



101

Memorable Poems
of Seven Centuries

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Compiled by Emma Laybourn
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Introduction

Poems can be memorable in two ways. They may enter the public consciousness and achieve lasting fame; or they may simply be easy to memorise.

Many of the poems in this anthology lie in the first category. The collection includes some of the best-known poems in English – and possibly the most famous single poem in the case of Wordsworth's *Daffodils* – as well as others that were once widely known but are now remembered chiefly for their first lines. *The boy stood on the burning deck*, by Felicia Hemans, is one of these, as is Byron's *The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold*. Others in the collection are little known.

However, all the works here, whether famous or not, have been chosen for their memorability in the second sense, of being easy to learn by heart – whether because of catchy rhythm, rhyme, meaning, or all three. The longest poem here is Grey's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, of which even a few stanzas are worth memorizing; many are much shorter.

Why bother to learn poetry? Sometimes it seems you have little choice; lines stick in the head as soon as you read them. Others take more effort, but if you memorise a favourite poem, it may then stay with you – like an unobtrusive but sympathetic friend – for life.

Only one poem by each poet is included in this anthology. Although this necessitated some difficult choices, it means that a wide range of poets is represented. Most of the authors here are British or Irish, but there are also a number of Americans, and a lone Australian.

The poems date from the 14th Century to the 1940s, and are set out in chronological order of the poet's birth. All the works here are in the public domain: this means that most of the 20th century poets eligible for the book died young, and tend to be War poets. Other than that, the subject matter ranges as widely as the authors, taking in love and death, nature, sorrow, joy and courage.

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Anonymous (14th Century)

Maiden in the mor

Maiden in the mor lay—
 in the mor lay—
 Sevenist fulle, sevenist fulle.
 Maiden in the mor lay—
 in the mor lay—
 Sevenistes fulle ant a day.

Welle was hire mete—
 wat was hire mete?
 The primerole ant the, the primerole ant the—
 Welle was hire mete—
 Wat was hire mete?
 The primerole ant the violet.

Welle was hire dryng—
 wat was hire dryng?
 The chelde water of the, the chelde water of the—
 Welle was hire dryng—
 Wat was hire dryng?
 The chelde water of the welle-spring.

Welle was hire bour—
 wat was hire bour?
 The rede rose an te, the rede rose an te—
 Welle was hire bour—
 wat was hire bour?
 The rede rose an te lilie flour.

Notes

mor – moor

sevenist – seven nights

hire mete – her meat, i.e. food

hire dryng – her drink

↑
Anonymous (?14th Century)

A Lyke-Wake Dirge

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
 Every nighte and alle,
 Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
 And Christe receive thy saule.

When thou from hence away art past,
 Every nighte and alle,
 To Whinny-muir thou com'st at laste;
 And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon,
 Every nighte and alle,
 Sit thee down and put them on;
 And Christe receive thy saule.

If hosen and shoon thou ne'er gav'st nane,
 Every nighte and alle,
 The whinnes sall prick thee to the bare bane;
 And Christe receive thy saule.

From Whinny-muir when thou mayst pass,
 Every nighte and alle,
 To Brig o' Dread thou com'st at last;
 And Christe receive thy saule.

From Brig o' Dread when thou mayst pass,
 Every nighte and alle,
 To Purgatory fire thou com'st at last,
 And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gavest meat or drink,
 Every nighte and alle,
 The fire sall never make thee shrink;
 And Christe receive thy saule.

If meat or drink thou never gav'st nane,
 Every nighte and alle,
 The fire will burn thee to the bare bane;
 And Christe receive thy saule.

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
 Every nighte and alle,
 Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
 And Christe receive thy saule.

Notes

This is a traditional song from North Yorkshire.

lyke-wake – *lyke* is a corpse, and *wake* the tradition of watching by the side of the dead.

ae – one, or only

fire and fleet and candle-light – in some versions this is changed to *fire and sleet and candle-light*. However Joseph Wright's *Dialect Dictionary* notes that *fire and flet* (or *fleet*) means fire and house-room, *flet* being the inner part of a house. So *fire and fleet* means much the same as hearth and home.

hosen and shoon – stockings and shoes

whinnes – gorse-bushes

**Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1340–1400)****Merciles Beaute: Captivity**

Your eyen two wol slay me suddenly,
I may the beauty of them not sustain,
So woundeth it though-out my hearte keen.

And but your word will healen hastily
My hearte's wound, while that it is green,
Your eyen two wol slay me suddenly.
I may the beauty of them not sustain.

Upon my troth I say you faithfully,
That you be of my life and death the queen;
For with my death the truthe shall be seen.
Your eyen two wol slay me suddenly,
I may the beauty of them not sustain,
So woundeth it through-out my hearte keen.

Note

Spelling has been partially modernised.

The form of this poem is a rondel, (or poem that 'goes round' with repeating lines). It was a popular form in 14th century France.

↑
John Skelton (c.1460 – 1529)

To Mistress Margaret Hussey

Merry Margaret,
 As midsummer flower,
 Gentle as falcon
 Or hawk of the tower:
 With solace and gladness,
 Much mirth and no madness,
 All good and no badness;
 So joyously,
 So maidenly,
 So womanly
 Her demeaning
 In everything,
 Far, far passing
 That I can indite,
 Or suffice to write
 Of Merry Margaret
 As midsummer flower,
 Gentle as falcon
 Or hawk of the tower.
 As patient and still
 And as full of good will
 As fair Isaphill,
 Coriander,
 Sweet pomander,
 Good Cassander,
 Steadfast of thought,
 Well made, well wrought,
 Far may be sought
 Ere that ye can find
 So courteous, so kind,
 As merry Margaret,
 This midsummer flower,
 Gentle as falcon
 Or hawk of the tower.

Notes

Spelling has been modernised.

demeaning – demeanour

indite – say

Isaphill – Hypsipyle, in Greek legend, a brave princess of Lemnos

pomander – a fragrant ball of spices, sometimes based on an orange, used to sweeten the air

Cassander – Cassandra, a prophetess in Greek mythology

↑
Thomas Wyatt (1503 – 1542)

They Flee from me

They flee from me that sometime did me seek
 With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.
 I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
 That now are wild, and do not remember
 That sometime they put themselves in danger
 To take bread at my hand; and now they range
 Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune, it hath been otherwise
 Twenty times better; but once in special,
 In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
 When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
 And she me caught in her arms long and small,
 Therewith all sweetly did me kiss,
 And softly said, “Dear heart, how like you this?”

It was no dream: I lay broad waking:
 But all is turned, thorough my gentleness,
 Into a strange fashion of forsaking;
 And I have leave to go of her goodness,
 And she also to use newfangledness.
 But since that I so kindly am served,
 I would fain know what she hath deserved.

Note

her arms long and small – her arms long and slender
gentleness – gentlemanly behaviour, courtesy

↑
Sir Philip Sidney 1554 – 1586

Sonnet

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies!
 How silently, and with how wan a face!
 What, may it be that even in heav'nly place
 That busy archer his sharp arrows tries!
 Sure, if that long-with love-acquainted eyes
 Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case,
 I read it in thy looks; thy languish'd grace
 To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.

Then, ev'n of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
 Is constant love deem'd there but want of wit?
 Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
 Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet
 Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
 Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

Notes

busy archer – Cupid, god of love in Roman mythology
descries – here has the older meaning of *proclaims* rather than *perceives*.
want of wit – lack of good sense



Sir Walter Raleigh (1554?–1618)

His Pilgrimage (extract)

Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
 My staff of faith to walk upon,
 My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
 My bottle of salvation,
 My gown of glory, hope's true gage;
 And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.

Blood must be my body's balmer;
 No other balm will there be given;
 Whilst my soul, like quiet palmer,
 Travelleth towards the land of heaven;
 Over the silver mountains,
 Where spring the nectar fountains.
 There will I kiss
 The bowl of bliss;
 And drink mine everlasting fill
 Upon every milken hill.
 My soul will be a-dry before;
 But after it will thirst no more.

Notes

Walter Raleigh (or Raleigh) was a noted sailor and explorer who for a while was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I. He was executed for treason by King James I.
scallop shell – symbol of a pilgrim
gage – pledge

↑
Chidiock Tichborne (c.1558 - 1586)

Elegie, written with his own hand in the Tower before his execution

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,
 My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
 My crop of corn is but a field of tares,
 And all my good is but vain hope of gain.
 The day is past, and yet I saw no sun,
 And now I live, and now my life is done.

My tale was heard, and yet it was not told,
 My fruit is fallen, and yet my leaves are green:
 My youth is spent, and yet I am not old,
 I saw the world, and yet I was not seen.
 My thread is cut and yet it is not spun,
 And now I live, and now my life is done.

I sought my death, and found it in my womb,
 I looked for life, and saw it was a shade,
 I trod the earth, and knew it was my Tomb,
 And now I die, and now I was but made;
 My glass is full, and now my glass is run,
 And now I live, and now my life is done.

