

Poetry Anthology

The Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) English Literature
Poetry Anthology

should be used to prepare for Component 2 of your assessment

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A Poison Tree

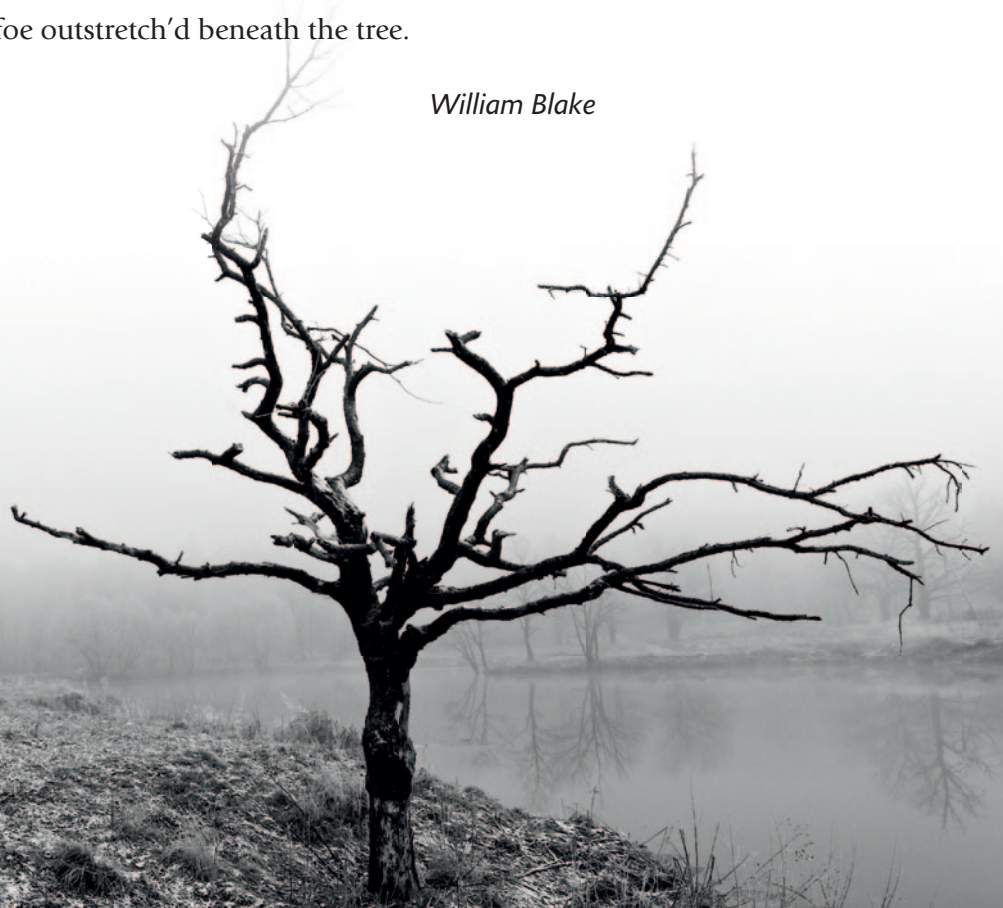
I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

5 And I water'd it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
10 Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole
When the night had veil'd the pole:
15 In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

William Blake





The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

5 Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
10 And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there roll'd not the breath of his pride:
15 And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
20 The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Lord Byron



Extract from The Prelude

- One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
5 Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
10 Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
15 The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
20 Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
25 And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
30 And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, –
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
35 That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
40 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

William Wordsworth



The Man He Killed

'Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

5 'But ranged as infantry,
 And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
 And killed him in his place.

 'I shot him dead because –
10 Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
 That's clear enough; although

 'He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
 Off-hand like – just as I –
15 Was out of work – had sold his traps –
 No other reason why.

 'Yes; quaint and curious war is!
 You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
20 Or help to half-a-crown.'

Thomas Hardy



Cousin Kate

I was a cottage-maiden
 Hardened by sun and air,
Contented with my cottage-mates,
 Not mindful I was fair.
5 Why did a great lord find me out
 And praise my flaxen hair?
Why did a great lord find me out
 To fill my heart with care?

