Year 1 English Literature (AS)

Component 1: Poetry – Exam 2016 (From “Poems of the Decade” 2011)

KHT 2015
English Literature Component 1 – Poetry and Drama

Introduction

For component 1, students will study poetry and drama – however this booklet is concerned with poetry.

Mode of Assessment

Exam – 2016.
60 % of AS English Literature.

This exam will be 2 hours long and open book – clean copies of the texts to be taken into the examination.

Total of 72 marks available – 24 marks for Section A and 48 marks for Section B.

Two sections: students answer one question from a choice of two on their studied poetry collection in Section A and one question from a choice of two on their studied drama text in Section B.

Section A – One comparative essay question on a named poem from the studied text, plus a free choice of second poem from the selected list. Students will draw on their knowledge of poetic form, language and conventions (A01, A02 + A04 assessed.)

Section B – Drama one essay question (A01, A02, A03 and A04 assessed.)
Overview of Poetry Unit

Students will study a selection of poems from a published poetry text. They will develop their understanding of poetic form, content and meaning and their ability to make links and connections within their studied collection.

Assessment Objectives

Your work for this unit will be marked against the five Assessment Objectives (AOs) outlined below. This is the weighting for both poetry and drama. You must:

AO1 Articulate creative, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology and coherent, accurate written expression 16.8 %

AO2 Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts 16.8%

AO3 Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received 10%

AO4 Explore connections across literary texts 6.6 %

AO5 Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations 10 %
Learning outcomes (Poetry / Drama)

Students are required to:

- Show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and make connections and explore the relationships between texts.
- Show knowledge and understanding of how playwrights use dramatic forms to shape meanings and evoke a response in audiences.
- Show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features and conventions in poetry.
- Show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts, responding critically and creatively.
- Show knowledge of the contexts in which texts have been produced and received.
- Respond to and critically evaluate texts, drawing on their understanding of interpretations by other readers.
- Identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts.
- Communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge understanding and evaluation of texts.
- Use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination.
- Make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, referring accurately and appropriately to texts.
SECTION A: Poetry

Answer ONE question and write your answer in the space provided.

1 Compare the ways in which poets explore the shift from childhood to adulthood in *An Easy Passage* by Julia Copus (on page 47) and one other poem of your choice, from the *Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2002–2011*.

In your answer you should consider the following:

- the poets’ development of themes
- the poets’ use of language and imagery
- the use of other poetic techniques.

(Total for Question 1 = 24 marks)

OR

2 Compare the ways in which poets use ordinary events to explore universal themes in *Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass* by Simon Armitage (on page 16) and one other poem of your choice from the *Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2002–2011*.

In your answer you should consider the following:

- the poets’ development of themes
- the poets’ use of language and imagery
- the use of other poetic techniques.

(Total for Question 2 = 24 marks)
### Paper 1 Mark scheme

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<tr>
<th>Question number</th>
<th>Indicative content</th>
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| 1               | Appropriate selection of poem to accompany *An Easy Passage*, exploring the shift from childhood to adulthood such as *To My Nine-Year-Old Self* by Helen Dunmore. Students may refer to the following in their answers:  
  - the comparative impact of the first-person speaker in one poem and the third-person perspective in the other  
  - the varied effects of structures (e.g. narrative structure of *An Easy Passage*; Dunmore’s imagined dialogue) and how the poets use these to develop their themes  
  - how each poet conveys a sense of change and movement in the course of the poem (“I won’t keep you then.”, Copus’s use of the present tense throughout)  
  - the distant observations of Copus contrasted with the personal and bittersweet tone of Dunmore’s poem (‘nothing in common beyond a few shared years...’)  
  - the impact of the intervention of the speaker’s voice in the rhetorical question (“What can she know of the way the world admits us less and less...?”)  
  - effects of Dunmore’s use of pronouns –“we” and “I” and how they enable subtle shifts in perspective  
  - the absence of imagery in *An Easy Passage* in contrast to Dunmore’s sensual description  
  - how both poets focus on vivid detail to convey the intensity of growing up (“hole-punched aluminum lever”, “shimmering oyster”, “nail varnish”)  
  - consideration of the impact of each poem’s ending. |

Reward any other appropriate poem selection and relevant responses.
<table>
<thead>
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| 2               | Appropriate selection of poem to accompany *Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass* in which poets use ordinary events to explore universal themes such as *A Leisure Centre is Also a Temple of Learning* by Sue Boyle. Students may refer to the following in their answers:  
  • how both poems move from the commonplace (cutting grass; a changing room) towards a much wider perspective (human frailty/mutability)  
  • how the poems create a sense of drama (Armitage’s extended metaphor of the personified chainsaw; Boyle’s dramatic pause before the final lines)  
  • how the poets play with language to create effects (the colloquially masculine diction of “Knocked back a quarter pint...”; the strained sensuality of advertising copy – “Toned every muscle”, “gentle exfoliant”)  
  • a consideration of the different types of imagery used by the poets (e.g. Armitage’s images of battle: “the dead zone...” Boyle’s deliberately hackneyed:”...like a waterfall.”)  
  • the poets’ use of sardonic humour to develop their themes, e.g. the deliberately ‘macho’ vocabulary in Armitage’s description of the chainsaw – “juices ran”, “gunned the trigger”; Boyle’s natural imagery being undercut by “chemicals” and “charlatan”  
  • the effect of the poets’ use of literary/biblical allusions (“Corn in Egypt”, the “bee... sip”” reference to Keats’s *Ode on Melancholy*; Boyle’s Greek chorus)  
  • the reminder at the end of each poem of the limitations of human endeavour (“...we know what happens next.”; “...its man-made dreams...”). |

Reward any other appropriate poem selection and relevant responses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>AO1 = bullet point 1 Descriptor (AO1, AO2, AO4)</th>
<th>AO2 = bullet point 2</th>
<th>AO4 = bullet point 3</th>
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</table>
| Level 1 | 1-4  | Recalls information/descriptive  
• Recalls basic points with few accurate references to texts. Recalls limited concepts and terms. Ideas are unstructured with frequent errors and technical lapses.  
• Uses a highly narrative or descriptive approach. Shows overall lack of understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts and the writer’s craft.  
• Has limited awareness of connections between texts. Describes the texts separately. | | |
| Level 2 | 5-9  | General understanding/approach  
• Makes general points and references texts, though not always securely. Gives general explanation of concepts and terminology. Ideas are organised but writing has errors and technical lapses.  
• Gives surface readings of texts by commenting on straightforward elements. Shows general understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts and the writer’s craft.  
• Gives general connections between texts. Provides straightforward examples. | | |
| Level 3 | 10-14 | Clear understanding/exploration  
• Offers a clear response, providing examples. Accurate use of concepts and terminology. Ideas are expressed with few errors and lapses in expression.  
• Demonstrates clear approach to how meanings are shaped in texts. Has clear knowledge which shows understanding of the writer’s craft.  
• Makes clear connections between texts. Supports with clear examples. | | |
| Level 4 | 15-19 | Consistent application/exploration  
• Constructs a consistent argument with examples, confident structure and precise transitions. Uses appropriate concepts and terminology. Expression is secure with carefully chosen language.  
• Displays a secure understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts. Provides evidence of effective and consistent understanding of the writer’s craft.  
• Makes connections between texts. Uses consistently appropriate examples. | | |
| Level 5 | 20-24 | Discriminating application/exploration  
• Provides a consistently effective argument with textual examples. Applies a discriminating range of concepts and terminology. Secure expression with carefully chosen language and sophisticated transitions.  
• Displays discrimination when evaluating how meanings are shaped in texts. Shows a critical understanding of the writer’s craft.  
• Makes effective connections between texts. Exhibits discriminating use of examples. | | |
Patience Agbabi

