

## A Poem A Week!

*I knew a student whose future was bleak.  
They hadn't studied, and they shrieked, "Eek! -  
I need to improve,  
not just self-reprove,  
by reading a poem a week!"*



Part A of your 'Exploring Poetry' paper will ask you to COMPARE a poem from your CONFLICT CLUSTER with a PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN poem. One of the best ways to prepare for this is to become familiar with reading poetry. Below you will find a number of poems based on CONFLICT for you to read.

For best results, read one poem a week. Read the poem once, then read again making mental notes using your S.M.I.L.E approach (Structure, Meaning, Imagery, Language and Effect). For even better results, discuss your thoughts with someone else (Friends? Parents? Countrymen?) – "Two heads are better than one"; "Sharing is caring" etc....

In addition to S.M.I.L.Eing at the poem, ask yourself:

- a. How does this poem relate to conflict?
  - Internal Conflict
  - Conflict between individuals
  - Conflict between groups
  - Conflict between countries
  - Conflict between humans and nature / the planet
- b. Which poem/s from your anthology could you anticipate being required to compare with this poem in Part A? Why?
- c. Does this poem resonate with you? If, "Yes!" go out and seek further poems by the same poet. Remember, in the words of T.S Eliot, "Genuine poetry can communicate before it's understood." Just become familiar with reading poetry: poems are not riddles to be deciphered, but pleasures to be discovered. I said that...

### POEM 1

#### Remains by Simon Armitage

On another occasion, we got 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, and 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.

## **POEM 2**

### **Exposure by Wilfred Owen**

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

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?

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.

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.

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?

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.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;  
Nor 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.

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

### **POEM 3**

#### **Kamikaze by Beatrice Garland**

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

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

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

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

- 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.

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

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

### **POEM 4**

#### **The Emigree by Carol Rumens**

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.  
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  
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  
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.  
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,

## **POEM 5**

### **Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley**

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."

## **POEM 6**

### **The Charge of the Light Brigade by Alfred Tennyson**

I

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.

II

'Forward, the Light Brigade!  
Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
Some one had blunder'd:  
Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

III

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.

IV

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.

V

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.

VI

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!

**POEM 7**

**Drummer Hodge by Thomas Hardy**

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest  
Uncoffined — just as found:  
His landmark is a kopje-crest  
That breaks the veldt around:  
And foreign constellations west  
Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the drummer never knew —  
Fresh from his Wessex home —  
The meaning of the broad Karoo,  
The Bush, the dusty loam,  
And why uprose to nightly view  
Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain  
Will Hodge for ever be;  
His homely Northern breast and brain  
Grow up some Southern tree,  
And strange-eyed constellations reign  
His stars eternally.

## **POEM 8**

### **Strange Meeting by Wilfred Owen**

It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.  
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,—  
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;  
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,  
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."  
"None," said that other, "save the undone years,  
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
After the wildest beauty in the world,  
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
And of my weeping something had been left,  
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.  
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;  
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:  
To miss the march of this retreating world  
Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,  
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
Let us sleep now. . . ."

## **POEM 9**

### **MCMXIV by Philip Larkin**

Those long uneven lines  
Standing as patiently  
As if they were stretched outside  
The Oval or Villa Park,  
The crowns of hats, the sun  
On moustached archaic faces  
Grinning as if it were all  
An August Bank Holiday lark;

And the shut shops, the bleached  
Established names on the sunblinds,

The farthings and sovereigns,  
And dark-clothed children at play  
Called after kings and queens,  
The tin advertisements  
For cocoa and twist, and the pubs  
Wide open all day;

And the countryside not caring:  
The place-names all hazed over  
With flowering grasses, and fields  
Shadowing Domesday lines  
Under wheat's restless silence;  
The differently-dressed servants  
With tiny rooms in huge houses,  
The dust behind limousines;

Never such innocence,  
Never before or since,  
As changed itself to past  
Without a word - the men  
Leaving the gardens tidy,  
The thousands of marriages  
Lasting a little while longer:  
Never such innocence again.

