mindful I was fair.
	5	Why did a great lord find me out,
	6	And praise my flaxen hair?
	7	Why did a great lord find me out
	8	To fill my heart with care?
2	9	He lured me to his palace home—
	10	Woe's me for joy thereof—
	11	To lead a shameless shameful life,
	12	His plaything and his love.
	13	He wore me like a silken knot,
	14	He changed me like a glove;
	15	So now I moan, an unclean thing,
	16	Who might have been a dove.
3	17	O Lady Kate, my cousin Kate,
	18	You grew more fair than I:
	19	He saw you at your father's gate,
	20	Chose you, and cast me by.
	21	He watched your steps along the lane,
	22	Your work among the rye;
	23	He lifted you from mean estate
	24	To sit with him on high.
4	25	Because you were so good and pure
	26	He bound you with his ring:
	27	The neighbors call you good and pure,
	28	Call me an outcast thing.

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	29	Even so I sit and howl in dust,
	30	You sit in gold and sing:
	31	Now which of us has tenderer heart?
	32	You had the stronger wing.
5	33	O cousin Kate, my love was true,
	34	Your love was writ in sand:
	35	If he had fooled not me but you,
	36	If you stood where I stand,
	37	He'd not have won me with his love
	38	Nor bought me with his land;
	39	I would have spit into his face
	40	And not have taken his hand.
6	41	Yet I've a gift you have not got,
	42	And seem not like to get:
	43	For all your clothes and wedding-ring
	44	I've little doubt you fret.
	45	My fair-haired son, my shame, my pride,
	46	Cling closer, closer yet:
	47	Your father would give lands for one
	48	To wear his coronet.

Exposure

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us ...
	2	Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...
	3	Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...
	4	Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
	5	But nothing happens.
2	6	Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
	7	Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
	8	Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
	9	Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
	10	What are we doing here?
3	11	The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow ...
	12	We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
	13	Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
	14	Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,
	15	But nothing happens.
4	16	Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
	17	Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
	18	With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,
	19	We watch them wandering up and down the wind's
	20	nonchalance, But nothing happens.
5	21	Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
	22	We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
	23	Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
	24	Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
	25	—Is it that we are dying?
6	26	Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
	27	With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	28	For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
	29	Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,—
	30	We turn back to our dying.
7	31	Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
	32	Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
	33	For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
	34	Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
	35	For love of God seems dying.
8	36	Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,
	37	Shrivelling many hands, and puckering foreheads crisp.
	38	The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,
	39	Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
	40	But nothing happens.

Half-Caste

POEM (OPENING)

Excuse me
Standing on one leg
I'm half-caste

POEM (ENDING)

Explain yuself
Wha yu mean
When yu say half-caste
Yu mean when picasso
Mix red an green
Is a half-caste canvas?
Explain yuself
Wha u mean
When yu say half-caste
Yu mean when light an shadow
Mix in de sky
Is a half-caste weather??
Well in dat case
England weather
Nearly always half-caste
In fact some o dem cloud
Half-caste till dem overcast
So spiteful dem dont want de
sun pass
Ah rass
Explain yuself
Wha yu mean
When yu say half-caste?
Yu mean tchaikovsky
Sit down at dah piano
An mix a black key
Wid a white key
Is a half-caste symphony?

Explain yuself
Wha yu mean
Ah listening to yu wid de keen
Half of mih ear
Ah looking at u wid de keen
Half of mih eye
And when I'm introduced to yu
I'm sure you'll understand
Why I offer yu half-a-hand
An when I sleep at night
I close half-a-eye
Consequently when I dream
I dream half-a-dream
An when moon begin to glow
I half-caste human being
Cast half-a-shadow
But yu come back tomorrow
Wid de whole of yu eye
An de whole of yu ear
And de whole of yu mind

An I will tell yu
De other half
Of my story

No Problem

STANZA LINE POEM

1

1	I am not de problem
2	But I bear de brunt
3	Of the silly playground taunts
4	An racist stunts,
5	I am not de problem
6	I am born academic
7	But dey got me on de run
8	Now im a branded athletic
9	I am not de problem
10	If yu give I a chance
11	I can teach yu of Timbuktu
12	I can do more dan dance
13	I am not de problem
14	I greet yu wid a smile
15	Yu put me in a pigeon hole
16	But i am versatile
17	These conditions may affect me
18	As I get older,
19	An I am positively sure
20	I have no chips on my shoulders,
21	Black is not de problem
22	Mother country get it right
23	An juss fe de record,
24	Sum of me best friends are white.

