

## **Love Armed**

*Aphra Behn*

Love in Fantastic Triumph sat,  
Whilst Bleeding Hearts around him flowed,  
For whom Fresh pains he did Create,  
And strange Tyrannic power he showed;  
From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,  
Which round about, in sport he hurled;  
But 'twas from mine he took desire  
Enough to undo the Amorous World.

From me he took his sighs and tears,  
From thee his Pride and Cruelty;  
From me his Languishments and Fears,  
And every Killing Dart from thee;  
Thus thou and I, the God have armed,  
And set him up a Deity;  
But my poor Heart alone is harmed,  
Whilst thine the Victor is, and free.

## **A Different History**

*Sujata Bhatt*

Great Pan is not dead;  
he simply emigrated  
to India.

Here the gods roam freely,  
disguised as snakes or monkeys;  
every tree is sacred  
and it is a sin  
to be rude to a book.

It is a sin to shove a book aside with your foot,  
a sin to slam books down  
hard on a table,  
a sin to toss one carelessly  
across a room.

You must learn how to turn the pages gently  
without disturbing Sarasvati,  
without offending the tree  
from whose wood the paper was made.

Which language  
has not been the oppressor's tongue?  
Which language  
truly meant to murder someone?  
And how does it happen  
that after the torture,  
after the soul has been cropped  
with a long scythe swooping out  
of the conqueror's face –  
the unborn grandchildren  
grow to love that strange language.

## **The Chimney Sweeper**

*Blake*

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

## Where I Come From

*Elizabeth Brewster*

People are made of places. They carry with them  
hints of jungles or mountains, a tropic grace  
or the cool eyes of sea gazers. Atmosphere of cities  
how different drops from them, like the smell of smog  
or the almost-not-smell of tulips in the spring,  
nature tidily plotted with a guidebook;  
or the smell of work, glue factories maybe,  
chromium-plated offices; smell of subways  
crowded at rush hours.

Where I come from, people  
carry woods in their minds, acres of pine woods;  
blueberry patches in the burned-out bush;  
wooden farmhouses, old, in need of paint,  
with yards where hens and chickens circle about,  
clucking aimlessly; battered schoolhouses  
behind which violets grow. Spring and winter  
are the mind's chief seasons: ice and the breaking of ice.  
A door in the mind blows open, and there blows  
a frosty wind from fields of snow.

## **Report to Wordsworth,**

*Boey Kim Cheng*

You should be here, Nature has need of you.

She has been laid waste. Smothered by the smog,  
the flowers are mute, and the birds are few  
in a sky slowing like a dying clock.

All hopes of Proteus rising from the sea  
have sunk; he is entombed in the waste  
we dump. Triton's notes struggle to be free,  
his famous horns are choked, his eyes are dazed,  
and Neptune lies helpless as beached as a whale,  
while insatiate man moves in for the kill.

Poetry and piety have begun to fail,  
As Nature's mighty heart is lying still.

O see the widening in the sky,  
God is labouring to utter his last cry.

## Lament

*Gillian Clarke*

For the green turtle with her pulsing burden,  
in search of the breeding ground.  
For her eggs laid in their nest of sickness.  
For the cormorant in his funeral silk,  
the veil of iridescence on the sand,  
the shadow on the sea.  
For the ocean's lap with its mortal stain.  
For Ahmed at the closed border.  
For the soldier with his uniform of fire.  
For the gunsmith and the armourer,  
the boy fusilier who joined for the company,  
the farmer's sons, in it for the music.  
For the hook-beaked turtles,  
the dugong and the dolphin,  
the whale struck dumb by the missile's thunder.  
For the tern, the gull and the restless wader,  
the long migrations and the slow dying,  
the veiled sun and the stink of anger.  
For the burnt earth and the sun put out,  
the scalded ocean and the blazing well.  
For vengeance, and the ashes of language.

## **The Cockroach**

*Kevin Halligan*

I watched a giant cockroach start to pace,  
Skirting a ball of dust that road the floor.  
At first he seemed quite satisfied to trace  
A path between the wainscot and the door,  
But soon he turned to jog in crooked rings,  
Circling the rusty table leg and back,  
And flipping right over to scratch his wings-  
As if the victim of a mild attack  
Of restlessness that worsened over time.  
After a while, he climbed an open shelf  
And stopped. He looked uncertain where to go.  
Was this due payment for some vicious crime  
A former life had led to? I don't know  
Except I thought I recognised myself.

## **Follower**

*Seamus Heaney*

My father worked with a horse-plough,  
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung  
Between the shafts and the furrow.  
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.