Note

Chidiock Tichborne was a Catholic who conspired against Queen Elizabeth I and was executed for treason.

tares – weeds

my glass – hourglass

↑
Anonymous (16th – 17th Century)

Helen of Kirkconnell

I wish I were where Helen lies,
 Night and day on me she cries;
 O that I were where Helen lies,
 On fair Kirkconnell lea!

Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
 And curst the hand that fired the shot,
 When in my arms burd Helen dropt,
 And died to succour me!

O think na ye my heart was sair,
 When my Love dropp'd and spak nae mair!
 There did she swoon wi' meikle care,
 On fair Kirkconnell lea.

As I went down the water side,
 None but my foe to be my guide,
 None but my foe to be my guide,
 On fair Kirkconnell lea;

I lighted down my sword to draw,
 I hackèd him in pieces sma',
 I hackèd him in pieces sma',
 For her sake that died for me.

O Helen fair, beyond compare!
 I'll mak a garland o' thy hair,
 Shall bind my heart for evermair,
 Until the day I dee!

O that I were where Helen lies!
 Night and day on me she cries;
 Out of my bed she bids me rise,
 Says, 'Haste, and come to me!'

O Helen fair! O Helen chaste!
 If I were with thee, I'd be blest,
 Where thou lies low and taks thy rest,
 On fair Kirkconnell lea.

I wish my grave were growing green,
 A winding-sheet drawn owre my een,
 And I in Helen's arms lying,
 On fair Kirkconnell lea.

I wish I were where Helen lies!
 Night and day on me she cries;
 And I am weary of the skies,
 For her sake that died for me.

Note

This version of a famous Scottish Border ballad is taken from *The Oxford Book of Ballads* (1910) ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch.

burd – young lady, noblewoman

meikle care – much distress or pain



Michael Drayton (1563 – 1631)

Sonnet

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.
 Nay, I have done, you get no more of me,
 And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart
 That thus so cleanly I myself can free;
 Shake hands forever, cancel all our vows,
 And when we meet at any time again,
 Be it not seen in either of our brows
 That we one jot of former love retain.
 Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
 When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
 When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
 And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
 Now if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
 From death to life thou mightst him yet recover.



William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

Full Fathom Five

Full fathom five thy father lies:
 Of his bones are coral made;
 Those are pearls that were his eyes:
 Nothing of him that doth fade,
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange;
 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
 Hark! now I hear them,—
 Ding, dong, Bell.

Note

This poem is from Shakespeare's final play, *The Tempest*.



John Donne (1572 – 1631)

Go and catch a falling star

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.

Note

mandrake root – the mandrake plant has a forked root and was thought to resemble a human.

↑
William Drummond (1585 – 1649)

Madrigal

This world a hunting is:
 The prey, poor man; the Nimrod fierce is death;
 His speedy greyhounds are
 Lust, sickness, envy, care,
 Strife that ne'er falls amiss,
 With all those ills which haunt us while we breathe.
 Now if, by chance, we fly
 Of these the eager chase,
 Old age with stealing pace
 Casts up his nets, and there we panting die.

Note

Nimrod – a Biblical king who was a mighty hunter

↑
Lady Mary Wroth (1587 – 1651)

Love, a Child, is ever Crying

Love, a child, is ever crying;
 Please him, and he straight is flying;
 Give him, he the more is craving,
 Never satisfied with having.

His desires have no measure;
 Endless folly is his treasure;
 What he promiseth he breaketh;
 Trust not one word that he speaketh.

He vows nothing but false matter;
 And to cozen you will flatter;
 Let him gain the hand, he'll leave you
 And still glory to deceive you.

He will triumph in your wailing;
 And yet cause be of your failing:
 These his virtues are, and slighter
 Are his gifts, his favours lighter.

Feathers are as firm in staying;
 Wolves no fiercer in their preying;
 As a child then, leave him crying;
 Nor seek him so given to flying.

Notes

Lady Mary Wroth was a celebrated poet of her time who also wrote the novel *Urania*.

cozen – cheat, deceive

**Robert Herrick 1591–1674****To the Virgins, to make much of Time**

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
 Old Time is still a-flying:
 And this same flower that smiles to-day
 To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
 The higher he's a-getting,
 The sooner will his race be run,
 And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
 When youth and blood are warmer;
 But being spent, the worse, and worst
 Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
 And while ye may, go marry,
 For having lost but once your prime,
 You may for ever tarry.

**Francis Quarles (1592 – 1644)****My Beloved is Mine and I am his (extracts)**

Ev'n like two little bank-divided brooks,
 That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams,
 And having ranged and searched a thousand nooks,
 Meet both at length at silver-breasted Thames,
 Where in a greater current they conjoin:
 So I my Best-Beloved's am, so he is mine.

Ev'n so we met; and after long pursuit
 Ev'n so we joined; we both became entire;
 No need for either to renew a suit,
 For I was flax and he was flames of fire:
 Our firm-united souls did more than twine;
 So I my Best-Beloved's am, so he is mine.

* * *

He is my Altar; I, his Holy Place;
 I am his guest; and he, my living food;
 I'm his by penitence; he mine by grace;
 I'm his by purchase; he is mine by blood;
 He's my supporting elm; and I his vine;
 Thus I my Best-Beloved's am, thus he is mine.

He gives me wealth; I give him all my vows;
 I give him songs; he gives me length of days;
 With wreaths of grace he crowns my longing brows,
 And I his temples with a crown of praise,
 Which he accepts: an everlasting sign,
 That I my Best-Beloved's am; that he is mine.

Note

I was flax and he was flames of fire – a reference to the Bible verse:
 “A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till
 He sends forth justice to victory.” (Matthew ch.12 v.20)

**George Herbert (1593 – 1633)****Love**

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
 But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked any thing.

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

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

Note

meat – food of any kind

↑
Anonymous (17th Century)

Love will Find out the Way

Over the mountains
 And over the waves,
 Under the fountains
 And under the graves;
 Under floods that are deepest,
 Which Neptune obey;
 Over rocks that are steepest
 Love will find out the way.

Where there is no place
 For the glow-worm to lie;
 Where there is no space
 For receipt of a fly;
 Where the midge dares not venture
 Lest herself fast she lay;
 If love come, he will enter
 And soon find out his way.

You may esteem him
 A child for his might;
 Or you may deem him
 A coward from his flight;
 But if she whom love doth honour
 Be conceal'd from the day,
 Set a thousand guards upon her,
 Love will find out the way.

Some think to lose him
 By having him confined;
 And some do suppose him,
 Poor thing, to be blind;
 But if ne'er so close ye wall him,
 Do the best that you may,
 Blind love, if so ye call him,
 Will find out his way.

You may train the eagle
 To stoop to your fist;
 Or you may inveigle
 The phoenix of the east;
 The lioness, ye may move her
 To give o'er her prey;
 But you'll ne'er stop a lover:
 He will find out his way.

Note

This ballad was collected by Thomas Percy (1729 – 1811) in his collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. It has been suggested that Percy may have written some of the poem himself.

**Jasper Mayne (1604 – 1672)****Time**

Time is the feather'd thing,
 And, whilst I praise
 The sparklings of thy looks and call them rays,
 Takes wing,
 Leaving behind him as he flies
 An unperceivèd dimness in thine eyes.
 His minutes, whilst they're told,
 Do make us old;
 And every sand of his fleet glass,
 Increasing age as it doth pass,
 Insensibly sows wrinkles there
 Where flowers and roses do appear.
 Whilst we do speak, our fire
 Doth into ice expire,
 Flames turn to frost;
 And ere we can
 Know how our crow turns swan,
 Or how a silver snow
 Springs there where jet did grow,
 Our fading spring is in dull winter lost.
 Since then the Night hath hurl'd
 Darkness, Love's shade,
 Over its enemy the Day, and made
 The world
 Just such a blind and shapeless thing
 As 'twas before light did from darkness spring,
 Let us employ its treasure
 And make shade pleasure:
 Let's number out the hours by blisses,
 And count the minutes by our kisses;
 Let the heavens new motions feel
 And by our embraces wheel;
 And whilst we try the way
 By which Love doth convey
 Soul unto soul,
 And mingling so
 Makes them such raptures know
 As makes them entrancèd lie
 In mutual ecstasy,
 Let the harmonious spheres in music roll!

Notes

This poem comes from Mayne's play *The Amorous War*.

his fleet glass – his swift hour-glass

harmonious spheres – Sun, moon and planets, which in ancient philosophy were thought to move to an inaudible music.



Edmund Waller (1606 – 1687)

Old Age

The seas are quiet when the winds give o'er;
 So calm are we when passions are no more.
 For then we know how vain it was to boast
 Of fleeting things, so certain to be lost.
 Clouds of affection from our younger eyes
 Conceal that emptiness which age descries.