Poppies

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	Three days before Armistice Sunday
	2	and poppies had already been placed
	3	on individual war graves. Before you left,
	4	I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
	5	spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
	6	of yellow bias binding around your blazer.
2	7	Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
	8	I rounded up as many white cat hairs
	9	as I could, smoothed down your shirt's
	10	upturned collar, steeled the softening
	11	of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
	12	across the tip of your nose, play at
	13	being Eskimos like we did when
	14	you were little. I resisted the impulse
	15	to run my fingers through the gelled
	16	blackthorns of your hair. All my words
	17	flattened, rolled, turned into felt,
3	18	slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
	19	with you, to the front door, threw
	20	it open, the world overflowing
	21	like a treasure chest. A split second
	22	and you were away, intoxicated.
	23	After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,
	24	released a song bird from its cage.
	25	Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
	26	and this is where it has led me,
	27	skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
	28	making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without

STANZA	LINE	POEM
4	29	a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.
	30	On reaching the top of the hill I traced
	31	the inscriptions on the war memorial,
	32	leaned against it like a wishbone.
	33	The dove pulled freely against the sky,
	34	an ornamental stitch, I listened, hoping to hear
	35	your playground voice catching on the wind.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	Half a league, half a league,
	2	Half a league onward,
	3	All in the valley of Death
	4	Rode the six hundred.
	5	"Forward, the Light Brigade!
	6	Charge for the guns!" he said.
	7	Into the valley of Death
	8	Rode the six hundred.
2	9	"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
	10	Was there a man dismayed?
	11	Not though the soldier knew
	12	Someone had blundered.
	13	Theirs not to make reply,
	14	Theirs not to reason why,
	15	Theirs but to do and die.
	16	Into the valley of Death
3	17	Rode the six hundred.
	18	Cannon to right of them,
	19	Cannon to left of them,
	20	Cannon in front of them
	21	Volleyed and thundered;
	22	Stormed at with shot and shell,
	23	Boldly they rode and well,
	24	Into the jaws of Death,
4	25	Into the mouth of hell
	26	Rode the six hundred.
	27	Flashed all their sabres bare,
	28	Flashed as they turned in air

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	29	Sabring the gunners there,
	30	Charging an army, while
	31	All the world wondered.
	32	Plunged in the battery-smoke
	33	Right through the line they broke;
	34	Cossack and Russian
	35	Reeled from the sabre stroke
	36	Shattered and sundered.
	37	Then they rode back, but not
	38	Not the six hundred.
5	39	Cannon to right of them,
	40	Cannon to left of them,
	41	Cannon behind them
	42	Volleyed and thundered;
	43	Stormed at with shot and shell,
	44	While horse and hero fell.
	45	They that had fought so well
	46	Came through the jaws of Death,
	47	Back from the mouth of hell,
	48	All that was left of them,
6	49	Left of six hundred.
	50	When can their glory fade?
	51	O the wild charge they made!
	52	All the world wondered.
	53	Honour the charge they made!
	54	Honour the Light Brigade,
	55	Noble six hundred!

The Class Game

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	1	How can you tell what class I'm from?
	2	I can talk posh like some
	3	With an 'Olly in me mouth
	4	Down me nose, wear an 'at not a scarf
	5	With me second-hand clothes.
	6	So why do you always wince when you hear
	7	Me say 'Tara' to me 'Ma' instead of 'Bye Mummy dear'?
	8	How can you tell what class I'm from?
	9	'Cos we live in a corpy, not like some
	10	In a pretty little semi, out Wirral way
	11	And commute into Liverpool by train each day?
	12	Or did I drop my unemployment card
1	13	Sitting on your patio (We have a yard)?
	14	How can you tell what class I'm from?
	15	Have I a label on me head, and another on me bum?
	16	Or is it because my hands are stained with toil?
	17	Instead of soft lily-white with perfume and oil?
	18	Don't I crook me little finger when I drink me tea
	19	Say toilet instead of bog when I want to pee?
	20	Why do you care what class I'm from?
	21	Does it stick in your gullet like a sour plum?
	22	Well, mate! A cleaner is me mother
	23	A docker is me brother
	24	Bread pudding is wet nelly
	25	And me stomach is me belly
	26	And I'm proud of the class that I come from.