Eat Me

When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake,
three layers of icing, home-made,
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,
they said, eat me. And I ate, did
what I was told. Didn’t even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk
round the bed so he could watch my broad
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The bigger the better, he’d say, I like
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,
my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh

too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.
Soon you'll be forty... he whispered, and how could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week. His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed. There was nothing else left in the house to eat.
Simon Armitage

CHAINSAW VERSUS THE PAMPAS GRASS

It seemed an unlikely match. All winter unplugged, grinding its teeth in a plastic sleeve, the chainsaw swung nose-down from a hook in the darkroom under the hatch in the floor. When offered the can it knocked back a quarter-pint of engine oil and juices ran from its joints and threads, oozed across the guide-bar and the maker’s name, into the dry links.

From the summerhouse, still holding one last gulp of last year’s heat behind its double doors, and hung with the weightless wreckage of wasps and flies, moth-balled in spider’s wool… from there, I trailed the day-glo orange power-line the length of the lawn and the garden path, fed it out like powder from a keg, then walked back to the socket and flicked the switch, then walked again and coupled the saw to the flex – clipped them together. Then dropped the safety catch and gunned the trigger.

No gearing up or getting to speed, just an instant rage, the rush of metal lashing out at air, connected to the main. The chainsaw with its perfect disregard, its mood to tangle with cloth, or jewellery, or hair. The chainsaw with its bloody desire, its sweet tooth for the flesh of the face and the bones underneath, its grand plan to kick back against nail or knot and rear up into the brain. I let it flare, lifted it into the sun and felt the hundred beats per second drumming in its heart, and felt the drive-wheel gargle in its throat.
The pampas grass with its ludicrous feathers and plumes. The pampas grass, taking the warmth and light from cuttings and bulbs, sunning itself, stealing the show with its footstools, cushions and tufts and its twelve-foot spears.

This was the sledgehammer taken to crack the nut. Probably all that was needed here was a good pull or shove or a pitchfork to lever it out at its base. Overkill. I touched the blur of the blade against the nearmost tip of a reed – it didn’t exist. I dabbed at a stalk that swooned, docked a couple of heads, dismissed the top third of its canes with a sideways sweep at shoulder height – this was a game. I lifted the fringe of undergrowth, carved at the trunk – plant-juice spat from the pipes and tubes and dust flew out as I ripped into pockets of dark, secret warmth.

To clear a space to work
I raked whatever was severed or felled or torn towards the dead zone under the outhouse wall, to be fired. Then cut and raked, cut and raked, till what was left was a flat stump the size of a manhole cover or barrel lid that wouldn’t be dug with a spade or prized from the earth. Wanting to finish things off I took up the saw and drove it vertically downwards into the upper roots, but the blade became choked with soil or fouled with weeds, or what was sliced or split somehow closed and mended behind,
like cutting at water or air with a knife.
I poured barbecue fluid into the patch and threw in a match – it flamed for a minute, smoked for a minute more, and went out. I left it at that.
In the weeks that came new shoots like asparagus tips sprang up from its nest and by June it was riding high in its saddle, wearing a new crown. Corn in Egypt. I looked on from the upstairs window like the midday moon.

Back below stairs on its hook, the chainsaw seethed. I left it a year, to work back through its man-made dreams, to try to forget. The seamless urge to persist was as far as it got.
Ros Barber

Material

My mother was the hanky queen
when hanky meant a thing of cloth,
not paper tissues bought in packs
from late-night garages and shops,
but things for waving out of trains
and mopping the corners of your grief:
when hankies were material
she’d have one, always, up her sleeve.

Tucked in the wrist of every cardi,
a mum’s embarrassment of lace
embroidered with a V for Viv,
spittled and scrubbed against my face.
And sometimes more than one fell out
as if she had a farm up there
where dried-up hankies fell in love
and mated, raising little squares.

She bought her own; I never did.
Hankies were presents from distant aunts
in boxed sets, with transparent covers
and script initials spelling ponce,
the naifest Christmas gift you’d get –
my brothers too, more often than not,
got male ones: serious, and grey,
and larger, like they had more snot.

It was hankies that closed department stores,
with headscarves, girdles, knitting wool
and trouser presses; homely props
you’d never find today in malls.
Hankies, which demanded irons,
and boiling to be purified
shuttered the doors of family stores
when those who used to buy them died.

And somehow, with the hanky’s loss,
greengrocer George with his dodgy foot
delivering veg from a Comma van
is history, and the friendly butcher
who’d slip an extra sausage in,
the fishmonger whose marble slab
of haddock smoked the colour of yolks
and parcelled rows of local crab

lay opposite the dancing school
where Mrs White, with painted talons,
taught us *When You’re Smiling* from
a stumbling, out of tune piano:
step-together, step-together, step-together,
point! The Annual Talent Show
when every mother, fencing tears,
would whip a hanky from their sleeve
and smudge the rouge from little dears.

Nostalgia only makes me old.
The innocence I want my brood
to cling on to like ten-bob notes
was killed in TV’s lassitude.
And it was me that turned it on
to buy some time to write this poem
and eat bought biscuits I would bake
if I’d commit to being home.

There’s never a hanky up my sleeve.
I raised neglected-looking kids,
the kind whose noses strangers clean.
What awkwardness in me forbids
me to keep tissues in my bag
when handy packs are 50p?
I miss material handkerchiefs, 
their soft and hidden history.

But it isn't mine. I'll let it go. 
My mother too, eventually, 
who died not leaving handkerchiefs 
but tissues and uncertainty: 
and she would say, should I complain 
of the scratchy and disposable, 
that *this is your material* 
to do with, *daughter; what you will.*
Eavan Boland

INHERITANCE

I have been wondering
what I have to leave behind, to give my daughters.

No good offering the view
between here and Three Rock Mountain,
the blueness in the hours before rain, the long haze afterwards.
The ground I stood on was never really mine. It might not ever be theirs.

And gifts that were passed through generations –
silver and the fluid light left after silk – were never given here.

This is an island of waters, inland distances,
with a history of want and women who struggled
to make the nothing which was all they had
into something they could leave behind.