The soul's dark cottage, batter'd and decay'd,
 Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made:
 Stronger by weakness, wiser men become
 As they draw near to their eternal home.
 Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view
 That stand upon the threshold of the new.



John Milton (1608 – 1674)

Satan's Lament (Extract from *Paradise Lost*, Book 4)

Me miserable! which way shall I fly
 Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
 Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
 O then at last relent: is there no place
 Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
 None left but by submission; and that word
 Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame
 Among the Spirits beneath, whom I seduc'd
 With other promises and other vaunts
 Than to submit, boasting I could subdue
 Th' Omnipotent. Ay me, they little know

How dearly I abide that boast so vain,
 Under what torments inwardly I groan:
 While they adore me on the Throne of Hell,
 With Diadem and Sceptre high advanc'd
 The lower still I fall, only supreme
 In misery; such joy Ambition finds.

Note

This passage is part of a speech by Satan, outcast from Heaven, from Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Milton despised rhyming poetry and wrote in blank (i.e. non-rhyming) verse. *Paradise Lost* uses the verse form of iambic pentameters, in which every line contains ten syllables: five unaccented syllables, each followed by an accented one.



Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612 – 1672)

To My Dear and Loving Husband

If ever two were one, then surely we.
 If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.
 If ever wife was happy in a man,
 Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
 I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
 Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
 My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
 Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
 Thy love is such I can no way repay;
 The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
 Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,
 That when we live no more, we may live ever.

Note

Anne Bradstreet emigrated to the New World in 1630, and became one of America's earliest important poets.

↑
Richard Lovelace (1617 – 1657)

To Lucasta. Going to the Wars

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind,
 That from the nunnery
 Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
 To war and arms I fly.

True: a new mistress now I chase,
 The first foe in the field;
 And with a stronger faith embrace
 A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
 As you too shall adore;
 I could not love thee, dear, so much,
 Lov'd I not Honour more.

Note

Richard Lovelace was a supporter of King Charles I and fought on his behalf during the English Civil War.

↑
Henry Vaughan (1621 – 1695)

The World (extract)

I saw Eternity the other night,
 Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
 All calm, as it was bright;
 And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
 Driv'n by the spheres
 Like a vast shadow mov'd; in which the world
 And all her train were hurl'd.
 The dotting lover in his quaintest strain
 Did there complain;
 Near him, his lute, his fancy, and his flights,
 Wit's sour delights,
 With gloves, and knots, the silly snares of pleasure,
 Yet his dear treasure
 All scatter'd lay, while he his eyes did pour
 Upon a flow'r.

Notes

the spheres – the planets, sun and moon

knots – love knots were patterns used in embroidery and decoration



Andrew Marvell (1621 – 1678)

To his Coy Mistress

Had we but world enough, and time,
 This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
 We would sit down and think which way
 To walk and pass our long love's day.
 Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
 Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
 Of Humber would complain. I would
 Love you ten years before the Flood,
 And you should, if you please, refuse
 Till the conversion of the Jews.
 My vegetable love should grow
 Vaster than empires, and more slow;
 An hundred years should go to praise
 Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;
 Two hundred to adore each breast,
 But thirty thousand to the rest;
 An age at least to every part,
 And the last age should show your heart.
 For, Lady, you deserve this state,
 Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
 Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity.
 Thy beauty shall no more be found,
 Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
 My echoing song: then worms shall try
 That long preserved virginity,
 And your quaint honour turn to dust,
 And into ashes all my lust:
 The grave's a fine and private place,
 But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
 And while thy willing soul transpires
 At every pore with instant fires,
 Now let us sport us while we may,
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 Than languish in his slow-chapt power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Thorough the iron gates of life:
 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Notes

Humber – a river in Northern England

slow-chapt – *chaps* are jaws; so slow-devouring



John Dryden (1631 – 1700)

Happy the Man

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



Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661 – 1720)

The Soldier's Death

Trail all your pikes, dispirit every drum,
 March in a slow procession from afar,
 Ye silent, ye dejected men of war!
 Be still the hautboys, and the flute be dumb!
 Display no more, in vain, the lofty banner;
 For see! where on the bier before ye lies
 The pale, the fall'n, the untimely sacrifice
 To your mistaken shrine, to your false idol Honour.

Note

hautboys – oboes, associated with gloomy or funereal music

↑
Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744)

The Quiet Life

Happy the man, whose wish and care
 A few paternal acres bound,
 Content to breathe his native air
 In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
 Whose flocks supply him with attire;
 Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
 In winter, fire.

Blest, who can unconcern'dly find
 Hours, days and years slide soft away
 In health of body, peace of mind,
 Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease
 Together mix'd; sweet recreation,
 And innocence, which most does please
 With meditation.

This let me live, unseen, unknown;
 Thus unlamented let me die;
 Steal from the world, and not a stone
 Tell where I lie.

↑
William Whitehead (1715 – 1785)

The *Je Ne Sais Quoi*

Yes, I'm in love, I feel it now,
 And Celia has undone me;
 And yet I swear I can't tell how
 The pleasing pain stole on me.

'Tis not her face which love creates,
 For there no graces revel;
 'Tis not her shape, for there the fates
 Have rather been uncivil.

'Tis not her air, for sure in that
 There's nothing more than common;
 And all her sense is only chat,
 Like any other woman.

Her voice, her touch, might give th' alarm;
 'Twas both, perhaps, or neither;
 In short, 'twas that provoking charm
 Of Celia altogether.

Note

Je Ne Sais Quoi – French for 'I don't know what'



Thomas Gray (1716- 1771)

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
 The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
 The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
 And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
 Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
 And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
 The moping owl does to the moon complain
 Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,
 Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
 Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
 Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
 The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
 The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
 The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
 No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
 Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
 No children run to lisp their sire's return,
 Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
 Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
 How jocund did they drive their team afield!
 How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,
 The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
 And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
 Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
 The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,
 If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
 Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
 The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
 Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
 Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
 Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
 Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
 Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
 And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
 The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
 The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
 Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
 Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

The applause of listening senates to command,
 The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
 To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
 And read their history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone
 Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
 Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
 And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
 To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
 Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
 With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
 Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
 Along the cool sequestered vale of life
 They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet even these bones from insult to protect
 Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
 With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,
 Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered muse,
 The place of fame and elegy supply:
 And many a holy text around she strews,
 That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
 This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
 Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
 Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
 Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
 Ev'n from the tomb the voice of nature cries,
 Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who mindful of the unhonoured dead
 Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
 If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
 Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
 'Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
 'Brushing with hasty steps the dews away
 'To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
 'That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
 'His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
 'And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
 'Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,
 'Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
 'Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

‘One morn I missed him on the custumed hill,
 ‘Along the heath and near his favourite tree;
 ‘Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
 ‘Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

‘The next with dirges due in sad array
 ‘Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne.
 ‘Approach and read (for thou can’st read) the lay,
 ‘Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.’

The Epitaph

*Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
 A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.
 Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
 And Melancholy marked him for her own.*

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
 Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
 He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
 He gained from Heaven (’twas all he wished) a friend.*

*No farther seek his merits to disclose,
 Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
 (There they alike in trembling hope repose)
 The bosom of his Father and his God.*

Notes.

curfew – bell signalling evening time.

rude forefathers – *rude* here means simple or rustic.

glebe – earth, land

their team – ie. team of horses (or sometimes oxen) drawing the plough.

storied urn – a funeral urn adorned with pictures from legendary stories.

village-Hampden – John Hampden was a 17th century parliamentarian who resisted naval taxes imposed by King Charles I.

wonted – usual

hoary-headed swain – white-haired rustic or countryman.



William Cowper (1731 – 1800)

Light Shining out of Darkness

God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never-failing skill
 He treasures up his bright designs,
 And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
 The clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy, and shall break
 In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
 But trust him for His grace;
 Behind a frowning providence
 He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
 Unfolding every hour:
 The bud may have a bitter taste,
 But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
 And scan his work in vain;
 God is his own interpreter,
 And he will make it plain.

Note

This poem is also sung as a well-known hymn, set to music by William Jones.

↑
Isabel Pagan (1741 – 1821)

Ca' the Yowes

Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
 Ca' them whare the heather grows,
 Ca' them whare the burnie rows,
 My bonnie dearie.

As I gaed down the water side,
 There I met my shepherd lad,
 He rowed me sweetly in his plaid,
 And he ca'd me his dearie.

'Will ye gang down the water side,
 And see the waves sae sweetly glide
 Beneath the hazels spreading wide,
 The moon it shines fu' clearly.'

'I was bred up at nae sic school,
 My shepherd lad, to play the fool;
 And a' the day to sit in dool,
 And naebody to see me.'

'Ye sall get gowns and ribbons meet,
 Cauf-leather shoon upon your feet,
 And in my arms ye'se lie and sleep,
 And ye sall be my dearie.'

'If ye'll but stand to what ye've said,
 I'se gang wi' you, my shepherd lad;
 And ye may row me in your plaid,
 And I sall be your dearie.'