#### **POEM 10**

#### **The Death Of The Ball Turret Gunner by Randall Jarrell**

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,  
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.  
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,  
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.  
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

#### **POEM 11**

#### **Listen by Gillian Clarke**

to the chant that tranced me thirty years ago  
in Samarkand: the call to prayer at dawn;

to that voice again, years and miles from then,  
in the blood-red mountains of Afghanistan;

to the secret placing of a double-bomb  
at a dark hour in a Helmand street;

to the first foot to tread the viper's head,  
the scream that ripped the morning's rising heat;

to the widow's wail as she crouches in the rubble  
over a son, a brother torn apart;

to a mother dumb with shock who locks her door  
and sits alone, taking the news to heart;

to the soldier's words, "It's World War One out here";  
to the rattled air, the growl of the grenade;

to a chanting crowd fisting the foetid air;  
to a silent Wiltshire town at a last parade;

to ruin ripening in poppy fields;  
to barley burnished in the summer air;

to the sound at dusk, cantata of despair,  
the holy call become a howl of prayer.

## **POEM 12**

### **War on Terror by Fred D'Aguiar**

Lasts for as long as nightmares  
paint behind the eyelids

as long as a piece of string  
cut from a navel remains buried under a tamarind tree

as long as radar from a whale  
sounds like my child crying in her sleep

not long after the eyes wash away  
last nights paint

no longer than a piece of string  
tied at a navel

shorter than this war in this time under  
this government that drowns our children in their sleep

## **POEM 13**

### **Untidiness by Amanda Dalton**

*The National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad*

Some time after the looting, the locked gates,  
the US tank stood idle in a gallery,

Mushin Hasan, his head bowed  
in a room of shattered stone,

after some had come back in blankets,  
dustbin bags, the boots of cars,

in pieces - the Bassetki Statue, pulled  
from a cesspool, smeared with grease -

and others recovered from Jordan, Italy,  
France, US, UK, Peru, eBay,

they re-opened the museum,

missing maybe 3 or 11,000  
(depending what you read), missing

the Hatra Heads, the Nimrud Lioness,  
and doubting they'll ever get them back,

those bits of the world,  
bits of the civilised world, scattered.

## **POEM 14**

### **Big Ask by Carol Ann Duffy (In memory of Adrian Mitchell)**

What was it Sisyphus pushed up the hill?  
*I wouldn't call it a rock.*  
Will you solemnly swear on the Bible?  
*I couldn't swear on a book.*  
With which piece did you capture the castle?  
*I shouldn't hazard a rook.*

When did the President give you the date?  
*Nothing to do with Barack!*  
Were 1200 targets marked on a chart?  
*Nothing was circled in black.*  
On what was the prisoner stripped and stretched?  
*Nothing resembling a rack.*

Guantanamo Bay - how many detained?  
*How many grains in a sack?*  
Extraordinary Rendition - give me some names.  
*How many cards in a pack?*  
Sexing the Dossier - name of the game?  
*Poker. Gin Rummy. Blackjack.*

What's your understanding of 'shock' and 'awe'?  
*I didn't plan the attack.*  
Once inside the Mosque, describe what you saw.  
*I couldn't see through the smoke.*  
Your estimate of the cost of the War?  
*I had no brief to keep track.*

Where was Saddam when they found him at last?  
*Maybe holed under a shack.*  
What happened to him once they'd kicked his ass?  
*Maybe he swung from the neck.*  
The WMD ... you found the stash?  
*Well, maybe not in Iraq.*

## **POEM 15**

### **The Grassington Mandala by Ian Duhig**

The photograph, a monk explains,  
shows statues once in Bamiyan;  
near here the Pilgrimage of Grace  
fought Bluff King Henry's Taliban,

where now enlightened refugees  
rebuild their Buddha's house in sand,  
a sand once ground from precious stones;  
they laugh, now statue-dust's as sound.

The sun and moon attend his throne  
surrounded by five jewelled walls;  
a foursquare palace circles both  
(with, on its roof, white parasols),

then rosaries of thunderbolts,  
and rainbow-serpent aureoles;  
each high brocaded gate supports  
two kneeling deer with dharma wheels.