An expert. He would set the wing  
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.  
The sod rolled over without breaking.  
At the headrig, with a single pluck

Of reins, the sweating team turned round  
And back into the land. His eye  
Narrowed and angled at the ground,  
Mapping the furrow exactly.

I stumbled in his hobnailed wake,  
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;  
Sometimes he rode me on his back  
Dipping and rising to his plod.

I wanted to grow up and plough,  
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.  
All I ever did was follow  
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,  
Yapping always. But today  
It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away

## Storyteller

*Liz Lochhead*

she sat down  
at the scoured table  
in the swept kitchen  
beside the dresser with its cracked delft.  
And every last crumb of daylight was salted away.

No one could say the stories were useless  
for as the tongue clacked  
five or forty fingers stitched  
corn was grated from the husk  
patchwork was pieced  
or the darning was done.

Never the one to slander her shiftless.  
Daily sloven or spotless no matter whether  
Dishwater or tasty was her soup.  
To tell the stories was her work.  
It was like spinning,  
gathering air to the single strongest  
thread. Night in  
she'd have us waiting, held  
breath, for the ending we knew by heart.

And at first light  
as the women stirred themselves to build the fire  
as the peasant's feet felt for clogs  
as thin grey light washed over flat fields  
the stories dissolved in the whorl of the ear  
but they  
hung themselves upside down  
in the sleeping heads of the children  
till they flew again  
in the storytellers night.

## **Before the Sun**

*Charles Mungoshi*

Intense blue morning  
promising early heat  
and later in the afternoon,  
heavy rain.

The bright chips  
fly from the sharp axe  
for some distance through the air,  
arc,  
and eternities later,  
settle down in showers  
on the dewy grass.

It is a big log:  
but when you are fourteen  
big logs  
are what you want.

The wood gives off  
a sweet nose-cleansing odour  
which (unlike sawdust)  
doesn't make one sneeze.

It sends up a thin spiral  
of smoke which later straightens  
and flutes out  
to the distant sky: a signal  
of some sort,  
or a sacrificial prayer.

The wood hisses,  
The sparks fly.

And when the sun  
finally shows up  
in the East like some  
latecomer to a feast  
I have got two cobs of maize  
ready for it.

I tell the sun to come share  
with me the roasted maize  
and the sun just winks  
like a grown-up.

So I go ahead, taking big  
alternate bites:  
one for the sun,  
one for me.  
This one for the sun,  
this one for me:  
till the cobs  
are just two little skeletons  
in the sun.

## **A Married State**

*Katherine Phillips*

A married state affords but little ease  
The best of husbands are so hard to please.  
This in wives' careful faces you may spell  
Though they dissemble their misfortunes well.  
A virgin state is crowned with much content;  
It's always happy as it's innocent.  
No blustering husbands to create your fears;  
No pangs of childbirth to extort your tears;  
No children's cries for to offend your ears;  
Few worldly crosses to distract your prayers:  
Thus are you freed from all the cares that do  
Attend on matrimony and a husband too.  
Therefore Madam, be advised by me  
Turn, turn apostate to love's levity,  
Suppress wild nature if she dare rebel.  
There's no such thing as leading apes in hell.

## **An Essay on Man**

*Alexander Pope*

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of mankind is man.  
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest,  
In doubt to deem himself a god or beast,  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer,  
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little or too much:  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;  
Still by himself abused or disabused;  
Created half to rise and half to fall,  
Great lord of all things, but a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

## **The Carpet-weavers, Morocco**

*Carol Rumens*

The children are at the loom of another world.  
Their braids are oiled and black, their dresses bright.  
Their assorted heights would make a melodious chime.

They watch their flickering knots like television.  
As the garden of Islam grows, the bench will be raised.  
Then they will lace the dark-rose veins of the tree-tops.

The carpet will travel in the merchant's truck.  
It will be spread by the servants of the mosque.  
Deep and soft, it will give when heaped with prayer.

The children are hard at work in the school of days.  
From their fingers the colours of all-that-will-be fly  
and freeze into the frame of all-that-was.

## Sonnet 18

*Bill Shakespeare*

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date;

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

## **Hunting Snake**

*Judith Wright*

Sun-warmed in this late season's grace  
under the autumn's gentlest sky  
we walked, and froze half-through a pace.  
The great black snake went reeling by.

Head down, tongue flickering on the trail  
he quested through the parting grass,  
sun glazed his curves of diamond scale  
and we lost breath to see him pass.

What track he followed, what small food  
fled living from his fierce intent,  
we scarcely thought; still as we stood  
our eyes went with him as he went.

Cold, dark and splendid he was gone  
into the grass that hid his prey.  
We took a deeper breath of day,  
looked at each other, and went on.