'While waters wimple to the sea,
 While day blinks in the lift sae hie;
 Till clay-cauld death sall blin' my e'e,
 Ye aye shall be my dearie.'

Notes

This poem in Scots dialect was later rewritten by the poet Robert Burns, who seems to have thought it was a traditional song.

yowes – ewes, sheep

knowes – small hills

he rowed me sweetly in his plaid – he wrapped me sweetly in his tartan cloak

dool – misery

ribbons meet – ribbons that are fitting or suitable

I'se gang wi' you – I shall go with you

wimple – meander, or ripple
the lift sae hie – the sky so high
aye – always

↑

Thomas Chatterton (1752 – 1770)

Song from Aella

O sing unto my roundelay,
 O drop the briny tear with me;
 Dance no more at holyday,
 Like a running river be:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed,
 All under the willow-tree.

Black his cryne as the winter night,
 White his rode as the summer snow,
 Red his face as the morning light,
 Cold he lies in the grave below:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed,
 All under the willow-tree.

Sweet his tongue as the throstle's note,
 Quick in dance as thought can be,
 Deft his tabor, cudgel stout;
 O he lies by the willow-tree!
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed,
 All under the willow-tree.

Hark! the raven flaps his wing
 In the brier'd dell below;
 Hark! the death-owl loud doth sing
 To the nightmares, as they go:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed,
 All under the willow-tree.

See! the white moon shines on high;
 Whiter is my true-love's shroud:
 Whiter than the morning sky,
 Whiter than the evening cloud:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed
 All under the willow-tree.

Here upon my true-love's grave
 Shall the barren flowers be laid;
 Not one holy saint to save
 All the coldness of a maid:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed
 All under the willow-tree.

With my hands I'll dent the briers
 Round his holy corse to gre:
 Ouphant fairy, light your fires,
 Here my body still shall be:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed
 All under the willow-tree.

Come, with acorn-cup and thorn,
 Drain my heart's blood away;
 Life and all its good I scorn,
 Dance by night, or feast by day:
 My love is dead,
 Gone to his death-bed
 All under the willow-tree.

Note

Thomas Chatterton was a teenage poet who tried to pass his work off as that of a 14th century poet, Thomas Rowley. He died of suicide, in great poverty, at the age of seventeen.

Chatterton filled his work with archaic spellings which have been removed from this version of the poem. The original version begins:

*O! synge untoe mie roundelaie,
 O! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee...*

cryne – crown, hair

rode – robe?

throstle – song-thrush

tabor – small drum

his holy corse to gre – his holy corpse to grow

ouphant – elfin



William Blake (1757 – 1827)

The Tyger

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
 In the forests of the night,
 What immortal hand or eye
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
 Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
 On what wings dare he aspire?
 What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
 And when thy heart began to beat,
 What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
 In what furnace was thy brain?
 What the anvil? what dread grasp
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
 And water'd heaven with their tears,
 Did he smile his work to see?
 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
 In the forests of the night,
 What immortal hand or eye
 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



Robert Burns (1759 – 1796)

John Anderson, My Jo

John Anderson, my jo, John,
 When we were first acquent,
 Your locks were like the raven,
 Your bonnie brow was brent;
 But now your brow is beld, John,
 Your locks are like the snow;
 But blessings on your frosty pow,
 John Anderson, my jo.

John Anderson, my jo, John,
 We clamb the hill thegither;
 And mony a cantie day, John,
 We've had wi' ane anither:
 Now we maun totter down, John,
 And hand in hand we'll go,
 And sleep thegither at the foot,
 John Anderson, my jo.

Notes

jo – Scots word for a sweetheart

brent – smooth, unwrinkled

beld – bald

pow – head, scalp

cantie – cheerful, pleasant

maun – must



Joanna Baillie (1762 – 1851)

The Outlaw's Song

The chough and crow to roost are gone,
 The owl sits on the tree,
 The hush'd wind wails with feeble moan,
 Like infant charity.
 The wild-fire dances on the fen,
 The red star sheds its ray;
 Uprouse ye then, my merry men!
 It is our opening day.

Both child and nurse are fast asleep,
 And closed is every flower,
 And winking tapers faintly peep
 High from my lady's bower;
 Bewilder'd hinds with shorten'd ken
 Shrink on their murky way;
 Uprouse ye then, my merry men!
 It is our opening day.

Nor board nor garner own we now,
 Nor roof nor latchèd door,
 Nor kind mate, bound by holy vow
 To bless a good man's store;
 Noon lulls us in a gloomy den,
 And night is grown our day;
 Uprouse ye then, my merry men!
 And use it as ye may.

Notes*chough* – a type of crow*tapers* – candles*hinds* – female deer*ken* – recognition, perception*board* – dinner-table*garner* – store of food, granary**Andrew Cherry (1762 – 1812)****The Bay of Biscay, O!**

Loud roared the dreadful thunder,
 The rain a deluge showers,
 The clouds were rent asunder
 By lightning's vivid powers,
 The night both drear and dark,
 Our poor deluded bark
 Till next day there she lay
 In the Bay of Biscay, O!

Now dashed upon the billow,
 Our opening timbers creak,
 Each fears a watery pillow,
 None stops the dreadful leak!
 To cling to slippery shrouds,
 Each breathless seaman crowds,
 As she lay till next day
 In the Bay of Biscay, O!

At length, the wished-for morrow
 Broke through the hazy sky,
 Absorbed in silent sorrow,
 Each heaved a bitter sigh;
 The dismal wreck to view,
 Struck horror to the crew,
 As she lay, on that day,
 In the Bay of Biscay, O!

Her yielding timbers sever,
 Her pitchy seams are rent,
 When Heaven, all-bounteous ever,
 Its boundless mercy sent.
 A sail in sight appears;
 We hail her with three cheers!
 Now we sail, with the gale,
 From the Bay of Biscay, O!

Notes

The Bay of Biscay lies between western France and northern Spain. The area suffers from fierce weather conditions and has had countless shipwrecks as a result.

bark – ship

shrouds – sails

**Samuel Rogers (1763 – 1855)****A Wish**

Mine be a cot beside the hill;
 A bee-hive's hum shall soothe my ear;
 A willowy brook, that turns a mill,
 With many a fall shall linger near.

The swallow, oft, beneath my thatch,
 Shall twitter from her clay-built nest;
 Oft shall the pilgrim lift the latch,
 And share my meal, a welcome guest.

Around my ivy'd porch shall spring
 Each fragrant flower that drinks the dew;
 And Lucy, at her wheel, shall sing
 In russet gown and apron blue.

The village-church among the trees,
 Where first our marriage-vows were given,
 With merry peals shall swell the breeze,
 And point with taper spire to heaven.

Note

cot – cottage

↑
Carolina, Lady Nairne (1766 – 1845)

Gude Nicht, and Joy be wi' ye a'

The best o' joys maun ha'e an end,
 The best o' friends maun part, I trow;
 The langest day will wear away,
 And I maun bid fareweel to you.
 The tear will tell when hearts are fu';
 For words, gin they hae sense ava,
 They're broken, faltering, and few;
 Gude nicht, and joy be wi' you a'.
 O we hae wandered far and wide,
 O'er Scotia's lands o' firth and fell,
 And mony a simple flower we've pu'd,
 And twined it wi' the heather bell.
 We've ranged the dingle and the dell,
 The cot-house and the baron's ha';
 Now we maun tak' a last farewell,
 Gude nicht, and joy be wi' you a'.

My harp, fareweel, thy strains are past,
 Of gleefu' mirth, and heartfelt wae;
 The voice of song maun cease at last,
 And minstrelsy itsel' decay.
 But, oh! whare sorrow canna win,
 Nor parting tears are shed ava,
 May we meet neighbour, kith and kin,
 And joy for aye be wi' us a'!

Notes

maun – must

gin they hae sense ava – if they have sense at all

firth and fell – estuary and hill

dingle – a deep, shady dell or small valley

cot-house – farmworker's cottage

wae – woe, misery

↑
James Hogg (1770 – 1835)

A Boy's Song

Where the pools are bright and deep,
Where the grey trout lies asleep,
Up the river and o'er the lea,
That's the way for Billy and me.

Where the blackbird sings the latest,
Where the hawthorn blooms the sweetest,
Where the nestlings chirp and flee,
That's the way for Billy and me.

Where the mowers mow the cleanest,
Where the hay lies thick and greenest;
There to trace the homeward bee,
That's the way for Billy and me.

Where the hazel bank is steepest,
Where the shadow falls the deepest,
Where the clustering nuts fall free,
That's the way for Billy and me.

Why the boys should drive away
Little maidens from their play,
Or love to banter and fight so well,
That's the thing I never could tell.

But this I know, I love to play,
Through the meadow, among the hay:
Up the water and o'er the lea,
That's the way for Billy and me.

