

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 shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command 5
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: 10
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.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

London

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man, 5
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper's cry 10
Every black'ning church appalls,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse 15
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.

WILLIAM BLAKE

Extract from, *The Prelude*

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnacle; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, –
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read 5
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, 10
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps 15
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had 20
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West, 25
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked 30
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will 35
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse, 40
– E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands 45
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; 50
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me! 55

ROBERT BROWNING

Glossary:

Munificence – generosity, charity **ample** – good enough **warrant** - justification, cause **dowry** – money received by the husband from the wife's family when they marry **avowed** – swore, promised **object** – what he wants

The Charge of the Light Brigade

1. Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
2. 'Forward, the Light Brigade!'

Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
3. Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.
4. Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.
5. Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.
6. When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

ALFRED TENNYSON

Exposure

∞

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us ...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

5

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here?

10

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow ...
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,
But nothing happens.

15

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

20

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces -
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
— Is it that we are dying?

25

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed, -
We turn back to our dying.

30

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
For love of God seems dying.

35

Tonight, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands. puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.

40

WILFRED OWEN

Storm on the Island

We are prepared: we build our houses squat,
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.
This wizened earth has never troubled us
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees 5
Which might prove company when it blows full
Blast: you know what I mean – leaves and branches
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale
So that you can listen to the thing you fear
Forgetting that it pummels your house too. 10
But there are no trees, no natural shelter.
You might think that the sea is company,
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs
But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits
The very windows, spits like a tame cat 15
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives
And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo,
We are bombarded by the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

SEAMUS HEANEY

Bayonet Charge

Suddenly he awoke and was running – raw
In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,
Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge
That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing
Bullets smacking the belly out of the air – 5
He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm;
The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye
Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest, –

In bewilderment then he almost stopped –
In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations 10
Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running
Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs
Listening between his footfalls for the reason
Of his still running, and his foot hung like
Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows 15

Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame
And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide
Open silent, its eyes standing out.
He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,
King, honour, human dignity, etcetera 20
Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm
To get out of that blue crackling air
His terror's touchy dynamite.

TED HUGHES

Remains

On another occasion, we get sent out
to tackle looters raiding a bank.
And one of them legs it up the road,
probably armed, possibly not.

Well myself and somebody else and somebody else
are all of the same mind,
so all three of us open fire.
Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear

I see every round as it rips through his life –
I see broad daylight on the other side.
So we've hit this looter a dozen times
and he's there on the ground, sort of inside out,

pain itself, the image of agony.
One of my mates goes by
and tosses his guts back into his body.
Then he's carted off in the back of a lorry.

End of story, except not really.
His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol
I walk right over it week after week.
Then I'm home on leave. But I blink

and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.
Sleep, and he's probably armed, possibly not.
Dream, and he's torn apart by a dozen rounds.
And the drink and the drugs won't flush him out –

he's here in my head when I close my eyes,
dug in behind enemy lines,
not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land
or six-feet-under in desert sand,

but near to the knuckle, here and now,
his bloody life in my bloody hands.

SIMON ARMITAGE

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Jane Weir is an Anglo-Italian writer, designer and editor who grew up in Manchester and Northern Italy. She lived in **Belfast** for several years. 'Poppies' was published in the selection of contemporary war poetry commissioned by **Carol Ann Duffy** for the Guardian in July 2009.

Glossary:

Armistice Sunday – the Sunday closest to 11th November
Crimped –1. push into small ridges 2. limit something in a way that affects it negatively
Spasms – movement of the muscle which you can't control
Blockade – anything that stops people or food entering
Bias – 1. a pattern on clothing that is at a diagonal 2. prejudice or discrimination against a group
Felt – type of cloth made from wool
Intoxicated – drunk, under the influence
Inscriptions – writing carved into stone or metal
Ornamental – decorative, attractive

Jane Weir Interviewed by Luca Brancati (Vicenza 2010, Italy)

How did your poem 'Poppies' come about, what made you write the poem?

