

FOREWORD

*As in the Underground there's no mistaking
the train's approach, it pushes air ahead,
whirls paper, the line sings, a sort of dread
suffusing longing and my platform shaking –
so it is before our every meeting
till you arrive. Hear how my heart is beating!*

Our Meetings by Andrew Waterman

As London moves towards a new kind of normalcy, we'd like to welcome everyone with some of the poems which have entertained London Underground travellers for the past 35 years. The poems gathered here offer consolation for our troubles and promise a brighter future, as they celebrate London and its amazing transport system, past and present. We are grateful to TfL, Arts Council England and the British Council for enabling us to produce free copies of this leaflet. We also thank poets and publishers for permission to reprint the poems in copyright.

The Editors

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EVERYTHING CHANGES

Everything changes. We plant
trees for those born later
but what's happened has happened,
and poisons poured into the seas
cannot be drained out again.

What's happened has happened.
Poisons poured into the seas
cannot be drained out again, but
everything changes. We plant
trees for those born later.

CICELY HERBERT

FROM THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN

'After sharp showers,' said Peace, 'the sun
shines brightest;
No weather is warmer than after watery clouds;
Nor any love dearer, or more loving friends,
Than after war and woe, when Love and Peace
are masters.
There was never war in this world, or
wickedness so keen,
That Love, if he liked, could not turn to
laughter,
And Peace, through patience, put an end to all
perils.'

WILLIAM LANGLAND

BAM CHI CHI LA LA; LONDON, 1969

In Jamaica she was a teacher. Here, she is
charwoman
at night in the West End. She eats a cold
midnight meal
carried from home and is careful to expunge
her spice
trail with Dettol. She sings 'Jerusalem' to
herself and
recites the Romantic poets as she mops
hallways and
scours toilets, dreaming the while of her
retirement
mansion in Mandeville she is building brick by
brick.

LORNA GOODISON

THANKYOU LONDON UNDERGROUND

Turnham Green and Camden Town
Where Air Raid huddles laid them down.

Neasden, Willesden, Dollis Hill,
Tottenham Hale and Hearty, still.

Thankyou London Underground.

And all your staff, who get me round.
How deep you are.
I still find it astounding how deep you are.
When you are off, we're off on rants
We cram the bus
And as we crawl like ants upon the surface...
 then we know
The rich resource that's down below.
The tube is Lubricating.

In February, I'm booked to go
To Jackson's Lane to do a show – by bus, is my
 intention, yes
But how glad I am that Highgate Station's less
Than fifty yards across the road.

The tube is a nourishing subterranean facility.
 Like a potato.
A tuber-system.

Since that first open carriage load,
Our Underground, how it has grown, and
flourished.
Now, groan I do, I must admit
When I have to sit and wait and wait
For a service to get through
At Edgware Road, but that station does have to
accommodate
The Metropolitan, The Hammersmith and City,
The Circle, The District and the Bakerloo
line.

So, here's to the gaps, the maps
And the elapse of a hundred and fifty years
since that first
Steaming monster hurled
Through its Metropolitan Minotaur world
To all the billiard ball-bottomed straps onto
which I've hung.
And here's to the police officer, who when I was
illegally busking outside Westminster
Station, approached me and said,

'Do you know any Neil Young?'

JOHN HEGLEY

from **SUMMONED BY BELLS**

Great was my joy, with London at my feet –
All London mine, five shillings in my hand
And not expected back till after tea!
Great was our joy, Ronald Hughes Wright's
and mine,
To travel by the Underground all day
Between the rush hours, so that very soon
There was no station, north to Finsbury Park,
To Barking eastwards, Clapham Common
south,
No temporary platform in the west
Among the Actons and the Ealings, where
We had not once alighted.

JOHN BETJEMEN

GHERKIN MUSIC

Walk the spiral
up out of the pavement
into your own reflection, into
transparency, into the space

where flat planes are curves
and you are transposed
as you go higher into a thought

of flying, joining the game
of brilliance and scattering
where fragments of poems,

words, names fall like glory
into the lightwells until
St Mary Axe is brimming

JO SHAPCOTT

BUSES IN THE STRAND

The Strand is beautiful with buses,
Fat and majestic in form,
Red like tomatoes in their trusses
In August, when the sun is warm.

They cluster in the builded chasm,
Corpulent fruit, a hundred strong,
And now and then a secret spasm
Spurs them a yard or two along.

Scarlet and portly and seraphic,
Contented in the summer's prime,
They beam among the jumbled traffic,
Patiently ripening with time,

Till, with a final jerk and rumble,
The Strand tomatoes, fat and fair,
Roll past the traffic lights and tumble
Gleefully down Trafalgar Square.

R.P.LISTER

COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE
SEPTEMBER 3, 1802

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

CHILLING OUT BESIDE THE THAMES

Summer come, mi chill-out beside the Thames.
Spend a little time with weeping willow.
Check if dem Trafalgar pigeon still salute
old one-eyed one-armed Lord Horatio.

Mi treat mi gaze to Gothic cathedral
Yet mi cyant forget how spider spiral
Is ladder aspiring to eternal truth . . .
Trickster Nansi spinning from Shakespeare sky.

Sudden so, mi decide to play tourist.
Tower of London high-up on mi list.
Who show up but Anne Boleyn with no head on
And headless Raleigh gazing towards Devon.

Jesus lawd, history shadow so bloody.
A-time fo summer break with strawberry.

JOHN AGARD

LONDON FIELDS

Evening falls between the trees
The drumming for Ghana fills the leaves

The wicket falls
High fives all round
Conkers shining in their nests
Mr Softee pulls away
She makes love to her mobile
So happy he's called

Here a plane tree
Higher than a warehouse
Thicker than a rubbish bin
Stronger than a promise
Older than a Town hall

Evening falls between the trees
The drumming for Ghana fills the leaves

MICHAEL ROSEN

LONDONER

Scarcely two hours back in the country
and I'm shopping in East Finchley High Road
in a cotton skirt, a cardigan, jandals --
or flipflops as people call them here,
where February's winter. Aren't I cold?
The neighbours in their overcoats are smiling
at my smiles and not at my bare toes:
they know me here.

I hardly know myself,
yet. It takes me until Monday evening,
walking from the office after dark
to Westminster Bridge. It's cold, it's foggy,
the traffic's as abominable as ever,
and there across the Thames is County Hall,
that uninspired stone body, floodlit.
It makes me laugh. In fact, it makes me sing.

FLEUR ADCOCK

LOVE

Mornings, we'd find salmon bagels from Brick
Lane,
Char siu buns and Soho flower rolls,
A box of Motichoor.
Upstairs, you huddled in the covers, curtains
drawn,
The talk show murmur from the radio,
A sliver of light across the wall.

HANNAH LOWE

SMALL BROWN JOB

May you be led on all your walks
By an unidentified bird
Flitting ahead, at least one branch
The tease, between you
And it. Is that an eye-
Stripe? Epaulette? Your desire
For a name grows stronger.
Chaffinch? Warbler? This is spinning
Gold from straw. You're in good hands.
Shut up and follow.

GWYNETH LEWIS

LONDON

Poems on the Underground



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