↑
William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)

The Daffodils

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:—
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company:
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Note

Wordsworth wrote this poem after seeing daffodils near Ullswater, in England's Lake District, where they grow wild.

↑
Sir Walter Scott (1771 – 1832)

Proud Maisie

Proud Maisie is in the wood,
 Walking so early;
 Sweet Robin sits on the bush,
 Singing so rarely.

‘Tell me, thou bonny bird,
 When shall I marry me?’
 ‘When six braw gentlemen
 Kirkward shall carry ye.’

‘Who makes the bridal bed,
 Birdie, say truly?’
 ‘The grey-headed sexton,
 That delves the grave duly.’

‘The glowworm o’er grave and stone
 Shall light thee steady;
 The owl from the steeple sing
 Welcome, proud lady!’

Notes

This poem is from Scott’s novel *The Heart of Midlothian*.
braw – able-bodied, strong
kirkward – towards the church

↑
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834)

Kubla Khan

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
 A stately pleasure-dome decree:
 Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
 Through caverns measureless to man
 Down to a sunless sea.
 So twice five miles of fertile ground
 With walls and towers were girdled round:
 And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
 And here were forests ancient as the hills,
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
 Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
 A savage place! as holy and enchanted
 As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
 By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
 And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
 As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
 A mighty fountain momentarily was forced;
 Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
 And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
 Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
 Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
 Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
 And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
 And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
 Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves;
 Where was heard the mingled measure
 From the fountain and the caves.
 It was a miracle of rare device,
 A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
 In a vision once I saw:
 It was an Abyssinian maid,
 And on her dulcimer she played,
 Singing of Mount Abora.
 Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song,
 To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
 That with music loud and long,
 I would build that dome in air,
 That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
 And all who heard should see them there,
 And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
 His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
 Weave a circle round him thrice,
 And close your eyes with holy dread,
 For he on honey-dew hath fed,
 And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Note

Kubla Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, was head of the huge Mongol empire that stretched across Asia in the 13th century, and had a palace in the city of Shang-tu (Xanadu).

↑
Walter Savage Landor (1775 – 1864)

Death

Death stands above me, whispering low
 I know not what into my ear:
 Of his strange language, all I know
 Is, there is not a word of fear.

↑
Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834)

The Old Familiar Faces

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
 In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days,
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
 Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies,
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a Love once, fairest among women:
 Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man:
 Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
 Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
 Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,
 Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
 Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling?
 So might we talk of the old familiar faces—

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
 And some are taken from me; all are departed—
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Note

Lamb was only twenty-three when he wrote this poem; but had suffered from a failed love affair, and had endured tragedy when his older sister Mary, temporarily insane, murdered their mother. He was to look after Mary for the rest of his life.

Friend of my bosom – this is very likely to have been the poet Coleridge, who went to school with Lamb.

**Thomas Moore (1779–1852)****The Minstrel Boy**

The Minstrel-boy to the war is gone,
 In the ranks of death you'll find him;
 His father's sword he has girded on,
 And his wild harp slung behind him.—
 'Land of song!' said the warrior bard,
 'Tho' all the world betrays thee,
 One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard,
 One faithful harp shall praise thee!'

The Minstrel fell! – but the foeman's chain
 Could not bring his proud soul under;
 The harp he loved ne'er spoke again,
 For he tore its chords asunder;
 And said, 'No chains shall sully thee,
 Thou soul of love and bravery!
 Thy songs were made for the pure and free,
 They shall never sound in slavery!'

Note

This poem by the Irish writer Thomas Moore tells a fictional tale. It is nowadays associated with the Irish army.

↑
George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788 – 1824)

The Destruction of Sennacherib

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

Sennacherib was King of Assyria (in modern Iraq) in the 8th Century BCE. He built a place at Ninevah, and attacked Babylon and Jerusalem. The Bible relates how the King of Judah, Hezekiah, warned Sennacherib that the Jewish God would save them from his armies. When Sennacherib mocked him, “King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this. And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace.” (2 Chronicles 3. 20-21)

cohorts – troops

Galilee – the Sea of Galilee is a lake in Israel

Ashur – an ancient city in Assyria

Baal – a god worshipped in many parts of the ancient Middle East

Gentile – non-Jew, i.e. Assyrian

↑
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822)

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land,
 Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
 And on the pedestal these words appear:
 "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Note

Ozymandias is the Greek name for the Pharaoh Ramses II of Egypt, who reigned in the 13th century BCE.

↑
Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793 – 1835)

Casabianca

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 childlike, 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 yet 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 that 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.

Notes

The poem is based on a true event during the Battle of the Nile in 1798, when British ships under Nelson defeated the French fleet. 12 year old Giocante Casabianca was the son of the commander of the French flagship, *L’Orient*. Both father and son were on board the flagship during the battle, and remained even after the ship had caught fire. The boy refused to save himself; both he and his father died when flames reached the guns. and the ship exploded.

pennon – long narrow flag



John Clare (1793 – 1864)

Autumn

I love the fitful gust that shakes
 The casement all the day
 And from the glossy elm tree takes
 The faded leaves away
 Twirling them by the window pane
 With thousand others down the lane

I love to see the shaking twig
 Dance till the shut of eve
 The sparrow on the cottage rig
 Whose chirp would make believe
 That Spring was just now flirting by
 In Summer's lap with flowers to lie

I love to see the cottage smoke
 Curl upwards through the trees
 The pigeons nestled round the cote
 On November days like these
 The cock upon the dunghill crowing
 The mill sails on the heath a-going

The feather from the raven's breast
 Falls on the stubble lea
 The acorns near the old crow's nest
 Drop pattering down the tree
 The grunting pigs that wait for all
 Scramble and hurry where they fall

Notes

John Clare preferred to write without punctuation, although his publishers often added their own to his work.

casement – window

rig – roof

lea – field



John Keats (1795 – 1821)

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

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 dreamed
 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.

Notes

When he wrote this, Keats knew he was suffering from the tuberculosis which had already killed his mother and brother, and from which he was to die two years later at the age of twenty-five.

grot – grotto, cave

gloom – twilight

↑
Thomas Hood (1799 – 1845)

I Remember, I Remember

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 Heaven
 Than when I was a boy.



Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 – 1861)

A Musical Instrument

What was he doing, the great god Pan,
 Down in the reeds by the river?
 Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
 Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
 And breaking the golden lilies afloat
 With the dragon-fly on the river.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
 From the deep cool bed of the river:
 The limpid water turbidly ran,
 And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
 And the dragon-fly had fled away,
 Ere he brought it out of the river.

High on the shore sate the great god Pan,
 While turbidly flowed the river;
 And hacked and hewed as a great god can,
 With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
 Till there was not a sign of a leaf indeed
 To prove it fresh from the river.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan
 (How tall it stood in the river!)
 Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,
 Steadily from the outside ring,
 And notched the poor dry empty thing
 In holes, as he sate by the river.

‘This is the way,’ laughed the great god Pan
 (Laughed while he sate by the river),
 ‘The only way, since gods began
 To make sweet music, they could succeed.’
 Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
 He blew in power by the river.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
 Piercing sweet by the river!
 Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
 The sun on the hill forgot to die,
 And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
 Came back to dream on the river.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
 To laugh as he sits by the river,
 Making a poet out of a man:
 The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,
 For the reed which grows nevermore again
 As a reed with the reeds in the river.

Note

Pan – Greek god of nature and the wild, and of music. He was said to play music on panpipes, which were made from reeds.
scattering ban – *ban* is an old word for a curse, though the poet may be using it as a variant of *bane*, meaning harm or woe.



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882)

The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls

The tide rises, the tide falls,
 The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
 Along the sea-sands damp and brown
 The traveller hastens toward the town,
 And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
 But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
 The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
 Efface the footprints in the sands,
 And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls
 Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
 The day returns, but nevermore
 Returns the traveller to the shore,
 And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Note

hostler – ostler, or stable-man

↑
Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892)

Ulysses

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 enjoyed
 Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
 Through 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 honoured 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 wherethrough
 Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
 As though 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 grey 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 through 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 toiled, 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.
 Though much is taken, much abides; and though
 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.

Notes

Ulysses is the Roman name for Odysseus: the poem is set after the end of Homer's *Odyssey*, when Odysseus is back in his homeland of Ithaca after twenty years' absence at the Trojan War.

Hyades – in Greek mythology, five daughters of the Titan Atlas who were turned into stars; their name means 'The Rainers.'

Happy Isles – in Greek mythology, the Elysian Fields, where heroes dwelt after death.



Edward FitzGerald (1809 – 1883)

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (extract)

LXXI

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

Note

The extract is from FitzGerald's translation of a work by the 11th Century Persian astronomer Omar Khayyam. His version became famous as a poem in its own right.