The poem came out of sadness and anger, the two emotions combined, and it was written quickly, which is fairly unusual. I don't want to dissect the poem, bit by bit and spell out completely what the poem's about because I think it's important to let the reader have space to make up their own mind, but I suppose if I'm pressed I'd say that the poem is a contemporary war poem; by this I mean 'war' in all its various guises; after all there are lots of different 'wars'.

Anyway, I'd been reading a lot about womens' experiences during the First and Second World Wars and was particularly struck by their diversity; women working not just as nurses or VAD's, women working in munitions factories, shipyards, on the land; women working outside the home environment in a wide variety of occupations. I was aware of the variety of women's voices, in particular Mothers, wives and girlfriends, writing from the 'homefront' to the 'battlefield frontline' in letters. I read letters from all sorts of women, including some by Susan Owen, Wilfred Owen's mother.

At the time the news was full of conflict; Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, and of course we'd had the Balkans, and various 'tribal wars' in Africa... We very rarely hear the women speak. I have two sons myself and I'd read in the newspapers, seen on TV the verdicts from the inquests on soldiers killed in Iraq. Who could forget the harrowing testimonies of the soldiers families, and in particular their Mothers... and I was angry and frustrated at the apathy, or what I perceived as 'voicelessness' and ability to be heard or get any kind of justice. I wanted to write a poem from the point of view of a mother and her relationship with her son, a child who was loved cherished and protected... and it had led to this... heightened and absolute fear that parents experience in letting their children go, the anxiety and ultimately the pain of loss... I hoped to somehow channel all this, convey it into something concise and contemporary, but also historically classic, in terms of universal experience.

I also wanted to 'do' something about what I was witnessing, the futility of war, and in my own way; 'doing' is 'making' a poem, it's my way of participating, and although writing a poem about losing a child, in one way or another, may appear to be ineffective, I believe that speaking out, just as poets have always done about injustice, as did Shelley or Byron or Blake, is part and parcel of what poetry is about, - does that make sense?

You're a textile designer as well as a writer - how do you think this has impacted on your poems?

It's inescapable, its what I do and moulds the way I think and 'see' things. I think in pattern, it shapes my world, not only in the forms I apply to my poems, but in the sounds the poems make when read. 'Poppies' draws upon 'stitch craft', as does the companion poem I wrote to 'Poppies' called 'A Hank of Yellow Wool in a Landscape'.

Appropriating and applying the language of the too often condemned 'domestic' front is, I suppose, a political act. I'm not from the school of women poets who consider we should relegate this aspect of our experience in order to win favour or acceptance by a male establishment which even after the horrific wars of the twentieth century and witnessing their cost in human terms still wage physical conflict with little understanding of the social consequences.

Making a poem for me is like designing a pattern for cloth, all I do as a poet is think through my prints, explore motifs, and colours, and somehow the poems come out, like lengths of cloth.

Poppies

13

Three days before Armistice Sunday
and poppies had already been placed
on individual war graves. Before you left,
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
of yellow bias binding around your blazer. 5

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's
upturned collar, steeled the softening
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
across the tip of your nose, play at
being Eskimos like we did when
you were little. I resisted the impulse
to run my fingers through the gelled
blackthorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt, 15

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated. 20

After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.
Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
and this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves. 25

On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.
The dove pulled freely against the sky,
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear
your playground voice catching on the wind. 30
35

JANE WEIR

War Photographer

In his darkroom he is finally alone
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.
The only light is red and softly glows,
as though this were a church and he
a priest preparing to intone a Mass. 5
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays
beneath his hands, which did not tremble then
though seem to now. Rural England. Home again
to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel, 10
to fields which don't explode beneath the feet
of running children in a nightmare heat.

Something is happening. A stranger's features
faintly start to twist before his eyes,
a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries 15
of this man's wife, how he sought approval
without words to do what someone must
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black-and-white
from which his editor will pick out five or six 20
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where
he earns his living and they do not care.

CAROL ANN DUFFY

Tissue

Paper that lets the light
shine through, this
is what could alter things.
Paper thinned by age or touching,

5

the kind you find in well-used books,
the back of the Koran, where a hand
has written in the names and histories,
who was born to whom,

10

the height and weight, who
died where and how, on which sepia date,
pages smoothed and stroked and turned
transparent with attention.