I learned so little from them: the lace bobbin with its braided mesh,
its oat-straw pillow and the wheat-coloured shawl
knitted in one season
to imitate another

are all crafts I never had
and can never hand on. But then again there was a night
I stayed awake, alert and afraid, with my first child
who turned and turned; sick, fretful.

When dawn came I held my hand over the absence of fever,
over skin which had stopped burning, as if I knew the secrets
of health and air, as if I understood them

and listened to the silence
and thought, I must have learned that somewhere.
Sue Boyle

A Leisure Centre Is Also a Temple of Learning

The honey coloured girl in the women’s changing room is absorbed in making her body more beautiful: she has flexed and toned every muscle with a morning swim and showered away the pool chemicals using an aromatic scrub and a gentle exfoliant.

Lithe as a young leopard, she has perfect bone structure: her secret cleft is shaved as neatly as a charlatan’s moustache.

In dreamy abstractedness she moisturises then spray perfumes every part that might be loved. Her long hands move in rhythm like a weaver’s at a loom – tipped throat, underchin, the little kisspoints below her ears, the nuzzle between her breasts, her willow thighs. She brushes her hair so clean it looks like a waterfall.

A bee could sip her.
She is summer cream slipped over raspberries.
She is so much younger than the rest of us.

She should look around.

We twelve are the chorus:

we know what happens next.
John Burnside

History

St Andrews: West Sands; September 2001

Today
    as we flew the kites
– the sand spinning off in ribbons along the beach
and that gasoline smell from Leuchars gusting across
the golf links;
    the tide far out
and quail-grey in the distance;
    people
jogging, or stopping to watch
as the war planes cambered and turned
in the morning light –

today
    – with the news in my mind, and the muffled dread
of what may come –

    I knelt down in the sand
with Lucas
    gathering shells
and pebbles
    finding evidence of life in all this
driftwork:
    snail shells; shreds of razorfish;
smudges of weed and flesh on tideworn stone.

At times I think what makes us who we are
is neither kinship nor our given states
but something lost between the world we own
and what we dream about behind the names
on days like this
our lines raised in the wind
our bodies fixed and anchored to the shore

and though we are confined by property
what tethers us to gravity and light
has most to do with distance and the shapes
we find in water
reading from the book
of silt and tides
the rose or petrol blue
of jellyfish and sea anemone
combining with a child's
first nakedness.

Sometimes I am dizzy with the fear
of losing everything - the sea, the sky,
all living creatures, forests, estuaries:
we trade so much to know the virtual
we scarcely register the drift and tug
of other bodies
scarcely apprehend
the moment as it happens: shifts of light
and weather
and the quiet, local forms
of history: the fish lodged in the tide
beyond the sands;
the long insomnia
of ornamental carp in public parks
captive and bright
and hung in their own
slow-burning
transitive gold;
jamjars of spawn
and sticklebacks
or goldfish carried home
from fairgrounds
to the hum of radio

but this is the problem: how to be alive
in all this gazed-upon and cherished world
and do no harm

        a toddler on a beach
sifting wood and dried weed from the sand
and puzzled by the pattern on a shell

his parents on the dune slacks with a kite
plugged into the sky
        all nerve and line

patient; afraid; but still, through everything
attentive to the irredeemable.
Ciara Carson

The War Correspondent

I

Gallipoli

Take sheds and stalls from Billingsgate, glittering with scaling-knives and fish, the tumbledown outhouses of English farmers' yards that reek of dung and straw, and horses cantering the mewsy lanes of Dublin;

take an Irish landlord's ruinous estate, elaborate pagodas from a Chinese Delftware dish where fishes fly through shrouds and sails and yards of leaking ballast-laden junk's bound for Benares in search of bucket-loads of tea as black as tin;

take a dirty gutter from a back street in Boulogne, where shops and houses teeter so their pitched roofs meet, some chimney stacks as tall as those in Sheffield or Irish round towers, smoking like a fleet of British ironclad destroyers;

take the garlic-oregano-tainted arcades of Bologna, linguini-twists of souks and smells of rotten meat, as labyrinthine as the rifle-factories of Springfield, or the tenements deployed by bad employers who sit in parlours doing business drinking Power's;

then populate this slum with Cypriot and Turk, Armenians and Arabs, British riflemen and French Zouaves, camel-drivers, officers, and sailors, sappers, miners, Nubian slaves, Greek money-changers, plus interpreters who do not know the lingo;
dress them in turbans, shawls of fancy needlework, fedoras, fezzes, sashes, shirts of fine Valenciennes, boleros, pantaloons designed by jobbing tailors, knickerbockers of the ostrich and the pink flamingo, sans-culottes, and outfits even stranger;

requisition slaughter-houses for the troops, and stalls with sherbet, lemonade, and rancid lard for sale, a temporary hospital or two, a jail, a stagnant harbour redolent with cholera, and open sewers running down the streets;

let the staple diet be green cantaloupes swarming with flies washed down with sour wine, accompanied by the Byzantine jangly music of the cithara and the multi-lingual squawks of parakeets –

O landscape riddled with the diamond mines of Kimberley, and all the oubliettes of Trebizond, where opium-smokers doze among the Persian rugs, and spies and whores in dim-lit snugs discuss the failing prowess of the Allied powers,

where prowling dogs sniff for offal beyond the stench of pulped plums and apricots, from which is distilled the brandy they call ‘grape-shot’, and soldiers lie dead or drunk among the crushed flowers – I have not even begun to describe Gallipoli.
Julia Copus

AN EASY PASSAGE

Once she is halfway up there, crouched in her bikini on the porch roof of her family's house, trembling, she knows that the one thing she must not do is to think of the narrow windowsill, the sharp drop of the stairwell; she must keep her mind on the friend with whom she is half in love and who is waiting for her on the blond gravel somewhere beneath her, keep her mind on her and on the fact of the open window, the flimsy, hole-punched, aluminium lever towards which in a moment she will reach with the length of her whole body, leaning into the warm flank of the house. But first she steadies herself, still crouching, the grains of the asphalt hot beneath her toes and fingertips, a square of petrified beach. Her tiny breasts rest lightly on her thighs. – What can she know of the way the world admits us less and less the more we grow? For now both girls seem lit, as if from within, their hair and the gold stud earrings in the first one’s ears; for now the house exists only for them, set back as it is from the long, grey eye of the street, and far away from the mother who does not trust her daughter with a key, the workers about their business in the drab electroplating factory over the road, far too, most far, from the flush-faced secretary who, with her head full of the evening class she plans to take, or the trip of a lifetime, looks up now from the stirring omens of the astrology column at a girl – thirteen if she’s a day – standing in next to nothing in the driveway opposite, one hand flat against her stomach, one
shielding her eyes to gaze up at a pale calf,
a silver anklet and the five neat *shimmering-oyster*-painted toenails of an outstretched foot
which catch the sunlight briefly like the
flash of armaments before
dropping gracefully into the shade of the house.
Tishani Doshi

The Deliverer

Our Lady of the Light Convent, Kerala

The sister here is telling my mother
How she came to collect children
Because they were crippled or dark or girls.