Frances Anne (Fanny) Kemble (1809 – 1893)

Lines Written by the Seaside

If I believed in death, how sweet a bed
 For such a blessed slumber could I find,
 Beneath the blue and sparkling coverlid
 Of that smooth sea, stirred by no breath of wind.
 Oh if I could but die, and be at rest,
 Thou smiling sea! in thy slow-heaving breast.

But all thy thousand waves quench not the spark
 Immortal, woful, of one human soul;
 Under thy sapphire vault, cold, still, and dark,
 Deep down, below where tides and tempests roll,
 The spirit may not lose its deeper curse,
 It finds no death in the whole universe.

Note

Fanny Kemble was an acclaimed actress and abolitionist who also wrote plays and novels.



Edward Lear (1812 – 1888)

The Jumblies

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.

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 ribbon, by way of a sail,
 To a small tobacco-pipe mast;
 And every one said who saw them go,
 "Oh! 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.

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.

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 coppersy gong,
 In the shade of the mountains brown.
 "O Timballoo! 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.

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 jackdaws,
 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.

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 Terrible 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.

Note

Edward Lear was an artist as well as writing several volumes of nonsense poetry – a genre which, along with Lewis Carroll, he helped to establish.

↑
Robert Browning (1812 – 1889)

Home Thoughts from Abroad

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!

Notes

Browning wrote this poem whilst living in Italy.
dower – gift, endowment

↑
Eliza Cook (1818 – 1889)

Fragment

Say on, that I'm over romantic,
 In loving the wild and the free;
 But the waves of the dashing Atlantic,
 The Alps, and the eagle for me!

The billows, so madly uprearing
 Their heads on the blast-ridden main,
 Mock the hurricane, dauntless, unfearing,
 And roar back the thunder again.

The mountain, right heavenward bearing,
 Half lost in the sun and the snow,
 Can only be trod by the daring:
 The fearful may tremble below.

The eagle is high in its dwelling,
 For ever the tameless, the proud;
 It heeds not the storm-spirits' yelling,
 It swoops through the lightning-fraught cloud.

Tell me not of a soft-sighing lover;
 Such things may be had by the score:
 I'd rather be bride to a rover,
 And polish the rifle he bore.

The storm, with its thunder affrighting;
 The torrent and avalanche high;
 These, these, would my spirit delight in;
 Mid these would I wander and die!

Say on, that I'm over romantic,
 In loving the wild and the free;
 But the waves of the dashing Atlantic,
 The Alps, and the eagle, for me!



Emily Bronte (1818 – 1848)

The Night is Darkening round me

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;
 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.

Note

Many of Emily Brontë's verses were inspired by the imaginary world of Gondal which she shared with her sister Anne; however, it is not clear if this poem is one of these, or is a more personal work.



Charles Kingsley 1819 – 1875

The Sands of Dee

'O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
 And call the cattle home,
 And call the cattle home,
 Across the sands of Dee.'

The western wind was wild and dark with foam,
 And all alone went she.

The western tide crept up along the sand,
 And o'er and o'er the sand,
 And round and round the sand,
 As far as eye could see.

The rolling mist came down and hid the land:
 And never home came she.

'O is it weed, or fish, or floating hair—
 A tress of golden hair,
 A drownèd maiden's hair,
 Above the nets at sea?'

Was never salmon yet that shone so fair
 Among the stakes of Dee.

They row'd her in across the rolling foam,
 The cruel crawling foam,
 The cruel hungry foam,
 To her grave beside the sea.

But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home,
 Across the sands of Dee.

Note

The River Dee flows from North Wales, meeting the sea between Wales and England; it has a wide estuary filled with constantly changing sands.



Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892)

O Captain! My Captain!

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
 The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
 Rise up – for you the flag is flung – for you the bugle trills,
 For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths – for you the shores a-crowding,
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
 The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
 From fearful trip, the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
 But I with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

Notes

The American poet Whitman wrote this poem in response to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, whom he had often seen in Washington and greatly admired.

rack – destruction (as in rack and ruin)



George Eliot 1819 – 80

The Choir Invisible (extracts)

O, may I join the choir invisible
 Of those immortal dead who live again
 In minds made better by their presence; live
 In pulses stirred to generosity,
 In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
 Of miserable aims that end with self,
 In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
 And with their mild persistence urge men's minds
 To vaster issues.

May I reach
 That purest heaven, – be to other souls
 The cup of strength in some great agony,
 Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,
 Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,
 Be the sweet presence of good diffused,
 And in diffusion ever more intense!
 So shall I join the choir invisible,
 Whose music is the gladness of the world.

Note

George Eliot (the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans) is better known as an outstanding novelist of the Victorian era.



Arthur Hugh Clough (1819 – 1861)

Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth

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.

Notes

the fliers – men who are fleeing
the main – the sea



Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888)

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straits;— on the French coast the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand;
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
 Listen! you hear the grating roar
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Notes

Sophocles – ancient author of Greek tragedies in the 5th century BCE.

The Sea of Faith – this phrase, now much used, seems to have first appeared in this poem.

shingles – small stones on a beach



Coventry Patmore (1823 – 1896)

Magna est Veritas

Here, in the little Bay,
 Full of tumultuous life and great repose.
 Where, twice a day,
 The purposeless, glad ocean comes and goes,
 Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town
 I sit me down.
 For want of me the world's course shall not fail;
 When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
 The truth is great, and shall prevail,
 When none cares whether it prevail or not.

Note

Magna est Veritas – Latin for 'Great is the Truth'

↑
William Allingham (1824 – 1889)

The Fairies

Up the airy mountain,
 Down the rushy glen,
 We daren't go a-hunting
 For fear of little men;
 Wee folk, good folk,
 Trooping all together;
 Green jacket, red cap,
 And white owl's feather!

Down along the rocky shore
 Some make their home,
 They live on crispy pancakes
 Of yellow tide-foam;
 Some in the reeds
 Of the black mountain-lake,
 With frogs for their watchdogs,
 All night awake.

High on the hill-top
 The old King sits;
 He is now so old and grey
 He's nigh lost his wits.
 With a bridge of white mist
 Columbkil he crosses,
 On his stately journeys
 From Slieveleague to Rosses;
 Or going up with the music
 On cold starry nights
 To sup with the Queen
 Of the gay Northern Lights.

They stole little Bridget
 For seven years long;
 When she came down again
 Her friends were all gone.
 They took her lightly back,
 Between the night and morrow,
 They thought that she was fast asleep,
 But she was dead with sorrow.
 They have kept her ever since
 Deep within the lake,
 On a bed of fig-leaves,
 Watching till she wake.

By the craggy hillside,
 Through the mosses bare,
 They have planted thorn trees
 For pleasure here and there.
 Is any man so daring
 As dig them up in spite,
 He shall find their sharpest thorns
 In his bed at night.

Up the airy mountain,
 Down the rushy glen,
 We daren't go a-hunting
 For fear of little men;
 Wee folk, good folk,
 Trooping all together;
 Green jacket, red cap,
 And white owl's feather!

Notes

William Allingham was an Irishman, and the places in the poem are in Ireland. However, his little men seem to be neither leprechauns (who are notoriously anti-social) nor the nobler Irish faery race, the Sidhe.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882)

Sudden Light

I have been here before,
 But when or how I cannot tell:
 I know the grass beyond the door,
 The sweet keen smell,
 The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,—
 How long ago I may not know:
 But just when at that swallow's soar
 Your neck turn'd so,
 Some veil did fall,— I knew it all of yore.

Has this been thus before?
 And shall not thus time's eddying flight
 Still with our lives our love restore
 In death's despite,
 And day and night yield one delight once more?

↑
Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1894)

Up-hill

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
 Yes, to the very end.
 Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
 From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
 A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
 May not the darkness hide it from my face?
 You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
 Those who have gone before.
 Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
 They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
 Of labour you shall find the sum.
 Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
 Yea, beds for all who come.

↑
Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886)

Hope

Hope is the thing with feathers
 That perches in the soul,
 And sings the tune without the words
 And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
 And sore must be the storm
 That could abash the little bird
 That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land
 And on the strangest sea;
 Yet never in extremity
 It asked a crumb of me.

↑
Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson) (1832 – 1898)

Jabberwocky

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
 The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
 Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
 The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
 Long time the manxome foe he sought—
 So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
 And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
 The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
 Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
 And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
 The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
 He left it dead, and with its head
 He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
 Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
 O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
 He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

Notes

The poem is from Chapter 1 of Carroll’s novel *Through the Looking Glass* (the sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*). In Chapter 5 Humpty Dumpty explains several words to Alice; for example, *brillig* means four o’clock in the afternoon, a *rath* is a green pig, and *outgrabing* is “something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle.” A few of Carroll’s invented words subsequently became part of the English language – notably *burbled* and *galumphing*.



