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ENGLISH LITERATURE  
(9275)

People and places: poetry anthology



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For teaching and examination outside the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

VERSION 2

# OXFORD AQA INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

## PEOPLE AND PLACES: POETRY ANTHOLOGY

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# LONDON

- 1 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.
- 5 In every cry of every man,  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear:
- How the chimney-sweeper's cry
- 10 Every black'ning church appalls,  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls.
- But most through midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot's curse
- 15 Blasts the new-born infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.

William Blake  
(1757 – 1827)

# IN A LONDON DRAWING ROOM

- 1 The sky is cloudy, yellowed by the smoke.  
For view there are the houses opposite.  
Cutting; the sky with one long line of wall  
Like solid fog: far as the eye can stretch
- 5 Monotony of surface and of form  
Without a break to hang a guess upon.  
No bird can make a shadow as it flies,  
For all is shadow, as in ways o'erhung  
By thickest canvass, where the golden rays
- 10 Are clothed in hemp. No figure lingering  
Pauses to feed the hunger of the eye  
Or rest a little on the lap of life.  
All hurry on and look upon the ground,  
Or glance unmarking at the passers by.
- 15 The wheels are hurrying too, cabs, carriages  
All closed, in multiplied identity.  
The world seems one huge prison-house and court  
Where men are punished at the slightest cost,  
With lowest rate of colour, warmth and joy.

George Eliot  
(1819 – 1880)

# AT CASTLE BOTEREL

1 As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,  
And the drizzle bedrenches the waggonette,  
I look behind at the fading byway,  
And see on its slope, now glistening wet,  
5 Distinctly yet

Myself and a girlish form benighted  
In dry March weather. We climb the road  
Beside a chaise. We had just alighted  
To ease the sturdy pony's load  
10 When he sighed and slowed.

What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of  
Matters not much, nor to what it led, -  
Something that life will not be balked of  
Without rude reason till hope is dead,  
15 And feeling fled.

It filled but a minute. But was there ever  
A time of such quality, since or before,  
In that hill's story? To one mind never,  
Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,  
20 By thousands more.

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,  
And much have they faced there, first and last,  
Of the transitory in Earth's long order;  
But what they record in colour and cast  
25 Is - that we two passed.

And to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,  
    In mindless rote, has ruled from sight  
The substance now, one phantom figure  
    Remains on the slope, as when that night  
30                 Saw us alight.

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,  
    I look back at it amid the rain  
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,  
    And I shall traverse old love's domain  
35                 Never again.

Thomas Hardy  
(1840 - 1928)

# THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

1 Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
5 To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
10 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
15 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less travelled by,  
20 And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost  
(1874 - 1963)

# FUTILITY

- 1 Move him into the sun –  
Gently its touch awoke him once,  
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.  
Always it woke him, even in France,  
5 Until this morning and this snow.  
If anything might rouse him now  
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds –  
Woke once the clays of a cold star.

- 10 Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides  
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?  
Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
– O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
To break earth's sleep at all?

Wilfred Owen  
(1893 – 1918)

# WIND

1 This house has been far out at sea all night,  
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,  
Winds stampeding the fields under the window  
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

5 Till day rose; then under an orange sky  
The hills had new places, and wind wielded  
Blade-light, luminous black and emerald,  
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as  
10 The coal-house door. Once I looked up –  
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes  
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,  
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap:  
15 The wind flung a magpie away and a black-  
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

Rang like some fine green goblet in the note  
That any second would shatter it. Now deep  
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip  
20 Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,  
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,  
Seeing the window tremble to come in,  
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

Ted Hughes  
(1930 – 1998)

# STORM ON THE ISLAND

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

Seamus Heaney  
(1939 - 2013)

# BELOW THE GREEN CORRIE

- 1 The mountains gathered round me  
like bandits. Their leader  
swaggered up close in the dark light,  
full of threats, full of thunders.
- 5 But it was they who stood and delivered.  
They gave me their money and their lives.  
They filled me with mountains and thunders.
- My life was enriched  
with an infusion of theirs.
- 10 I clambered downhill through the ugly weather.  
And when I turned to look goodbye  
to those marvellous prowlers  
a sunshaft had pierced the clouds  
and their leader,
- 15 that swashbuckling mountain,  
was wearing  
a bandolier of light.