Found naked in the streets,
Covered in garbage, stuffed in bags,
Abandoned at their doorstep.

One of them was dug up by a dog,
Thinking the head barely poking above the ground
Was bone or wood, something to chew.

This is the one my mother will bring.

*

Milwaukee Airport, USA

The parents wait at the gates.
They are American so they know about ceremony
And tradition, about doing things right.

They haven’t seen or touched her yet.
Don’t know of her fetish for plucking hair off hands,
Or how her mother tried to bury her.

But they are crying.
We couldn’t stop crying, my mother said,
Feeling the strangeness of her empty arms.

*
This girl grows up on video tapes,
Sees how she's passed from woman
To woman. She returns to twilight corners.

To the day of her birth,
How it happens in some desolate hut
Outside village boundaries

Where mothers go to squeeze out life,
Watch body slither out from body,

Feel for penis or no penis,
Toss the baby to the heap of others,

Trudge home to lie down for their men again.
Carol Ann Duffy

The Map-Woman

A woman's skin was a map of the town
where she'd grown from a child.
When she went out, she covered it up
with a dress, with a shawl, with a hat,
with mitts or a muff, with leggings, trousers
or jeans, with an ankle-length cloak, hooded
and fingertip-sleeved. But — birthmark, tattoo —
the A-Z street-map grew, a precise second skin,
broad if she binged, thin when she slimmed,
a precis of where to end or go back or begin.

Over her breast was the heart of the town,
from the Market Square to the Picture House
by way of St Mary's Church, a triangle
of alleys and streets and walks, her veins
like shadows below the lines of the map, the river
an artery snaking north to her neck. She knew
if you crossed the bridge at her nipple, took a left
and a right, you would come to the graves,
the grey-haired teachers of English and History,
the soldier boys, the Mayors and Councillors,

the beloved mothers and wives, the nuns and priests,
their bodies fading into the earth like old print
on a page. You could sit on a wooden bench
as a wedding pair ran, ringed, from the church,
confetti skittering over the marble stones,
the big bell hammering hail from the sky, and wonder
who you would marry and how and where and when
you would die; or find yourself in the coffee house
nearby, waiting for time to start, your tiny face
trapped in the window's bottle-thick glass like a fly.
And who might you see, short-cutting through the Grove to the Square – that line there, the edge of a fingernail pressed on her flesh – in the rain, leaving your empty cup, to hurry on after calling their name? When she showered, the map gleamed on her skin, blue-black ink from a nib. She knew you could scoot down Greengate Street, huddling close to the High House, the sensible shops, the Swan Hotel, till you came to the Picture House, sat in the musty dark watching the Beatles run for a train or Dustin Hoffman screaming *Elaine! Elaine! Elaine!* or the spacemen in *2001* floating to Strauss. She sponged, soaped, scrubbed; the prison and hospital stamped on her back, the park neat on her belly, her navel marking the spot where the empty bandstand stood, the river again, heading south, clear as an operation scar, the war memorial facing the railway station where trains sighed on the platforms, pining for Glasgow, London, Liverpool. She knew you could stand on the railway bridge, waving goodbye to strangers who stared as you vanished into the belching steam, tasting future time on the tip of your tongue. She knew you could run the back way home – there it was on her thigh – taking the southern road then cutting off to the left, the big houses anchored behind their calm green lawns, the jewels of conkers falling down at your feet, then duck and dive down Nelson and Churchill and Kipling and Milton Way until you were home.

She didn’t live there now. She lived down south, abroad, en route, up north, on a plane or train or boat, on the road, in hotels, in the back of cabs, on the phone; but the map was under her stockings,
under her gloves, under the soft silk scarf at her throat, under her chiffon veil, a delicate braille. Her left knee marked the grid of her own estate. When she knelt she felt her father's house pressing into the bone, heard in her head the looped soundtrack of then—a tennis ball repeatedly thumping a wall,

an ice-cream van crying and hurrying on, a snarl of children's shrieks from the overgrown land where the houses ran out. The motorway groaned just out of sight. She knew you could hitch from Junction 13 and knew of a girl who had not been seen since she did; had heard of a kid who'd run across all six lanes for a dare before he was tossed by a lorry into the air like a doll. But the motorway was flowing away, was a roaring river of metal and light, cheerio, au revoir, auf wiedersehen, ciao.

She stared in the mirror as she got dressed, both arms raised over her head, the roads for east and west running from shoulder to wrist, the fuzz of woodland or countryside under each arm. Only her face was clear, her fingers smoothing in cream, her baby-blue eyes unsure as they looked at themselves. But her body was certain, an inch to the mile, knew every nook and cranny, cul-de-sac, stile, back road, high road, low road, one-way street of her past. There it all was, back to front in the glass. She piled on linen, satin, silk, leather, wool, perfume and mousse and went out. She got in a limousine. The map perspired under her clothes. She took a plane. The map seethed on her flesh. She spoke in a foreign tongue. The map translated everything back to herself. She turned out the light and a lover's hands caressed the map in the dark from north to south,
lost tourists wandering here and there, all fingers
and thumbs, as their map flapped in the breeze.

So one day, wondering where to go next,
she went back, drove a car for a night and a day,
till the town appeared on her left, the stale cake
of the castle crumbled up on the hill; and she hired
a room with a view and soaked in the bath.
When it grew dark, she went out, thinking
she knew the place like the back of her hand,
but something was wrong. She got lost in arcades,
in streets with new names, in precincts
and walkways, and found that what was familiar
was only facade. Back in her hotel room, she stripped
and lay on the bed. As she slept, her skin sloughed
like a snake’s, the skin of her legs like stockings, silvery,
sheer, like the long gloves of the skin of her arms,
the papery camisole from her chest a perfect match
for the tissuely socks of the skin of her feet. Her sleep
peeled her, lifted a honeymoon thong from her groin,
a delicate bra of skin from her breasts, and all of it
patterned A to Z; a small cross where her parents’ skulls
grinned at the dark. Her new skin showed barely a mark.

She woke and spread out the map on the floor. What
was she looking for? Her skin was her own small ghost,
a shroud to be dead in, a newspaper for old news
to be read in, gift-wrapping, litter, a suicide letter.
She left it there, dressed, checked out, got in the car.
As she drove, the town in the morning sun glittered
behind her. She ate up the miles. Her skin itched,
like a rash, like a slow burn, felt stretched, as though
it belonged to someone else. Deep in the bone
old streets tunnelled and burrowed, hunting for home.
Ian Duhig

THE LAMMAS HIRELING

After the fair, I'd still a light heart
And a heavy purse, he struck so cheap.
And cattle doted on him: in his time
Mine only dropped heifers, fat as cream.
Yields doubled. I grew fond of company
That knew when to shut up. Then one night,

Disturbed from dreams of my dear late wife,
I hunted down her torn voice to his pale form.
Stock-still in the light from the dark lantern,
Stark-naked but for the fox-trap biting his ankle,
I knew him a warlock, a cow with leather horns.
To go into the hare gets you muckle sorrow,

The wisdom runs, muckle care. I levelled
And blew the small hour through his heart.
The moon came out. By its yellow witness
I saw him fur over like a stone mossing.
His lovely head thinned. His top lip gathered.
His eyes rose like bread. I carried him

In a sack that grew lighter at every step
And dropped him from a bridge. There was no
Splash. Now my herd's elf-shot. I don't dream
But spend my nights casting ball from half-crowns
And my days here. Bless me, Father, I have sinned.
It has been an hour since my last confession.
Helen Dunmore

To My Nine-Year-Old Self

You must forgive me. Don't look so surprised, perplexed, and eager to be gone, balancing on your hands or on the tightrope. You would rather run than walk, rather climb than run rather leap from a height than anything.