He lured me to his palace-home –
10 Woe's me for joy thereof –
To lead a shameless shameful life,
 His plaything and his love.
He wore me like a golden knot,
 He changed me like a glove:
15 So now I moan an unclean thing
 Who might have been a dove.

O Lady Kate, my Cousin Kate,
 You grow more fair than I:
He saw you at your father's gate,
20 Chose you and cast me by.
He watched your steps along the lane,
 Your sport among the rye:
He lifted you from mean estate
 To sit with him on high.

25 Because you were so good and pure
 He bound you with his ring:
The neighbours call you good and pure,
 Call me an outcast thing.
Even so I sit and howl in dust
30 You sit in gold and sing:
Now which of us has tenderer heart?
 You had the stronger wing.

O Cousin Kate, my love was true,
 Your love was writ in sand:
35 If he had fooled not me but you,
 If you stood where I stand,
He had not won me with his love
 Nor bought me with his land:
I would have spit into his face
40 And not have taken his hand.

Yet I've a gift you have not got
 And seem not like to get:
For all your clothes and wedding-ring
 I've little doubt you fret.
45 My fair-haired son, my shame, my pride,
 Cling closer, closer yet:
Your sire would give broad lands for one
 To wear his coronet.

Christina Rossetti



Half-caste

Excuse me
standing on one leg
I'm half-caste

Explain yuself
5 wha yu mean
when you say half-caste
yu mean when picasso
mix red an green
is a half-caste canvas/
10 explain yuself
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean when light an shadow
mix in de sky
15 is a half-caste weather/
well in dat case
england weather
nearly always half-caste
in fact some o dem cloud
20 half-caste till dem overcast
so spiteful dem dont want de sun pass
ah rass/
explain yuself
wha yu mean
25 when you say half-caste
yu mean tchaikovsky
sit down at dah piano
an mix a black key
wid a white key
30 is a half-caste symphony/

Explain yuself
wha yu mean
Ah listening to yu wid de keen
half of mih ear
35 Ah lookin at yu wid de keen
half of mih eye
and when I'm introduced to yu
I'm sure you'll understand
why I offer yu half-a-hand
40 an when I sleep at night
I close half-a-eye
consequently when I dream
I dream half-a-dream
an when moon begin to glow
45 I half-caste human being
cast half-a-shadow
but yu must come back tomorrow
wid de whole of yu eye
an de whole of yu ear
50 an de whole of yu mind

an I will tell yu
de other half
of my story

John Agard



Exposure

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...

Low, drooping flares confuse our memories of the salient...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

5 But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,

Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.

Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

10 What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...

We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army

Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,

15 But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.

Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,

With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,

20 But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces –

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-
dazed,

Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.

25 Is it that we are dying?



Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: The house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed, –
30 We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
35 For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying party, picks and shovels in the shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
40 But nothing happens.

Wilfred Owen





The Charge of the Light Brigade

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
5 'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
10 Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
15 Their's but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
20 Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
25 Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,



30 Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
35 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
40 Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
45 They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

50 When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
55 Noble six hundred!

Alfred, Lord Tennyson



Catrin

I can remember you, child,
As I stood in a hot, white
Room at the window watching
The people and cars taking
5 Turn at the traffic lights.
I can remember you, our first
Fierce confrontation, the tight
Red rope of love which we both
Fought over. It was a square
10 Environmental blank, disinfected
Of paintings or toys. I wrote
All over the walls with my
Words, coloured the clean squares
With the wild, tender circles
15 Of our struggle to become
Separate. We want, we shouted,
To be two, to be ourselves.

Neither won nor lost the struggle
In the glass tank clouded with feelings
20 Which changed us both. Still I am fighting
You off, as you stand there
With your straight, strong, long
Brown hair and your rosy,
Defiant glare, bringing up
25 From the heart's pool that old rope,
Tightening about my life,
Trailing love and conflict,
As you ask may you skate
In the dark, for one more hour.

Gillian Clarke



War Photographer

The reassurance of the frame is flexible
– you can think that just outside it
people eat, sleep, love normally
while I seek out the tragic, the absurd,
5 to make a subject.