Norman MacCaig  
(1910 – 1996)

# THE JOURNEY

1 One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting

5 their bad advice -  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.

10 "Mend my life!"  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried

15 with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations -  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late

20 enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,

25 the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice,  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,

30 that kept you company

as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do -  
35 determined to save  
the only life you could save.

Mary Oliver

(b. 1935)

# POEM AT THIRTY-NINE

1 How I miss my father.  
I wish he had not been  
so tired  
when I was  
5 born.

Writing deposit slips and checks  
I think of him.  
He taught me how.  
This is the form,  
10 he must have said:  
the way it is done.  
I learned to see  
bits of paper  
as a way  
15 to escape  
the life he knew  
and even in high school  
had a savings  
account.

20 He taught me  
that telling the truth  
did not always mean  
a beating;  
though many of my truths  
25 must have grieved him  
before the end.

How I miss my father!

He cooked like a person  
dancing  
30 in a yoga meditation  
and craved the voluptuous  
sharing  
of good food.

Now I look and cook just like him:  
35 my brain light;  
tossing this and that  
into the pot;  
seasoning none of my life  
the same way twice; happy to feed  
40 whoever strays my way.

He would have grown  
to admire  
the woman I've become:  
cooking, writing, chopping wood,  
45 staring into the fire.

Alice Walker  
(b. 1944)

# THE GREAT STORM

1 We rode it all night. We were not ourselves then.

Through the window everything was horizontal.

In cars and ships and woods, folk died.

Small trees scattered like matchsticks

5 and a whole shed flew by. The world roared.

A branch broke into the kitchen,

strewed twigs into the banging cupboard,

filled broken crocks with leaves. I heard

a tricycle roll up and down the attic as

10 the firmament streamed through smashed tiles.

I loved you but I loved the wind more,

wanted to be as horizontal as the tree tops,

to cling to the planet by my last fingernail,

singing into the rush, into the dark.

15 I didn't know then I would watch

my beloveds peel off the earth

each side of me, flying among tiles, bins,

caravans, car doors and chimney pots,

watch them turn themselves into flotsam

20 and disappear as wholly as the pier

the next morning, a Friday, mid-

October. Gone, split, vamoosed

like the fifteen million trees.

Jo Shapcott

(b. 1953)

# THE PLANNERS

1 They plan. They build. All spaces are gridded,  
filled with permutations of possibilities.

The buildings are in alignment with the roads  
which meet at desired points

5 linked by bridges all hang  
in the grace of mathematics.

They build and will not stop.

Even the sea draws back  
and the skies surrender.

10 They erase the flaws,  
the blemishes of the past, knock off  
useless blocks with dental dexterity.

All gaps are plugged  
with gleaming gold.

15 The country wears perfect rows  
of shining teeth.

Anaesthesia, amnesia, hypnosis.

They have the means.

They have it all so it will not hurt,

20 so history is new again.

The piling will not stop.

The drilling goes right through  
the fossils of last century.

But my heart would not bleed

25 poetry. Not a single drop  
to stain the blueprint  
of our past's tomorrow.

Kim Cheng Boey  
(b. 1965)

# HURRICANE HITS ENGLAND

1 It took a hurricane, to bring her closer

To the landscape.

Half the night she lay awake,

The howling ship of the wind,

5 Its gathering rage,

Like some dark ancestral spectre.

Fearful and reassuring.

Talk to me Huracan

Talk to me Oya

10 Talk to me Shango

And Hattie,

My sweeping, back-home cousin.

Tell me why you visit

An English coast?

15 What is the meaning

Of old tongues

Reaping havoc

In new places?

The blinding illumination,

20 Even as you short-

Circuit us

Into further darkness?

What is the meaning of trees

Falling heavy as whales

25 Their crusted roots

Their cratered graves?

O why is my heart unchained?

Tropical Oya of the Weather,

I am aligning myself to you,

30 I am following the movement of your winds,

I am riding the mystery of your storm.

Ah, sweet mystery,

Come to break the frozen lake in me,

Shaking the foundations of the very trees within me,

35 Come to let me know

That the earth is the earth is the earth.