I have spoiled this body we once shared. Look at the scars, and watch the way I move, careful of a bad back or a bruised foot. Do you remember how, three minutes after waking we'd jump straight out of the ground floor window into the summer morning?

That dream we had, no doubt it's as fresh in your mind as the white paper to write it on. We made a start, but something else came up - a baby vole, or a bag of sherbet lemons - and besides, that summer of ambition created an ice-lolly factory, a wasp trap and a den by the cesspit.

I'd like to say that we could be friends but the truth is we have nothing in common beyond a few shared years. I won't keep you then. Time to pick rosehips for tuppence a pound, time to hide down scared lanes from men in cars after girl-children,

or to lunge out over the water on a rope that swings from that tree long buried in housing - but no, I shan't cloud your morning. God knows I have fears enough for us both -
I leave you in an ecstasy of concentration
slowly peeling a ripe scab from your knee
to taste it on your tongue.
UA Fanthorpe

A Minor Role

I'm best observed on stage,
Propping a spear, or making endless
Exits and entrances with my servant's patter,
Yes, sir. O no, sir. If I get
These midget moments wrong, the monstrous fabric
Shrinks to unwanted sniggers.

But my heart's in the unobtrusive,
The waiting-room roles: driving to hospitals,
Parking at hospitals. Holding hands under
Veteran magazines; making sense
Of consultants' monologues; asking pointed
Questions politely; checking dosages,
Dates; getting on terms with receptionists;
Sustaining the background music of civility.

At home in the street you may see me
Walking fast in case anyone stops:
O, getting on, getting better my formula
For well-meant intrusiveness.

At home,
Thinking ahead: Bed? A good idea!
(Bed solves a lot); answer the phone,
Be wary what I say to it, but grateful always;
Contrive meals for a hunger-striker; track down
Whimsical soft-centred happy-all-the-way-through novels;
Find the cat (mysteriously reassuring);
Cancel things, tidy things; pretend all's well,
Admit it's not.

Learn to conjugate all the genres of misery:
Tears, torpor, boredom, lassitude, yearnings
For a simpler illness, like a broken leg.
Enduring ceremonial delays. Being referred
Somewhere else. Consultant’s holiday. Saying Thank you
For anything to everyone
  Not the star part.
And who would want it? I jettison the spear,
The servant’s tray, the terrible drone of Chorus:
Yet to my thinking this act was ill-advised
It would have been better to die*. No it wouldn’t!

I am here to make you believe in life.

*Chorus: from Oedipus Rex, trans EF Watling
Vicki Feaver

The Gun

Bringing a gun into a house changes it.

You lay it on the kitchen table, stretched out like something dead itself: the grainy polished wood stock jutting over the edge, the long metal barrel casting a grey shadow on the green-checked cloth.

At first it's just practice: perforating tins dangling on orange string from trees in the garden. Then a rabbit shot clean through the head.

Soon the fridge fills with creatures that have run and flown. Your hands reek of gun oil and entrails. You trample fur and feathers. There's a spring in your step; your eyes gleam like when sex was fresh.

A gun brings a house alive.
I join in the cooking: jointing
and slicing, stirring and tasting –
excited as if the King of Death
had arrived to feast, stalking
out of winter woods,
his black mouth
sprouting golden crocuses.
Leontia Flynn

The Furthest Distances I've Travelled

Like many folk, when first I saddled a rucksack,
feeling its weight on my back –
the way my spine
curved under it like a meridian –

I thought: Yes. This is how
to live. On the beaten track, the sherpa pass, between
   Krakow
and Zagreb, or the Siberian white
cells of scattered airports,

it came clear as over a tannoy
that in restlessness, in anonymity:
was some kind of destiny.

So whether it was the scare stories about Larium
 – the threats of delirium
and baldness – that led me, not to a Western Union
wiring money with six words of Lithuanian,

but to this post office with a handful of bills
or a giro; and why, if I'm stuffing smalls
hastily into a holdall, I am less likely
to be catching a Greyhound from Madison to Milwaukee

than to be doing some overdue laundry
is really beyond me.

However,
when, during routine evictions, I discover
alien pants, cinema stubs, the throwaway
comment – on a Post-it – or a tiny stowaway
pressed flower amid bottom drawers,
I know these are my souvenirs

and, from these crushed valentines, this unravelled
sports sock, that the furthest distances I’ve travelled
have been those between people. And what survives
of holidaying briefly in their lives.
Roderick Ford

GIUSEPPE

My Uncle Giuseppe told me
that in Sicily in World War Two,
in the courtyard behind the aquarium,
where the bougainvillea grows so well,
the only captive mermaid in the world
was butchered on the dry and dusty ground
by a doctor, a fishmonger, and certain others.

She, it, had never learned to speak
because she was simple, or so they’d said.
But the priest who held one of her hands
while her throat was cut,
said she was only a fish, and fish can’t speak.
But she screamed like a woman in terrible fear.

And when they took a ripe golden roe
from her side, the doctor said
this was proof she was just a fish
and anyway an egg is not a child,
but refused when some was offered to him.

Then they put her head and her hands
in a box for burial
and someone tried to take her wedding ring,
but the others stopped him,
and the ring stayed put.

The rest they cooked and fed to the troops.
They said a large fish had been found on the beach.

Starvation forgives men many things,
my uncle, the aquarium keeper, said,
but couldn’t look me in the eye,
for which I thank God.
Seamus Heaney

OUT OF THE BAG

I
All of us came in Doctor Kerlin’s bag.
He’d arrive with it, disappear to the room
And by the time he’d reappear to wash

Those nosy, rosy, big, soft hands of his
In the scullery basin, its lined insides
(The colour of a spaniel’s inside lug)

Were empty for all to see, the trap-sprung mouth
Unsnibbed and gaping wide. Then like a hypnotist
Unwinding us, he’d wind the instruments

Back into their lining, tie the cloth
Like an apron round itself,
Darken the door and leave

With the bag in his hand, a plump ark by the keel…
Until the next time came and in he’d come
In his fur-lined collar that was also spaniel-coloured

And go stooping up to the room again, a whiff
Of disinfectant, a Dutch interior gleam
Of waistcoat satin and highlights on the forceps.