This Mitrukpa Mandala's power,  
to these who travel with belief,  
absolves the karma of who kill  
or are involved in taking life.

The RAF train overhead -  
Jihadists also, up the Dale;  
a homeless monk with steady hands:  
another serpent bites its tail.

## **POEM 16**

### **Landlock by Matthew Hollis**

Rain came rarely to the white wood valley.  
In between times, he did what he could,  
cut rhubarb and gooseberries, brought flowers  
from the hill: camel-thorn in winter, rest-harrow  
in summer, rock-rose, barberry, mimosa.  
He ground wormwood to settle her fever.  
When the trouble was done he would take back the farm,  
plant olive and cedar, build her a home.  
But she thought mostly of the sea -  
the uncommissioned sea -  
wild at her, salt strong -  
not the starving river, brackish and torn -  
a river is never enough.  
One of her wishes was to find her own path,  
but the lowlands were locked down, the plains undone;  
so they climbed, and climbed as one.  
And when she could not walk he carried her  
and when he could not carry her she walked.  
Such as this the days went by, till his strength too was sapped.  
He laid his back against the longer rock  
and set her head that gently in his lap.  
Sleep overtook them on the slope.  
He woke to take the sunlight in his eyes  
and could not see at first the greater distance,  
the strange blue, stain blue light in the distance,  
that seemed every bit to move, impossible, surely,  
a thin drawn band of sea, somewhere meeting sky.  
He raised her head that she might see it done.  
But where she was she had already gone.

## **POEM 17**

### **Inquiry by Carola Luther**

how close how far how deep  
what shade what shape what height  
*these quiet skulls like eggs* how old  
how wide *one hundred thousand*  
which angle which side  
*the walls fall slowly as if half asleep*  
*stepping out of clothes* what's heard  
what's said *her stained abaya*  
from where from when  
*miles for water* what's dug up  
who's missing who's quiet  
*their bed in the crater by the park*  
what number what cost *on the step a baby*  
*his sucking mouth* what's named what's lost  
*on the rubbish mound two girls in black*  
*looking for nylon and Pepsi cans*  
what's counted what's hidden

what's not documented *the boy still searching*  
*for the head of his dog* what's shredded  
what's kept which contractor who's job  
*in the city darkness electric switch click*  
*click* who's friend who's father which cellar  
which jail *underground the oil* what email  
*one perfect apricot in the flattened orchard*  
who's dental record who's record beneath  
*a new sim-card painkillers ninety nine*  
*prayer beads* which faction which cabal  
*sometimes she tries to get to school*  
that firm which consortium *at the widow's stall*  
*petrol by the cup tissues chewing gum*  
who's ring who's tongue *left by the road*  
*in his mascara khol private clothes*  
what's stolen what's found  
*a Sumerian statue from the flipflop man*  
what's ignored *inside there were ants*  
what's replayed *the Sony camcorder*  
*whirring like a watch under her bhurka*  
that's intact what's standing what story  
what rumour *sepsis making its yellow flower*  
which fact which faith *just tea and dates*  
*tea and dates and three small onions*  
*my son has gone the teacher's leaving*  
which airport which building  
*quiet men meeting*

#### **POEM 18**

#### **After the Stealth Bomber by Robert Minhinnick** **(Umm Ghada at the Amiriya Bunker)**

It is years later now  
but time can also run backwards.  
Still she squats in candlelight,  
Umm Ghada in the caravan,  
or in 125 degrees Fahrenheit,  
a cockroach ticking on her divan.

At night  
they come out of the bunker,  
the children, the old people,  
but all a fog of flesh.  
one body with four hundred souls  
is exposed in a photographic flash.  
They pick the wedding rings and wisdom teeth  
from crematorium ash.

Who was it dreamed a stealth bomber?  
Stealth steals.  
Think of a smart bomb.  
Not so smart.  
Where the missiles entered Amiriya  
daylight was star-shaped in the sarcophagus,  
the concrete blasted back,  
all the bodies foaming like phosphorus  
in a bunker in Iraq.

The old women  
took off their shoes  
to welcome the fire that jumped into their mouths.  
How quickly the children  
found themselves unborn.