The Destruction of Sennacherib

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
	2	And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
	3	And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
	4	When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.
2	5	Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
	6	That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
	7	Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
	8	That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.
3	9	For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
	10	And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
	11	And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
	12	And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!
4	13	And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
	14	But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
	15	And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
	16	And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.
5	17	And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
	18	With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail;
	19	And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
	20	The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.
6	21	And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
	22	And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
	23	And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
	24	Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

The Man He Killed

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	"Had he and I but met
	2	By some old ancient inn,
	3	We should have sat us down to wet
	4	Right many a nipperkin!
2	5	"But ranged as infantry,
	6	And staring face to face,
	7	I shot at him as he at me,
	8	And killed him in his place.
3	9	"I shot him dead because —
	10	Because he was my foe,
	11	Just so: my foe of course he was;
	12	That's clear enough; although
4	13	"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
	14	Off-hand like — just as I —
	15	Was out of work — had sold his traps —
	16	No other reason why.
5	17	"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
	18	You shoot a fellow down
	19	You'd treat if met where any bar is,
	20	Or help to half-a-crown."

Extract from The Prelude

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	1	One summer evening (led by her) I found
	2	A little boat tied to a willow tree
	3	Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
	4	Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
	5	Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
	6	And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
	7	Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
	8	Leaving behind her still, on either side,
	9	Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
	10	Until they melted all into one track
	11	Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
	12	Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
	13	With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
	14	Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
	15	The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
	16	Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
	17	She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
	18	I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
	19	And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	20	Went heaving through the water like a swan;
	21	When, from behind that craggy steep till then
1	22	The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
	23	As if with voluntary power instinct,
	24	Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
	25	And growing still in stature the grim shape
	26	Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
	27	For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
	28	And measured motion like a living thing,
	29	Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
	30	And through the silent water stole my way
	31	Back to the covert of the willow tree;
	32	There in her mooring-place I left my bark, -
	33	And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
	34	And serious mood; but after I had seen
	35	That spectacle, for many days, my brain
	36	Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
	37	Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
	38	There hung a darkness, call it solitude
	39	Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
	40	Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
	41	Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	42	But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
	43	Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
	44	By day, and were a trouble to my dreams

War Photographer

STANZA	LINE	
1	1	The reassurance of the frame is flexible
	2	- you can think that just outside it
	3	people eat, sleep, love normally
	4	while I seek out the tragic, the absurd,
	5	to make a subject.
	6	Or if the picture's such as lifts the heart
	7	the firmness of the edges can convince you
	8	this is how things are
2	9	- as when at ascot once
	10	I took a pair of peach, sun-gilded girls
	11	rolling, silk crumpled, on the grass
	12	in champagne giggles
3	13	-as last week, when I followed a small girl
	14	staggering down some devastated street,
	15	hip thrust out under a baby's weight.
	16	she saw me seeing her; my finger pressed.
4	17	At the corner, the first bomb of the morning
	18	shattered the stones .
	19	Instinct prevailing, she dropped her burden
	20	and, mouth too small for her dark scream,
	21	began to run...
5	22	The picture showed the little mother
	23	the almost-smile. Their caption read
	24	'Even in hell the human spirit
	25	triumphs over all.'
	26	But hell' like heaven, is untidy,
	27	its boundaries
	28	arbitrary as a blood stain on a wall.

What Were They Like?

STANZA	LINE	POEM
1	1	1) Did the people of Viet Nam
	2	use lanterns of stone?
	3	2) Did they hold ceremonies
	4	to reverence the opening of buds?
2	5	3) Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
	6	4) Did they use bone and ivory,
	7	jade and silver, for ornament?
	8	5) Had they an epic poem?
	9	6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing?
3	10	1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
	11	It is not remembered whether in gardens
	12	stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
	13	2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
	14	but after their children were killed
	15	there were no more buds.
	16	3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
	17	4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
	18	All the bones were charred.
	19	5) It is not remembered. Remember,
	20	most were peasants; their life
	21	was in rice and bamboo.
	22	When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
	23	and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
	24	maybe fathers told their sons old tales.
	25	When bombs smashed those mirrors
	26	there was time only to scream.
4	27	6) There is an echo yet
	28	of their speech which was like a song.

STANZA	LINE	POEM
	29	It was reported that their singing resembled
	30	the flight of moths in moonlight.
	31	Who can say? It is silent now.