Getting the water ready, that was next—
Not plumping hot, and not lukewarm, but soft,
Sud-luscious, saved for him from the rain-butt

And savoured by him afterwards, all thanks
Denied as he towelled hard and fast,
Then held his arms out suddenly behind him
To be squired and silk-lined into the camel coat.  
At which point he once turned his eyes upon me,  
Hyperborean, beyond-the-north-wind blue,  

Two peepholes to the locked room I saw into  
Every time his name was mentioned, skimmed  
Milk and ice, swabbed porcelain, the white  

And chill of tiles, steel hooks, chrome surgery tools  
And blood dreeps in the sawdust where it thickened  
At the foot of each cold wall. And overhead  

The little, pendent, teat-hued infant parts  
Strung neatly from a line up near the ceiling –  
A toe, a foot and shin, an arm, a cock  

A bit like the rosebud in his buttonhole.  

2  
Poeta doctus Peter Levi says  
Sanctuaries of Asclepius (called asclepions)  
Were the equivalent of hospitals  

In ancient Greece. Or of shrines like Lourdes,  
Says poeta doctus Graves. Or of the cure  
By poetry that cannot be coerced,  

Say I, who realized at Epidaurus  
That the whole place was a sanatorium  
With theatre and gymnasium and baths,  

A site of incubation, where ‘incubation’  
Was technical and ritual, meaning sleep  
When epiphany occurred and you met the god...  

Hatless, groggy, shadowing myself  
As the thrifier I was in an open-air procession  
In Lourdes in ’56
When I nearly fainted from the heat and fumes,
Again I nearly fainted as I bent
To pull a bunch of grass and hallucinated

Doctor Kerlin at the steamed-up glass
Of the scullery window, starting in to draw
With his large pink index finger dot-faced men

With button-spots in a straight line down their fronts
And women with dot breasts, giving them all
A set of droopy sausage-arms and legs

That soon began to run. And then as he dipped and laved
In the generous suds again, miraculum:
The baby bits all came together swimming

Into his soapy big hygienic hands
And I myself came to, blinded with sweat,
Blinking and shaky in the windless light.

Bits of the grass I pulled I posted off
To one going in to chemotherapy
And one who had come through. I didn’t want

To leave the place or link up with the others.
It was midday, mid-May, pre-tourist sunlight
In the precincts of the god,

The very site of the temple of Asclepius.
I wanted nothing more than to lie down
Under hogweed, under seeded grass

And to be visited in the very eye of the day
By Hygeia, his daughter, her name still clarifying
The haven of light she was, the undarkening door.
The room I came from and the rest of us all came from
Stays pure reality where I stand alone,
Standing the passage of time, and she’s asleep

In sheets put on for the doctor, wedding presents
That showed up again and again, bridal
And usual and useful at births and deaths.

Me at the bedside, incubating for real,
Peering, appearing to her as she closes
And opens her eyes, then lapses back

Into a faraway smile whose precinct of vision
I would enter every time, to assist and be asked
In that hoarsened whisper of triumph,

‘And what do you think
Of the new wee baby the doctor brought for us all
When I was asleep?’
Alan Jenkins

Effects

I held her hand, that was always scarred
From chopping, slicing, from the knives that lay in wait
In bowls of washing-up, that was raw,
The knuckles reddened, rough from scrubbing hard
At saucepan, frying pan, cup and plate
And giving love the only way she knew,
In each cheap cut of meat, in roast and stew,
Old-fashioned food she cooked and we ate;
And I saw that they had taken off her rings,
The rings she’d kept once in her dressing-table drawer
With faded snapshots, long-forgotten things
(Scent-sprays, tortoise-shell combs, a snap or two
From the time we took a holiday ‘abroad’)
But lately had never been without, as if
She wanted everyone to know she was his wife
Only now that he was dead. And her watch? –
Classic ladies’ model, gold strap – it was gone,
And I’d never known her not have that on,
Not in all the years they sat together
Watching soaps and game shows I’d disdain
And not when my turn came to cook for her,
Chops or chicken portions, English, bland,
Familiar flavours she said she preferred
To whatever ‘funny foreign stuff’
Young people seemed to eat these days, she’d heard;
Not all the weeks I didn’t come, when she sat
Night after night and stared unseeing at
The television, at her inner weather,
Heaved herself upright, blinked and poured
Drink after drink, and gulped and stared – the scotch
That, when he was alive, she wouldn’t touch,
That was her way to be with him again;
Not later in the psychiatric ward,
Where she blinked unseeing at the wall, the nurses
(Who would steal anything, she said), and dreamt
Of when she was a girl, of the time before
I was born, or grew up and learned contempt,
While the TV in the corner blared
To drown some ‘poor soul’s’ moans and curses,
And she took her pills and blinked and stared
As the others shuffled round, and drooled, and swore...
But now she lay here, a thick rubber band
With her name on it in smudged black ink was all she wore
On the hand I held, a blotched and crinkled hand
Whose fingers couldn’t clasp mine any more
Or falteringly wave, or fumble at my sleeve –
The last words she had said were Please don’t leave
But of course I left; now I was back, though she
Could not know that, or turn her face to see
A nurse bring the little bag of her effects to me.
Robert Minhinnick

**The Fox in the National Museum of Wales**

He scans the frames but doesn’t stop,
this fox who has come to the museum today,
his eye in the renaissance
and his brush in the Baroque.

Between dynasties his footprints
have still to fade, between the Shan and the Yung,
the porcelain atoms shivering at his touch,
ah, lighter than the emperor’s breath, drinking rice wine from
the bowl,
daintier than the eunuch pouring wine.

I came as quickly as I could
but already the fox had left the Industrial Revolution behind,
his eye has swept the age of atoms,
the Taj Mahal within the molecule.

The fox is in the fossils and the folios, I cry.
The fox is in Photography and the Folk Studies Department.
The fox is in the flux of the foyer,
the fox is in the flock,
the fox is in the flock.

Now the fox sniffs at the dodo
and at the door of Celtic orthography.
The grave-goods, the chariots, the gods of darkness,
he has made their acquaintance on previous occasions.

There, beneath the leatherbacked turtle he goes,
the turtle black as an oil drum,
under the skeleton of the whale he skedaddles,
the whalebone silver as bubblewrap.
Through the light of Provence moves the fox, through the Ordovician era and the Sumerian summer, greyblue the brush on him, this one who has seen so much, blood on the bristles of his mouth, and on his suit of iron filings the air fans like silk.

Through the Cubists and the Surrealists this fox shimmies surreptitiously, past the artist who has sawn himself in half under the formaldehyde sky goes this fox shiny as a silver fax in his fox coat, for at a foxtrot travels this fox backwards and forwards in the museum.

Under the bells of *Brugmansia* that lull the Ecuadoran botanists to sleep, over the grey moss of Iceland further and further goes this fox, passing the lambs at the feet of Jesus, through the tear in Dante’s cloak.

How long have I legged it after his legerdemain, this fox in the labyrinth, this fox that never hurries yet passes an age in a footfall, this fox from the forest of the portrait gallery to Engineering’s cornfield sigh?