Yes, stealth steals.  
But still Umm Ghada  
guards. Umm Ghada  
who goads God  
with her grief  
and the ghosts she carries,  
Umm Ghada my guide  
in the charnel house corridors.

What is she but a woman  
in desert black.  
Yet no desert was ever so black  
as the sackcloth that Umm Ghada owns.  
Not the Syrian desert's  
Bedouin black, its cairns  
of cold stones.

### **POEM 19**

#### **Have I Got Old News For You by Daljit Nagra**

You've been mapping the best mortgage  
for our first house in these skint times,  
recalling the latest tracker rate  
you hint we play it safe  
with a five-year fixed.

You're by the telly when Dubya flashes up  
twitching a smirk in his cowboy gear,  
now safely in the past, yet verged  
on a mind-blowing  
thought.

I'm sorry Love, in the head to head,  
my head had gone astray so you were  
second best, it's just that I banked  
on a dead cert gaffe to raise  
us a laugh.

You don't hand me another Bud, but quiz  
my smiles at this sniggery ad-lib game  
of gags (that won your broken  
laughter back then).  
I'm thrown

to our courtship years glued to the smoke of *Guan-  
tanamoww*, *Eyraq*, and of course *Affghanestaan*  
freed by John Simpson for the Crusades,  
way before our daughter  
trode the earth.

### **POEM 20**

#### **Of Course If I Can Help in Any Way by Sean O'Brien**

May we begin? Please tell us what you said  
Or did, or saw the others do or say  
Or see, or write, or somehow intimate.  
We're anxious to be clear on all the facts.  
... But no. You think it's wiser if instead  
You don't do that. You haven't got all day.  
How could we grasp the interests of the state,  
The angel-subtleties its work exacts?  
Are we suggesting you might swerve

From righteousness? Why should we need to know?  
Who do we think we're talking to like this  
When - okay, look - God's asked you to preserve  
His plans from scrutiny? You smile. You go.  
Outside your creatures queue to take the piss.

## **POEM 21**

### **Battle Lines by Carole Satyamurti**

They wear the same boots, the same touching hair-cuts,  
they're smiles on the News, digits on print-out,  
our brave boys;  
names, ranks and numbers, action men  
splitting the night with mind-trash noise.

Below them, the lights are the Fourth of July,  
the screen shows cursors falling, converging  
on other brave men -  
abstract enemies with blanks for faces.  
The mission's to smash them and smash them again.

Each leader works at poses, inflections:  
strong on screen, bluff on the air-waves,  
caring friend.  
Each of them bathes in his own propaganda;  
his currency's lives, and he's plenty to spend.

It's no use praying for some clean ending,  
the God of the cross, of the star, of the crescent  
is deaf and blind.  
The fall-back, an echo of voices from childhood:  
Don't cry big boys. Never mind.

## **POEM 22**

### **St Brides by Jo Shapcott**

There is a tower of the winds as tall  
as this one in another city, a steeple  
filled with fire by the incendiary raids  
of a coalition of the unwilling. Nocturnal  
shocks pound the citizens who survive,  
blast them out of their beds into the streets,  
children bundled under their arms. The gutters flame.  
Dust is alight. I was born in a city

to come and go safely through the boroughs,  
carrying inside me every morning's news: pictures  
of soldiers in places they didn't want  
to understand, made to fight for loose change,  
for the hell of it, for a can of oil. I live here,  
but the smell of print and ashes is in my nose.

## **POEM 23**

### **It could have been by Clare Shaw**

Ali, son of Abdul. 16 months.  
Rocket on house, Sadr City 16.5.2009.

Ali, but for some detail of history,  
this day could have been yours.  
It could have been you this morning,  
stood at the end of your bed,  
eyes still shut, arms held up for your mother,  
who makes sun and all things possible,  
who could, little Ali, be me.

Tony Edward Shiol, 5 years.  
Kidnapped, found strangled, Shikan 12.05.2009.