Grace Nichols

(b. 1950)

# HOMELAND

1 For a country of stone and harsh wind  
For a country of bright perfect light  
For the black of its earth and the white of its walls

For the silent and patient faces

5 Which poverty slowly etched  
Close to the bone with the detail  
Of a long irrefutable report

And for the faces like sun and wind

And for the clarity of those words

10 Always said with passion  
For their colour and weight  
For their clean concrete silence  
From which the named things spring  
For the nakedness of awed words

15 Stone river wind house  
Lament day song breath  
Expanse root water -  
My homeland and my centre

The moon hurts me the sea weeps me

20 And exile stamps the heart of time

Sophia de Mello Breyner  
(1919 - 2004)

# BLESSING

1 The skin cracks like a pod.  
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,  
the small splash, echo

5 in a tin mug,  
the voice of a kindly god.

Sometimes, the sudden rush  
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,  
silver crashes to the ground

10 and the flow has found  
a roar of tongues. From the huts,  
a congregation: every man woman  
child for streets around  
butts in, with pots,

15 brass, copper, aluminium,  
plastic buckets,  
frantic hands,

and naked children  
screaming in the liquid sun,

20 their highlights polished to perfection,  
flashing light,  
as the blessing sings  
over their small bones.

Imtiaz Dharkar  
(b. 1954)

# THE MOMENT

1 The moment when, after many years  
of hard work and a long voyage  
you stand in the centre of your room,  
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,  
5 knowing at last how you got there,  
and say, *I own this,*

is the same moment when the trees unloose  
their soft arms from around you,  
the birds take back their language,  
10 the cliffs fissure and collapse,  
the air moves back from you like a wave  
and you can't breathe.

*No, they whisper. You own nothing.  
You were a visitor, time after time  
15 climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.  
We never belonged to you.  
You never found us.  
It was always the other way round.*

Margaret Atwood  
(b. 1939)

# WHERE I COME FROM

- 1 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
- 5 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.
- 10 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,
- 15 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.

Elizabeth Brewster  
(1922 – 2012)

# WINTER SWANS

- 1 The clouds had given their all -  
two days of rain and then a break  
in which we walked,  
  
the waterlogged earth
- 5 gulping for breath at our feet  
as we skirted the lake, silent and apart,  
  
until the swans came and stopped us  
with a show of tipping in unison.  
As if rolling weights down their bodies to their heads
- 10 they halved themselves in the dark water,  
icebergs of white feather, paused before returning again  
like boats righting in rough weather.  
  
'They mate for life' you said as they left,  
porcelain over the stilling water. I didn't reply
- 15 but as we moved on through the afternoon light,  
  
slow-stepping in the lake's shingle and sand,  
I noticed our hands, that had, somehow,  
swum the distance between us  
  
and folded, one over the other,
- 20 like a pair of wings settling after flight.

Owen Sheers  
(b. 1974)

# THE DOOR

1     Go and open the door.  
       Maybe outside there's  
       a tree, or a wood,  
       a garden,  
5     or a magic city.

       Go and open the door.  
       Maybe a dog's rummaging.  
       Maybe you'll see a face,  
       or an eye,  
10    or the picture  
       of a picture.

       Go and open the door.  
       If there's a fog  
       it will clear.

15    Go and open the door.  
       Even if there's only  
       the darkness ticking,  
       even if there's only  
       the hollow wind,  
20    even if  
       nothing  
       is there,  
       go and open the door.

       At least  
25    there'll be  
       a draught.

Miroslav Holub  
(1923 - 1998)

# THIS MORNING

1 I watched the sun moving round the kitchen,  
an early spring sun that strengthened and weakened,  
coming and going like an old mind.

I watched like one bedridden for a long time

5 on their first journey back into the world  
who finds it enough to be going on with:

the way the sunlight brought each possession in turn  
to its attention and made of it a small still life:

the iron frying-pan gleaming on its hook like an ancient find,  
10 the powdery green cheek of a bruised clementine.

Though more beautiful still was how the light moved on,  
letting go each chair and coffee cup without regret

the way my grandmother, in her final year, received me:  
neither surprised by my presence, nor distressed by my leaving,  
15 content, though, while I was there.

Esther Morgan  
(b. 1970)

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