I will tell you this. He is something to follow, this red fellow. This fox I foster – he is the future.
No one else
has seen him yet.
But they are closing
the iron doors.
Sinead Morrissey

Genetics

My father's in my fingers, but my mother's in my palms.  
I lift them up and look at them with pleasure -  
I know my parents made me by my hands.

They may have been repelled to separate lands,  
to separate hemispheres, may sleep with other lovers,  
but in me they touch where fingers link to palms.

With nothing left of their togetherness but friends  
who quarry for their image by a river,  
at least I know their marriage by my hands.

I shape a chapel where a steeple stands.  
And when I turn it over,  
my father's by my fingers, my mother's by my palms

demure before a priest reciting psalms.  
My body is their marriage register.  
I re-enact their wedding with my hands.

So take me with you, take up the skin's demands  
for mirroring in bodies of the future.  
I'll bequeath my fingers, if you bequeath your palms.  
We know our parents make us by our hands.
Andrew Motion

FROM THE JOURNAL OF A DISAPPOINTED MAN

I discovered these men driving a new pile into the pier. There was all the paraphernalia of chains, pulleys, cranes, ropes and, as I said, a wooden pile, a massive affair, swinging over the water on a long wire hawser. Everything else was in the massive style as well, even the men; very powerful men; very ruminative and silent men ignoring me.

Speech was not something to interest them, and if they talked at all it was like this – ‘Let go’, or ‘Hold tight’: all monosyllables. Nevertheless, by paying close attention to the obscure movements of one working on a ladder by the water’s edge, I could tell that for all their strength and experience these men were up against a great difficulty.

I cannot say what. Every one of the monsters was silent on the subject – baffled I thought at first, but then I realised indifferent and tired, so tired of the whole business.

The man nearest to me, still saying nothing but crossing his strong arms over his chest, showed me that for all he cared the pile could go on swinging until the crack of Doom.

I should say I watched them at least an hour and, to do the men justice, their slow efforts

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to overcome the secret problem did continue – then gradually slackened and finally ceased.

One massive man after another abandoned his position and leaned on the iron rail to gaze down like a mystic into the water. No one spoke; no one said what they saw;

though one fellow did spit, and with round eyes followed the trajectory of his brown bolus (he had been chewing tobacco) on its slow descent into the same depths.

The foreman, and the most original thinker, smoked a cigarette to relieve the tension. Afterwards, and with a heavy kind of majesty, he turned on his heel and walked away.

With this eclipse of interest, the incident was suddenly closed. First in ones and twos, then altogether, the men followed. That left the pile still in mid-air, and me of course.
Daljit Nagra

LOOK WE HAVE COMING TO DOVER!

'So various, so beautiful, so new....'
Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach'

Stowed in the sea to invade
the alfresco lash of a diesel-breeze
ratcheting speed into the tide, brunt with
gobfuls of surf phlegmed by cushy come-and-go
tourists prow’d on the cruisers, lording the ministered waves.

Seagull and shoal life
vexing their blarnies upon our huddled
camouflage past the vast crumble of scummed
cliffs, scamming on mulch as thunder unbladders
yobbish rain and wind on our escape hutch’d in a Bedford van.

Seasons or years we reap
inland, unclocked by the national eye
or stabs in the back, teemed for breathing
sweeps of grass through the whistling asthma of parks,
burdened, ennobled – poling sparks across pylon and pylon.

Swarms of us, grafting in
the black within shot of the moon’s
spotlight, banking on the miracle of sun –
span its rainbow, passport us to life. Only then
can it be human to hoick ourselves, bare-faced for the clear.

Imagine my love and I,
our sundry others, Blair’d in the cash
of our beeswax’d cars, our crash clothes, free,
we raise our charged glasses over unparasol’d tables
East, babbling our lingoes, flecked by the chalk of Britannia!
Sean O’Brien

**Fantasia on a Theme of James Wright**

There are miners still
In the underground rivers
Of West Moor and Palmersville.

There are guttering cap-lamps bound up in the roots
Where the coal is beginning again.
They are sinking slowly further

In between the shiftless seams,
To black pools in the bed of the world.
In their long home the miners are labouring still –

Gargling dust, going down in good order,
Their black-braided banners aloft,
Into flooding and firedamp, there to inherit

Once more the tiny corridors of the immense estate
They line with prints of Hedley’s *Coming Home*.
We hardly hear of them.

There are the faint reports of spent economies,
Explosions in the ocean floor,
The thud of iron doors sealed once for all

On prayers and lamentation,
On pragmatism and the long noyade
Of a class which dreamed itself

Immortalized by want if nothing else.
The singing of the dead inside the earth
Is like the friction of great stones, or like the rush
Of water into newly opened darkness. My brothers,
The living will never persuade them
That matters are otherwise, history done.
Ciaran O’Driscoll

Please Hold

This is the future, my wife says.
We are already there, and it’s the same
as the present. Your future, here, she says.
And I’m talking to a robot on the phone.
The robot is giving me countless options,
none of which answer to my needs.
Wonderful, says the robot
when I give him my telephone number.
And Great, says the robot
when I give him my account number.
I have a wonderful telephone number
and a great account number,
but I can find nothing to meet my needs
on the telephone, and into my account
(which is really the robot’s account)
goes money, my money, to pay for nothing.
I’m paying a robot for doing nothing.
This call is free of charge, says the robot.
Yes but I’m paying for it, I shout,
out of my wonderful account
into my great telephone bill.
Wonderful, says the robot.
And my wife says, This is the future.
I’m sorry, I don’t understand, says the robot.
Please say Yes or No.
Or you can say Repeat or Menu.
You can say Yes, No, Repeat or Menu,
or you can say Agent if you’d like to talk
to someone real, who is just as robotic.
I scream Agent! and am cut off,
and my wife says, This is the future.
We are already there and it’s the same
as the present. Your future, here, she says.
And I’m talking to a robot on the phone,
and he is giving me no options
in the guise of countless alternatives.
We appreciate your patience. Please hold.
Eine Kleine Nachtmusik. Please hold.
Eine Kleine Nachtmusik. Please hold.
Eine fucking Kleine Nachtmusik.
And the robot transfers me to himself.
Your call is important to us, he says.
And my translator says, This means
your call is not important to them.
And my wife says, This is the future.
And my translator says, Please hold
means that, for all your accomplishments,
the only way you can now meet your needs
is by looting. Wonderful, says the robot.

Please hold. Please grow old. Please grow cold.
This is the future. Please hold.
Ruth Padel

YOU, SHIVA, AND MY MUM

Shall I tell how she went to India
At the age of eighty
For a week in the monsoon

Because her last unmarried son
Was getting married to a girl
With a mask of yellow turmeric on her face

At the shrine of Maa Markoma
In the forest where Orissa’s last
Recorded human sacrifice took place?

How this mother of mine rode a motorbike,
Pillion, up a leopard-and-leeches path
Through jungle at full moon,

Getting off to shove away
The sleeping buffalo,
Puddled shaves of sacred calf?