If God had sneezed or been somehow distracted.  
If that ray of light had shifted  
and you had landed  
with that small, metallic thrill of conception  
as I walked down Euston Road,

then this could have been your morning.  
It could have been me inhaling  
your breath straight from sleep,  
the smell of hot lake and woodsmoke, could  
have  
been  
my tired arm under your neck.

Unnamed baby son of Haider Tariq Sain.  
Car bomb, Nawab Street, Baghdad 7.04.2009.

It could have been you  
shouting "carry"  
at the far top stair of my stairs -

hello stairs  
hello breakfast

- your feet in these shoes  
which do not contain ants;

Unnamed daughter of Captain Saada Mohammed Ali.  
Roadside bomb, Fallujah 20.4.2009.

biting soap  
which smells good  
but does not taste; watching  
the unsteady wonder of bubbles;  
throwing water up into the light.

Unnamed child of Haidar, male, aged 4.  
Suicide bomber, Baghdad 4.1.2009.

then swimming:  
your body held out in my hands;  
the pear-shaped  
weight of your head  
safe away from the pool's sharp side

Sa'adiya Saddam, aged 8, female.  
Shot dead by USA forces. Afak, 7/8 Feb, 2009.

It could have been me on that street  
with you in my hands  
and my hands red and wet  
and my face is a shriek  
and my voice is a house all on fire

But for geography,  
but for biology,  
but for the way  
things happen,  
it could have been

Unnamed female baby of the Abdul-Monim family.  
Shot dead, Balal Ruz 22.1.2009.

you falling,  
you holding your hand up for kissing.

**POEM 24**  
**Poppies by Jane Weir**

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.

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,

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.  
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.

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.

## **POEM 25**

### **When you see millions of the mouthless dead by Charles Sorley**

When you see millions of the mouthless dead  
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,  
Say not soft things as other men have said,  
That you'll remember. For you need not so.  
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know  
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?  
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.  
Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.  
Say only this, 'They are dead.' Then add thereto,  
'Yet many a better one has died before.'  
Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass, should you  
Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,  
It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.  
Great death has made all his for evermore.

## **Poem 26**

### **Marching Men by Majorie Pickthall**

Under the level winter sky  
I saw a thousand Christs go by.  
They sang an idle song and free  
As they went up to Calvary.

Careless of eye and coarse of lip,  
They marched in holiest fellowship.  
That heaven might heal the world, they gave  
Their earth-born dreams to deck the grave.

With souls unpurged and steadfast breath  
They supped the sacrament of death.  
And for each one, far off, apart,  
Seven swords have rent a woman's heart.

## **POEM 27**

### **The Son Clifford Dyment**

I found the letter in a cardboard box,  
Unfamous history. I read the words.  
The ink was frail and brown, the paper dry  
After so many years of being kept.  
The letter was a soldier's, from the front—  
Conveyed his love and disappointed hope  
Of getting leave. It's cancelled now, he wrote.  
My luck is at the bottom of the sea.

Outside the sun was hot; the world looked bright;  
I heard a radio, and someone laughed.  
I did not sing, or laugh, or love the sun,  
Within the quiet room I thought of him,  
My father killed, and all the other men,  
Whose luck was at the bottom of the sea.

**POEM 28****London by William Blake**

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,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls .

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

**POEM 29****No Problem by Benjamin Zephaniah**

I am not de problem  
But I bare de brunt  
Of silly playground taunts  
An racist stunts,  
I am not de problem  
I am a born academic  
But dey got me on de run  
Now I am branded athletic,  
I am not de problem  
If yu give I a chance  
I can teach yu of Timbuktu  
I can do more dan dance,  
I am not de problem  
I greet yu wid a smile  
Yu put me in a pigeon hole  
But I a versatile.  
These conditions may affect me  
As I get older,  
An I am positively sure  
I have no chips on me shoulders,  
Black is not de problem  
Mother country get it right,  
An just for de record,  
Sum of me best friends are white

**POEM 30****My Last Duchess by Robert Browning**

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps  
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps  
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff  
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,  
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,  
The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
The bough of cherries some officious fool  
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
She rode with round the terrace—all and each  
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked  
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked  
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let  
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—  
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
The company below, then. I repeat,  
The Count your master's known munificence  
Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!