William Morris (1834 – 1896)

Inscription for an Old Bed

The wind's on the wold
 And the night is a-cold,
 And Thames runs chill
 'Twixt mead and hill.
 But kind and dear
 Is the old house here
 And my heart is warm
 Midst winter's harm.
 Rest then and rest,
 And think of the best
 'Twixt summer and spring,
 When all birds sing
 In the town of the tree,
 And ye lie in me
 And scarce dare move,
 Lest the earth and its love
 Should fade away
 Ere the full of the day.
 I am old and have seen
 Many things that have been;
 Both grief and peace
 And wane and increase.
 No tale I tell
 Of ill or well,
 But this I say:
 Night treadeth on day,
 And for worst or best
 Right good is rest.

Note

One of the Pre-Raphaelite group of writers and artists, William Morris was also a furniture and fabric designer. This poem was embroidered on the hangings around his four-poster bed by his daughter May Morris. It can be seen at Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire.

[↑](#)
Sarah (Sadie) Williams (1837 – 1868)

“There They Buried Him”

Out among the mountains
 Where the breezes blow,
 Where the little blue-bells
 Wave to and fro;
 There I went to bury
 One old self of mine,
 Covered it with mole-earth
 Light and fine,
 And beside it planted
 A wild grape vine.

Out among the mountains
 Again went I,
 Windy rain was flashing
 Across the sky;
 I was sorely weary,
 And I cried in pain,
 “Oh, my self I buried
 Come to life again!”
 Answered to my weeping
 Only falling rain.

Out among the mountains
 Came I once more;
 Summer sun was shining,
 The storms were o'er;
 And a hand that loved me
 Gathered of my vine
 Tender grapes to cheer me,
 Nectar passing wine;
 And two lips that loved me
 Sealèd mine,
 And a heart that loved me
 Healèd mine.

Note

“There They Buried Him” may be a reference to the burial of Abraham and his family in the Bible (Genesis 49:31).

↑
Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)

The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was spectre-grey,
 And Winter's dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.
 The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
 Like strings of broken lyres,
 And all mankind that haunted nigh
 Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,
 His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
 The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
 And every spirit upon earth
 Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
 The bleak twigs overhead
 In a full-hearted evensong
 Of joy illimited;
 An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
 In blast-beruffled plume,
 Had chosen thus to fling his soul
 Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
 Of such ecstatic sound
 Was written on terrestrial things
 Afar or nigh around,
 That I could think there trembled through
 His happy good-night air
 Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
 And I was unaware.

Notes

The poem was originally titled *By the Century's Deathbed, 1900*.
bine-stems – stems of woodbine

↑
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 – 1889)

Sonnet

My own heart let me have more pity on; let
 Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
 Charitable; not live this tormented mind
 With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

I cast for comfort I can no more get
 By groping round my comfortless, than blind
 Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
 Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
 You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
 Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
 At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
 's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather – as skies
 Betweenpie mountains – lights a lovely mile.

Note

Hopkins, a Jesuit priest, used in his innovative verse what he called 'sprung rhythm', based on the accent or stress of words.

Jackself – a term invented by Hopkins, possibly meaning ordinary yet unique self.

Betweenpie mountains – possibly meaning between pied or dappled mountains; or mountains with the comforting peak of a piecrust.

↑
Louisa Sarah Bevington (1845 – 1895)

The Secret Of The Bees

How have you managed it? bright busy bee!
 You are all of you useful, yet each of you free.

What man only talks of, the busy bee does;
 Shares food, and keeps order, with no waste of buzz.

No cell that's too narrow, no squandering of wax,
 No damage to pay, and no rent, and no tax.

No drones kept in honey to look on and prate,
 No property tyrants, no big-wigs of State.

Free access to flowers, free use of all wings;
And when bee-life is threatened, then free use of stings.

No fighting for glory, no fighting for pelf,
Each thrust at the risk of each soldier himself.

Comes over much plenty one summer, you'll see
A lull and a leisure for each busy bee.

No over-work, under-work, glut of the spoil;
No hunger for any, no purposeless toil.

Economy, Liberty, Order, and Wealth! –
Say, busy bee, how you reached Social Health?

(Answer.)

Say rather, why not? It is easier so;
We have all the world open to come and to go.

We haven't got masters, we haven't got money,
We've nothing to hinder the gathering of honey.

The sun and the air and the sweet summer flowers
Attract to spontaneous use of our powers.

Our work is all natural – nothing but play,
For wings and proboscis can go their own way.

We find it convenient to live in one nest,
None hindering other from doing her best.

We haven't a Press, so we haven't got lies,
And it's worth no one's while to throw dust in our eyes.

We haven't among us a single pretence,
And we got our good habits through sheer Common Sense.

Note

pelf – money

William Ernest Henley (1849 - 1903)

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
 Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,
 And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll,
 I am the master of my fate;
 I am the captain of my soul.

Note

Invictus is Latin for unconquered
strait – narrow, confining



Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850 – 1919)

Solitude

Laugh, and the world laughs with you:
 Weep, and you weep alone;
 For the sad old earth
 Must borrow its mirth,
 It 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 want 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 it cannot help you die.

There is room in the halls of pleasure
 For a long and lordly train;
 But one by one
 We must all file on
 Through the narrow aisles of pain.

Note

gall – bitterness



Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 - 1894)

Requiem

Under the wide and starry sky,
 Dig the grave and let me lie.
 Glad did I live and gladly die,
 And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
 Here he lies where he longed to be;
 Home is the sailor, home from sea,
 And the hunter home from the hill.

Note

Stevenson (the Scottish author of *Treasure Island* and other novels) wrote this verse for his own grave, which is in Samoa.



A.E. Housman 1859 – 1936

On Wenlock Edge

On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;
 His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
 The gale, it plies the saplings double,
 And thick on Severn snow the leaves.

'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger
 When Uricon the city stood:
 'Tis the old wind in the old anger,
 But then it threshed another wood.

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman
 At yonder heaving hill would stare:
 The blood that warms an English yeoman,
 The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

There, like the wind through woods in riot,
 Through him the gale of life blew high;
 The tree of man was never quiet:
 Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The gale, it plies the saplings double,
 It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:
 To-day the Roman and his trouble
 Are ashes under Uricon.

Notes

Wenlock Edge is a limestone escarpment in Shropshire, near the border between England and Wales. The Wrekin is a hill nearby, on which there is an Iron Age hill fort once called Uriconio. It seems the name was later transferred along with the inhabitants when they moved to the Roman city of Viroconium (on the site of modern-day Wroxeter).



Amy Levy (1861 – 1889)

New Love, New Life

I.
 She, who so long has lain
 Stone-stiff with folded wings,
 Within my heart again
 The brown bird wakes and sings.

Brown nightingale, whose strain
Is heard by day, by night,
She sings of joy and pain,
Of sorrow and delight.

II.

'Tis true,— in other days
Have I unbarred the door;
He knows the walks and ways—
Love has been here before.

Love blest and love accurst
Was here in days long past;
This time is not the first,
But this time is the last.

↑

A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson (1864 – 1941)

The Last Parade

With never a sound of trumpet,
With never a flag displayed,
The last of the old campaigners
Lined up for the last parade.

Weary they were and battered,
Shoeless, and knocked about;
From under their ragged forelocks
Their hungry eyes looked out.

And they watched as the old commander
Read out to the cheering men
The Nation's thanks, and the orders
To carry them home again.

And the last of the old campaigners,
Sinewy, lean, and spare —
He spoke for his hungry comrades:
"Have we not done our share?"

"Starving and tired and thirsty
We limped on the blazing plain;
And after a long night's picket
You saddled us up again.

“We froze on the windswept kopjes
 When the frost lay snowy-white,
 Never a halt in the daytime,
 Never a rest at night!

“We knew when the rifles rattled
 From the hillside bare and brown,
 And over our weary shoulders
 We felt warm blood run down,

“As we turned for the stretching gallop,
 Crushed to the earth with weight;
 But we carried our riders through it —
 Sometimes, perhaps, too late.

“Steel! We were steel to stand it —
 We that have lasted through,
 We that are old campaigners
 Pitiful, poor, and few.

“Over the sea you brought us,
 Over the leagues of foam:
 Now we have served you fairly
 Will you not take us home?

“Home to the Hunter River,
 To the flats where the lucerne grows;
 Home where the Murrumbidgee
 Runs white with the melted snows.

“This is a small thing, surely!
 Will not you give command
 That the last of the old campaigners
 Go back to their native land?”

They looked at the grim commander,
 But never a sign he made.
 “Dismiss!” and the old campaigners
 Moved off from their last parade.

Notes

Paterson was a popular Australian poet. *The Last Parade* was published in 1902 and may relate to the 2nd Boer War (1899 – 1902) in South Africa, in which Australian soldiers supported the British army against the Boers.

kopjes – small hills in South Africa

Hunter River and *Murrumbidgee* – both rivers in New South Wales, Australia

↑
Sara Teasdale (1864 – 1933)

Moonlight

It will not hurt me when I am old,
 A running tide where moonlight burned
 Will not sting me like silver snakes;
 The years will make me sad and cold,
 It is the happy heart that breaks.