How she who hates all frills
Watched her feet painted scarlet henna,
Flip-flop pattern between the toes

And backward swastikas at heel, without a murmur?
How she climbed barefoot to Shiva
Up a rock-slide – where God sat

Cross-legged, navy blue,
On a boulder above his cave,
One hand forbidding anyone impure,
Or wearing leather, to come in?
How she forded Cobra River
In a hundred degrees at noon

To reach the God’s familiar – his little bull of stone,
A pinky blaze of ribbons, bells, hibiscus –
And, lifelong sceptic that she is,

The eyes of all the valley on her – Tribal, Hindu,
Atheist and Christian – bowed? Shall I tell how you
Laughed fondly at me for my pride

In her? How I wait on the miracle
Of your breath in my ear? Shall I tell
Them? Yes. Tell that.
George Szirtes

Song

for Helen Suzman

Nothing happens until something does.  
Everything remains just as it was  
And all you hear is the distant buzz  
Of nothing happening till something does.

A lot of small hands in a monstrous ball  
can make the air vibrate  
and even shake the wall;  
a voice can break a plate  
or glass, and one pale feather tip  
the balance on a sinking ship.

It’s the very same tune that has been sung  
time and again by those  
whose heavy fate has hung  
on the weight that they oppose,  
the weight by which are crushed  
the broken voices of the hushed.

But give certain people a place to stand  
a lever, a fulcrum, a weight,  
however small the hand,  
the object however great,  
it is possible to prove  
that even Earth may be made to move.

Nothing happens until something does,  
and hands, however small,  
fill the air so the buzz  
of the broken fills the hall  
as levers and fulcrums shift  
and the heart like a weight begins to lift.
Nothing happens until something does.
Everything remains just as it was
And all you hear is the distant buzz
Of nothing happening. Then something does.
Adam Thorpe

ON HER BLINDNESS

My mother could not bear being blind,
to be honest. One shouldn’t say it.

One should hide the fact that catastrophic
handicaps are hell; one tends to hear,

publicly, from those who bear it
like a Roman, or somehow find joy

in the fight. She turned to me, once,
in a Paris restaurant, still not finding

the food on the plate with her fork,
or not so that it stayed on (try it

in a pitch-black room) and whispered,
‘It’s living hell, to be honest, Adam.

If I gave up hope of a cure, I’d bump
myself off.’ I don’t recall what I replied,

but it must have been the usual sop,
inadequate: the locked-in son.

She kept her dignity, though, even when
bumping into walls like a dodgem; her sense

of direction did not improve, when cast
inward. ‘No built-in compass,’ as my father

joked. Instead, she pretended to ignore,
the void, or laughed it off.
Or saw things she couldn’t see
and smiled, as when the kids would offer

the latest drawing, or show her their new toy –
so we’d forget, at times, that the long,

slow slide had finished in a vision
as blank as stone. For instance, she’d continued

to drive the old Lanchester
long after it was safe

down the Berkshire lanes. She’d visit exhibitions,
admire films, sink into television

while looking the wrong way.
Her last week alive (a fortnight back)

was golden weather, of course,
the autumn trees around the hospital

ablaze with colour, the ground royal
with leaf-fall. I told her this, forgetting,

as she sat too weak to move, staring
at nothing. ‘Oh yes, I know,’ she said,

‘it’s lovely out there.’ Dying has made her
no more sightless, but now she can’t

pretend. Her eyelids were closed
in the coffin; it was up to us to believe

she was watching, somewhere, in the end.
Tim Turnbull

Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn

Hello! What’s all this here? A kitschy vase
some Shirley Temple manqué has knocked out
delineating tales of kids in cars
on crap estates, the Burberry clad louts
who flail their motors through the smoky night
from Manchester to Motherwell or Slough,
creating bedlam on the Queen’s highway.
Your gaudy evocation can, somehow,
conjure the scene, without inducing fright
as would a Daily Express exposé,

can bring to mind the throaty turbo roar
of hatchbacks tuned almost to breaking point,
the joyful throb of UK garage or
of house imported from the continent
and yet educe a sense of peace, of calm –
the screech of tyres and the nervous squeals
of girls, too young to quite appreciate
the peril they are in, are heard, but these wheels
will not lose traction, skid and flip, no harm
befall these children. They will stay out late

forever, pumped on youth and ecstasy,
on alloy, bass and arrogance, and speed
the back lanes, the urban gyratory,
the wide motorways, never having need
to race back home, for work next day, to bed.
Each girl is buff, each geezer toned and strong
charged with pulsing juice which, even yet,
fills every pair of Calvin’s and each thong,
ever to be deflated, given head
in crude games of chlamydia roulette.
Now see who comes to line the sparse grass verge,
to toast them in Buckfast and Diamond White:
rat-boys and corn-rowed cheerleaders who urge
them on to pull more burn-outs or to write
their donut Os, as signature, upon
the bleached tarmac of dead suburban streets.
There dogs set up a row and curtains twitch
as pensioners and parents telephone
the cops to plead for quiet, sue for peace —
tranquillity, though, is for the rich.

And so, millennia hence, you garish crock,
when all context is lost, galleries razed
to level dust and we’re long in the box,
will future poets look on you amazed,
speculate how children might have lived when
you were fired, lives so free and bountiful
and there, beneath a sun a little colder,
declare How happy were those creatures then,
who knew that truth was all negotiable
and beauty in the gift of the beholder.
Assessment Material  (Out of 24 – Measures A01, A02, A04)

1) Compare the ways in which poets explore the importance of childhood memories in To My Nine Year Old Self by Helen Dunmore and one other poem of your choice.

In your answer you should consider the following:
The poet’s development of themes
The poet’s use of language and imagery
The use of poetic techniques

2) Compare the ways in which poets explore the importance of new experiences in You, Shiva and My Mum by Ruth Padel and one other poem of your choice.

In your answer you should consider the following:
The poet’s development of themes
The poet’s use of language and imagery
The use of poetic techniques

3) Compare the ways in which poets explore admiration of youth in A Leisure Centre is Also a Temple of Learning by Sue Boyle and one other poem of your choice.

In your answer you should consider the following:
The poet’s development of themes
The poet’s use of language and imagery
The use of poetic techniques
4) Compare the ways in which poets explore the impact of travel on the individual in *The Furthest Distances I’ve Travelled*, by Leontia Flynn and one other poem of your choice.

In your answer you should consider the following:

- The poet’s development of themes
- The poet’s use of language and imagery
- The use of poetic techniques

5) Compare the ways in which poets explore family relationships in *Material* by Ros Barber and one other poem of your choice.

In your answer you should consider the following:

- The poet’s development of themes
- The poet’s use of language and imagery
- The use of poetic techniques

6) Compare the ways in which poets explore the impact of war in *The War Correspondent*, by Ciaran Carson and one other poem of your choice.

In your answer you should consider the following:

- The poet’s development of themes
- The poet’s use of language and imagery
- The use of poetic techniques