

FEBRUARY
POEMS ON THE UNDERGROUND

*Over the land freckled with snow half-thawed
The speculating rooks at their nests cawed
And saw from elm-tops, delicate as flowers of grass,
What we below could not see, Winter pass.*

Thaw by Edward Thomas

The poems now riding the Tube are
about love and death, youth and age,
and the changing seasons, as the
dark days of February give way to
early signs of spring.

In addition to the current tube poems,
we include here some personal favourites
from earlier years, reflections on the
natural world and the human imagination,
as the earth turns and life begins afresh.

In their highly individual voices, the poets
gathered together here all affirm the
enduring value of the written word.

We hope readers who have met the
poems on the Tube will enjoy them as
they return to the printed page.

We are grateful to London Underground,
Arts Council England and the British
Council for enabling us to produce and
distribute free copies of this leaflet.

The Editors
London, 2020

FEBRUARY – NOT EVERYWHERE

Such days, when trees run downwind,
their arms stretched before them.

Such days, when the sun's in a drawer
and the drawer locked.

When the meadow is dead, is a carpet,
thin and shabby, with no pattern

and at bus stops people retract into collars
their faces like fists.

--And when, in a firelit room, a mother looks
at her four seasons, at her little boy,

in the centre of everything, with still pools
of shadows and a fire throwing flowers.

NORMAN MacCAIG

HONESTY

So pure and still a purple
breathing at dusk from the tall mantles
ruined into paper coins
and helpless see-through tears of honesty . . .

from 'Talking to the Weeds'

KIT WRIGHT

PROMISE

Remember, the time of year
when the future appears
like a blank sheet of paper
a clean calendar, a new chance.
On thick white snow

you vow fresh footprints
then watch them go
with the wind's hearty gust.
Fill your glass. Here's tae us. Promises
made to be broken, made to last.

JACKIE KAY

PERSEVERANCE

I shall look at the grass
Till I obtain the degree
Of Doctor of Grass.

I shall look at the clouds
Till I become a Master
Of Clouds.

I shall walk beside the smoke
Till out of shame
The smoke returns to the flame
Of its beginning.

I shall walk beside all things
Till all things
Come to know me.

MARIN SORESCU
translated by D.J. Enright

SONNET 98

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laughed and leapt with him.
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they
grew:

Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.

Yet seemed it winter still, and you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

POEMS ON THE UNDERGROUND A NEW EDITION

Now out in Penguin paperback

Over 250 poems displayed on the Tube since the public arts project was launched in 1986.

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Ciaran Carson: 'Fear' from *The Twelfth of Never* (Picador 1999)

Jackie Kay: 'Promise' from *Darling: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe 2007)

Philip Larkin: 'The Trees' from *High Windows* (Faber & Faber 1974)

Norman MacCaig: 'February—not everywhere' from *Collected Poems: A New Edition* (Polygon 1990)

Miriam Nash: 'Prayer for My Father as a Child' from *All the Prayers in the House* (Bloodaxe 2017)

Jacob Polley: 'Gulls' from *The Brink* (Picador 2003)

Marin Sorescu: 'Perseverance', translated by D.J. Enright, from *The Biggest Egg in the World* (Bloodaxe 1987)

Kit Wright: 'Honesty' from *Ode to Didcot Power Station* (Bloodaxe 2014)

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PRAYER FOR MY FATHER AS A CHILD

In the house where he sleeps
let my ears
be the leaves at the window.

Let the bulbs of the lamps
be my eyes
on the animal street.

Let the shadows that harbour
my unborn body
stir when harm is stirring.

I'll sleep in the drawer
with the knives.
I'll turn in the locks.

MIRIAM NASH

FEAR

I fear the vast dimensions of eternity.
I fear the gap between the platform and the train.
I fear the onset of a murderous campaign.
I fear the palpitations caused by too much tea.

I fear the drawn pistol of a rapparee.
I fear the books will not survive the acid rain.
I fear the ruler and the blackboard and the cane.
I fear the Jabberwock, whatever it might be.

I fear the bad decisions of a referee.
I fear the only recourse is to plead insane.
I fear the implications of a lawyer's fee.

I fear the gremlins that have colonized my brain.
I fear to read the small print of the guarantee.
And what else do I fear? Let me begin again.

CIARAN CARSON

THE GULLS

They're trying to shake themselves out of their
sleeves
in the air above the bins,
their flight suddenly akin
to dangling on a coat hook
by the back of the coat you're still in.

JACOB POLLEY

THE TREES

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

PHILIP LARKIN

FEBRUARY

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