If buildings were paper, I might

feel their drift, see how easily

they fall away on a sigh, a shift

in the direction of the wind.

15

Maps too. The sun shines through

their borderlines, the marks

that rivers make, roads,

railtracks, mountainfolds,

20

Fine slips from grocery shops

that say how much was sold

and what was paid by credit card

might fly our lives like paper kites.

25

An architect could use all this,
place layer over layer, luminous
script over numbers over line,
and never wish to build again with brick

or block, but let the daylight break

through capitals and monoliths,

through the shapes that pride can make,
find a way to trace a grand design

30

with living tissue, raise a structure

never meant to last,

of paper smoothed and stroked

and thinned to be transparent,

35

turned into your skin.

IMTIAZ DHARKER

The Émigree

There once was a country... I left it as a child
but my memory of it is sunlight-clear
for it seems I never saw it in that November
which, I am told, comes to the mildest city.
The worst news I receive of it cannot break
my original view, the bright, filled paperweight. 5
It may be at war, it may be sick with tyrants,
but I am branded by an impression of sunlight.

The white streets of that city, the graceful slopes
glow even clearer as time rolls its tanks 10
and the frontiers rise between us, close like waves.
That child's vocabulary I carried here
like a hollow doll, opens and spills a grammar.
Soon I shall have every coloured molecule of it.
It may by now be a lie, banned by the state 15
but I can't get it off my tongue. It tastes of sunlight.

I have no passport, there's no way back at all
but my city comes to me in its own white plane.
It lies down in front of me, docile as paper;
I comb its hair and love its shining eyes. 20
My city takes me dancing through the city
of walls. They accuse me of absence, they circle me.
They accuse me of being dark in their free city.
My city hides behind me. They mutter death,
and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight. 25

Checking Out Me History

Dem tell me
Dem tell me
Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history
Blind me to me own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat
dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat
But Toussaint L'Ouverture
no dem never tell me bout dat

*Toussaint
a slave
with vision
lick back
Napoleon
battalion
and first Black
Republic: born
Toussaint de thorn
to de French
Toussaint de beacon
of de Haitian Revolution*

Dem tell me bout de man who discover de balloon
and de cow who jump over de moon
Dem tell me bout de dish ran away with de spoon
but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

*Nanny
see-far woman
of mountain dream
fire-woman struggle
hopeful stream
to freedom river*

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo
but dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492
but what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp
and how Robin Hood used to camp
Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul
but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

*From Jamaica
she travel far
to the Crimean War
she volunteer to go
and even when de British said no
she still brave the Russian snow
a healing star
among the wounded
a yellow sunrise
to the dying*

Dem tell me
Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me
But now I checking out me own history
I carving out me identity

JOHN AGARD

Kamikaze

Her father embarked at sunrise
 with a flask of water, a samurai sword
 in the cockpit, a shaven head
 full of powerful incantations
 and enough fuel for a one-way
 journey into history

5

but half way there, she thought,
 recounting it later to her children,
 he must have looked far down
 at the little fishing boats
 strung out like bunting
 on a green-blue translucent sea

10

and beneath them, arcing in swathes
 like a huge flag waved first one way
 then the other in a figure of eight,
 the dark shoals of fishes
 flashing silver as their bellies
 swivelled towards the sun

15

and remembered how he
 and his brothers waiting on the shore
 built cairns of pearl-grey pebbles
 to see whose withstood longest
 the turbulent inrush of breakers
 bringing their father's boat safe

20

- yes, grandfather's boat – safe
 to the shore, salt-sodden, awash
 with cloud-marked mackerel,
 black crabs, feathery prawns,
 the loose silver of whitebait and once
 a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous.

25

*And though he came back
 my mother never spoke again
 in his presence, nor did she meet his eyes
 and the neighbours too, they treated him
 as though he no longer existed,
 only we children still chattered and laughed*

30

*till gradually we too learned
 to be silent, to live as though
 he had never returned, that this
 was no longer the father we loved.*
 And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered
 which had been the better way to die.

40

BEATRICE GARLAND