Or if the picture's such as lifts the heart
the firmness of the edges can convince you
this is how things are

– as when at Ascot once

10 I took a pair of peach, sun-gilded girls
rolling, silk-crumpled, on the grass
in champagne giggles

– as last week, when I followed a small girl
staggering down some devastated street,
15 hip thrust out under a baby's weight.
She saw me seeing her; my finger pressed.

At the corner, the first bomb of the morning
shattered the stones.
Instinct prevailing, she dropped her burden
20 and, mouth too small for her dark scream,
began to run...

The picture showed the little mother
the almost-smile. Their caption read
'Even in hell the human spirit
25 triumphs over all.'

But hell, like heaven, is untidy,
its boundaries
arbitrary as a blood stain on a wall.

Carole Satyamurti

Belfast Confetti

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining
exclamation marks,

Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the
explosion.

Itself - an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst
of rapid fire...

I was trying to complete a sentence in my head but it kept
stuttering,

5 All the alleyways and side streets blocked with stops and
colons.

I know this labyrinth so well - Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman,
Odessa Street -

Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea
Street. Dead end again.

A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-
talkies. What is

My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A
fusillade of question-marks.

Ciaran Carson





The Class Game

- How can you tell what class I'm from?
I can talk posh like some
With an 'Olly in me mouth
Down me nose, wear an 'at not a scarf
5 With me second-hand clothes.
So why do you always wince when you hear
Me say 'Tara' to me 'Ma' instead of 'Bye Mummy
dear'?
- How can you tell what class I'm from?
'Cos we live in a corpy, not like some
10 In a pretty little semi, out Wirral way
And commute into Liverpool by train each day?
Or did I drop my unemployment card
Sitting on your patio (We have a yard)?
How can you tell what class I'm from?
- 15 Have I a label on me head, and another on me bum?
Or is it because my hands are stained with toil?
Instead of soft lily-white with perfume and oil?
Don't I crook me little finger when I drink me tea
Say toilet instead of bog when I want to pee?
- 20 Why do you care what class I'm from?
Does it stick in your gullet like a sour plum?
Well, mate! A cleaner is me mother
A docker is me brother
Bread pudding is wet nelly
- 25 And me stomach is me belly
And I'm proud of the class that I come from.

Mary Casey

Conflict

Poppies

Three days before Armistice Sunday
and poppies had already been placed
on individual war graves. Before you left,
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
5 spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's
10 upturned collar, steeled the softening
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
across the tip of your nose, play at
being Eskimos like we did when
you were little. I resisted the impulse
15 to run my fingers through the gelled
blackthorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
20 it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated.
After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.
25 Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
and this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.
30 On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.
The dove pulled freely against the sky,
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear
35 your playground voice catching on the wind.

Jane Weir





No Problem

I am not de problem
But I bear de brunt
Of silly playground taunts
An racist stunts,
5 I am not de problem
I am born academic
But dey got me on de run
Now I am branded athletic
I am not de problem
10 If yu give I a chance
I can teach yu of Timbuktu
I can do more dan dance,
I am not de problem
I greet yu wid a smile
15 Yu put me in a pigeon hole
But I am versatile

These conditions may affect me
As I get older,
An I am positively sure
20 I have no chips on me shoulders,
Black is not de problem
Mother country get it right
An juss fe de record,
Sum of me best friends are white.

Benjamin Zephaniah



What Were They Like?

- 1) Did the people of Viet Nam
use lanterns of stone?
- 2) Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?
- 5 3) Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
- 4) Did they use bone and ivory,
jade and silver, for ornament?
- 5) Had they an epic poem?
- 6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

- 10 1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
It is not remembered whether in gardens
stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
- 2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
but after their children were killed
- 15 there were no more buds)
- 3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
- 4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
All the bones were charred.
- 5) It is not remembered. Remember,
- 20 most were peasants; their life
was in rice and bamboo.
When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
maybe fathers told their sons old tales.
- 25 When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream.
- 6) There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.
It was reported that their singing resembled
- 30 the flight of moths in moonlight.
Who can say? It is silent now.

Denise Levertov