The heart asks more than life can give,
 When that is learned, then all is learned;
 The waves break fold on jewelled fold,
 But beauty itself is fugitive,
 It will not hurt me when I am old.

↑
Arthur Symons (1865 – 1945)

Quest

I chase a shadow through the night,
 A shadow unavailingly;
 Out of the dark, into the light,
 I follow, follow: is it she?

Against the wall of sea outlined,
 Outlined against the windows lit,
 The shadow flickers, and behind
 I follow, follow after it.

The shadow leads me through the night
 To the grey margin of the sea;
 Out of the dark, into the light,
 I follow unavailingly.



W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Notes

Yeats began writing this poem in 1919, soon after the end of the First World War.

gyre – spiral

Spiritus Mundi means spirit of the world, or a universal consciousness.



Ernest Dowson (1867 – 1900)

Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
 There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
 Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
 And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
 Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
 Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
 But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 When I awoke and found the dawn was grey:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
 Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
 Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind,
 But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
 But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
 Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
 And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

Notes

The title, from Horace's Odes, translates as "I am not as I was in the reign of good Cinara." In Horace's poem, the speaker implores Venus to leave him untroubled by love.



Charlotte Mew (1869 – 1928)

The Pedlar

Lend me, a little while, the key
 That locks your heavy heart, and I'll give you back—
 Rarer than books and ribbons and beads bright to see,
 This little Key of Dreams out of my pack.

The road, the road, beyond men's bolted doors,
 There shall I walk and you go free of me,
 For yours lies North across the moors,
 And mine South. To what sea?

How if we stopped and let our solemn selves go by,
 While my gay ghost caught and kissed yours, as ghosts don't do,
 And by the wayside this forgotten you and I
 Sat, and were twenty-two?

Give me the key that locks your tired eyes,
 And I will lend you this one from my pack,
 Brighter than coloured beads and painted books that make men wise:
 Take it. No, give it back!



William Henry Davies 1871 – 1940

Leisure

What is this life if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare?

No time to stand beneath the boughs
 And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
 Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
 Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
 And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
 Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this is if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare.

Note

William Henry Davies was a Welsh-born poet who spent much of his life as a tramp (hobo) in Britain and the USA. He wrote about his American experiences in *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*.



Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872 – 1906)

Sympathy

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!

Note

Dunbar, the son of freed Afro-American slaves, also wrote dialect poetry, novels and essays.



Edward Shillito (1874 – 1948)

Nameless Men

Around me when I wake or sleep,
 Men strange to me their vigils keep;
 And some were boys but yesterday,
 Upon the village green at play.
 Their faces I shall never know;
 Like sentinels they come and go.
 In grateful love I bend the knee
 For nameless men who die for me.

There is in earth or heaven no room
 Where I may flee this dreadful doom.
 Forever it is understood
 I am a man redeemed by blood.
 I must walk softly all my days
 Down my redeemed and solemn ways.
 Christ, take the men I bring to Thee,
 The men who watch and die for me.

Note

Edward Shillito was a pastor during World War One.



Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874 – 1936)

Elegy in a Country Churchyard

The men that worked for England
 They have their graves at home:
 And bees and birds of England
 About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
 Following a falling star,
 Alas, alas for England,
 They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
 In stately conclave met,
 Alas, alas for England
 They have no graves as yet.



Edward Thomas 1878 - 1917

The Owl

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.



Harold Monro (1879 – 1932)

The Silent Pool (stanza V)

Look downward in the silent pool:
The weeds cling to the ground they love;
They live so quietly, are so cool;
They do not need to think, or move.

Look down in the unconscious mind:
There everything is quiet too
And deep and cool, and you will find
Calm growth and nothing hard to do,
And nothing that need trouble you.



Anna Wickham (1884 – 1947)

Divorce

A voice from the dark is calling me.
In the close house I nurse a fire.
Out in the dark, cold winds rush free,
To the rock heights of my desire.
I smother in the house in the valley below,
Let me out to the night, let me go, let me go.
Spirits that ride the sweeping blast,
Frozen in rigid tenderness,
Wait! for I leave the fire at last
My little-love's warm loneliness.
I smother in the house in the valley below.
Let me out to the night, let me go, let me go.

High on the hills are beating drums.
Clear from a line of marching men
To the rock's edge the hero comes
He calls me, and he calls again.
On the hill there is fighting, victory, or quick death.
In the house is the fire, which I fan with sick breath.
I smother in the house in the valley below,
Let me out to the dark, let me go, let me go.

↑
Walter J. Turner (1889 - 1946)

Romance

When I was but thirteen or so
 I went into a golden land,
 Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
 Took me by the hand.

My father died, my brother too,
 They passed like fleeting dreams,
 I stood where Popocatapetl
 In the sunlight gleams.

I dimly heard the master's voice
 And boys far-off at play,
 Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
 Had stolen me away.

I walked in a great golden dream
 To and fro from school—
 Shining Popocatapetl
 The dusty streets did rule.

I walked home with a gold dark boy,
 And never a word I'd say,
 Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
 Had taken my speech away:

I gazed entranced upon his face
 Fairer than any flower—
 O shining Popocatapetl
 It was thy magic hour:

The houses, people, traffic seemed
 Thin fading dreams by day.
 Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
 They had stolen my soul away!

Notes

Chimborazo and *Cotopaxi* are inactive volcanoes of the South American Andes, in modern Ecuador, in a land once ruled by the Inca people. *Popocatapetl* is an active volcano in Mexico.

↑
Isaac Rosenberg (1890 – 1918)

Day (extract)

I saw the face of God to-day,
 I heard the music of his smile,
 And yet I was not far away,
 And yet in Paradise the while.

I lay upon the sparkling grass,
 And God's own mouth was kissing me.
 And there was nothing that did pass
 But blazèd with divinity.

Divine – divine – upon my eyes,
 Upon my hair – divine, divine,
 The fervour of the golden skies,
 The ardent gaze of God on mine.

Let me weave my fantasy
 Of this web like broken glass
 Gleaming through the fretted leaves
 In quaint intricacy,
 Diamond tipping all the grass.

↑
Ivor Gurney (1890 – 1937)

To His Love

He's gone, and all our plans
 Are useless indeed.
 We'll walk no more on Cotswold
 Where the sheep feed
 Quietly and take no heed.

His body that was so quick
 Is not as you
 Knew it, on Severn river
 Under the blue
 Driving our small boat through.

You would not know him now...
 But still he died
 Nobly, so cover him over
 With violets of pride
 Purple from Severn side.

Cover him, cover him soon!
 And with thick-set
 Masses of memoried flowers—
 Hide that red wet
 Thing I must somehow forget.

Notes

Cotswold – the Cotswolds are a rural upland area of western England, famed for being peaceful and picturesque.

Severn river flows from Wales through western England, near the Cotswolds.



Wilfred Owen (1893 – 1918)

Anthem for Doomed Youth

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

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

Note

orisons – prayers

↑
Alun Lewis (1915 – 1944)

Goodbye

So we must say Goodbye, my darling,
 And go, as lovers go, for ever;
 Tonight remains, to pack and fix on labels
 And make an end of lying down together.

I put a final shilling in the gas,
 And watch you slip your dress below your knees
 And lie so still I hear your rustling comb
 Modulate the autumn in the trees.

And all the countless things I shall remember
 Lay mummy-cloths of silence round my head;
 I fill the carafe with a drink of water;
 You say 'We paid a guinea for this bed,'
 And then, 'We'll leave some gas, a little warmth
 For the next resident, and these dry flowers,'
 And turn your face away, afraid to speak
 The big word, that Eternity is ours.

Your kisses close my eyes and yet you stare
 As though God struck a child with nameless fears;
 Perhaps the water glitters and discloses
 Time's chalice and its limpid useless tears.

Everything we renounce except our selves;
 Selfishness is the last of all to go;
 Our sighs are exhalations of the earth,
 Our footprints leave a track across the snow.

We made the universe to be our home,
 Our nostrils took the wind to be our breath,
 Our hearts are massive towers of delight,
 We stride across the seven seas of death.

Yet when all's done you'll keep the emerald
 I placed upon your finger in the street;
 And I will keep the patches that you sewed
 On my old battledress tonight, my sweet.

Note

shilling in the gas – coin in the gas meter



John Gillespie Magee (1922 – 1941)

High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, – and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of – wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there
I've chased the shouting winds along and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark nor ever eagle flew –
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

* * *

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A voice from the dark is calling me
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Full fathom five thy father lies
Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Give me my scallop-shell of quiet
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God moves in a mysterious way
Had we but world enough, and time
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Where the pools are bright and deep
With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies!
With never a sound of trumpet
Yes, I'm in love, I feel it now
Your eyen two wol slay me suddenly

* * *

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