

Trees

Poetry Meeting held on 11th April 2023

We begin with WINDSONG by Judith Nicholls - read by Irene

I am the seed
that grew the tree
that gave the wood
to make the page
to fill the book
with Poetry



Lodgepole Pine

Lin and Jeanette chose this poem

Trees by Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918 American poet killed while fighting in WW1)

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

Fiona chose **Trees** by Helen B Cruikshank

The parson's voice droned word on word
I did not hear for sorrow dulled my ears.
I dropped the cord within your grave and blurred
Black figures wavered through my smarting tears.
"Oh I shall faint," I thought, and on the tree
That grows beside your grave I put my hand.
My grief the plane tree seemed to understand,
So much it comforted and steadied me.
I'm glad you have those trees so near your mound
(Plane trees in front of you and pines behind);
For you loved trees. At night time by the sound
The wind made in their leaves you knew their kind.
You will not feel so lonely where you lie
If you can hear the pattering of rain
On smooth, broad leaves, and say "That is a plane,"
Or, "Surely those are pines that sough and sigh."

Dorothy read **In the Fields** by Charlotte Mew



Lord when I look at lovely things which pass,
Under old trees the shadow of young leaves
Dancing to please the wind along the grass,
Or the gold stillness of the August sun on the August sheaves;
Can I believe there is a heavenlier world than this?
And if there is
Will the heart of any everlasting thing
Bring me these dreams that take my breath away?
They come at evening with the home-flying rooks and the scent of hay,
Over the fields. They come in spring.

The poet laureate, Simon Armitage, has written a new poem which pays homage to spring, for World Poetry Day. 'Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers' is the first in a collection of poems inspired by blossom and commissioned by the National Trust. The charity will vow to bring blossom back to landscapes across the UK by planting 20m trees by 2030 to help tackle both the climate and nature crises.

The poem was read by **Linna**

Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers

by Simon Armitage

She's travelled for years
through tangled forests
and formal gardens,
edged along hedgerows,
set up her stall
on tenanted farms
then moved on, restless,
empty handed sometimes,
sometimes with fruit
in her arms.
She's hopscotched
through graveyards and parks,
settled down in allotments,
clung to a church roof
by a toe.
She's pitched camp on verges
and hard shoulders,
stumbled on threadbare moors
above the tree-line
and slumped it on wasteland,
but dug in on steep hillsides
and rough ground.
She was Queen of the May
on a roundabout once
in a roundabout way.
She's piggy-backed
across trading estates, hitched
in a mistle thrush beak,
drifted with thistledown.
She's thumbed a lift into town.
Now here she is,
in a cracked slab
in a city square
in a square mile
mirrored by glass and steel,

dwarfed by money
and fancy talk.
Hand-me-down brush,
pre-loved broom,
to the paid-by-the-minute
suits and umbrellas
and lunchtime shoppers
she's a poor Cinderella
rootling about
in a potting compost
of burger boxes
and popped poppers.
In that world,
orchard and orphan
are one and the same.
But she's here to stay -
plum in the middle -
and today she's fizzing
with light and colour,
outshining the smug sculptures
and blubbering fountains.
Scented and powdered
she's staging
a one-tree show
with hi-viz blossoms
and lip-gloss petals;
she'll season the pavements
and polished stones
with something like snow.



Congratulations to **Valerie** who chose three poems and recited them from memory



I Remember, I Remember

by Thomas Hood

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

Autumn Morning in Cambridge

by Frances Cornford (1886-1960)

I RAN out in the morning, when the air was clean and new,
And all the grass was glittering and grey with autumn dew,
I ran out to the apple tree and pulled an apple down,
And all the bells were ringing in the old grey town.
Down in the town, off the bridges and the grass
They are sweeping up the leaves to let the people pass,
Sweeping up the old leaves, golden-reds and browns,
While the men go to lecture with the wind in their gowns.

The Seed Shop by Muriel Stuart (1885-1967 the daughter of a Scottish barrister)

HERE in a quiet and dusty room they lie,
Faded as crumbled stone and shifting sand,
Forlorn as ashes, shrivelled, scentless, dry -
Meadows and gardens running through my hand.

Dead that shall quicken at the voice of spring,
Sleepers to wake beneath June's tempest kiss;
Though birds pass over, unremembering,
And no bee find here roses that were his.

In this brown husk a dale of hawthorn dreams;
A cedar in this narrow cell is thrust
That shall drink deeply at a century's streams;
These lilies shall make summer on my dust.

Here in their safe and simple house of death,
Sealed in their shells, a million roses leap;
Here I can stir a garden with my breath,
And in my hand a forest lies asleep.

Fiona read this unusual poem

Christmas Trees by Robert Frost

The city had withdrawn into itself
And left at last the country to the country;
When between whirls of snow not come to lie
And whirls of foliage not yet laid, there drove
A stranger to our yard, who looked the city,
Yet did in country fashion in that there
He sat and waited till he drew us out
A-buttoning coats to ask him who he was.
He proved to be the city come again
To look for something it had left behind
And could not do without and keep its Christmas.
He asked if I would sell my Christmas trees;
My woods—the young fir balsams like a place
Where houses all are churches and have spires.
I hadn't thought of them as Christmas Trees.
I doubt if I was tempted for a moment
To sell them off their feet to go in cars
And leave the slope behind the house all bare,
Where the sun shines now no warmer than the moon.
I'd hate to have them know it if I was.
Yet more I'd hate to hold my trees except
As others hold theirs or refuse for them,
Beyond the time of profitable growth,
The trial by market everything must come to.
I dallied so much with the thought of selling.
Then whether from mistaken courtesy
And fear of seeming short of speech, or whether
From hope of hearing good of what was mine,
I said, "There aren't enough to be worth while."
"I could soon tell how many they would cut,
You let me look them over."

"You could look.
But don't expect I'm going to let you have them."
Pasture they spring in, some in clumps too close
That lop each other of boughs, but not a few
Quite solitary and having equal boughs
All round and round. The latter he nodded "Yes" to,
Or paused to say beneath some lovelier one,
With a buyer's moderation, "That would do."
I thought so too, but wasn't there to say so.
We climbed the pasture on the south, crossed over,
And came down on the north.
He said, "A thousand."

"A thousand Christmas trees!—at what apiece?"

He felt some need of softening that to me:
"A thousand trees would come to thirty dollars."

Then I was certain I had never meant
To let him have them. Never show surprise!
But thirty dollars seemed so small beside
The extent of pasture I should strip, three cents
(For that was all they figured out apiece),
Three cents so small beside the dollar friends
I should be writing to within the hour
Would pay in cities for good trees like those,
Regular vestry-trees whole Sunday Schools
Could hang enough on to pick off enough.
A thousand Christmas trees I didn't know I had!
Worth three cents more to give away than sell,
As may be shown by a simple calculation.
Too bad I couldn't lay one in a letter.
I can't help wishing I could send you one,
In wishing you herewith a Merry Christmas.



Irene chose the same poet

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
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
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,
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 traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Jeanette read the next two poems

Poison Tree by William Blake

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.

And I watered 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,
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 veiled the pole;
In the morning, glad, I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

by Robert Frost



Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Two poems about the Alder Tree, which I chose

Planting the Alder by Seamus Heaney

For the bark, dulled argent, roundly wrapped
And pigeon-collared.

For the splitter-splatter, guttering
Rain-flirt leaves.

For the snub and clot of the first green cones,
Smelted emerald, chlorophyll.

For the scut and scat of cones in winter,
So rattle-skinned, so fossil-brittle.

For the alder wood, flame-red when torn
Branch from branch.

But mostle for the swinging locks
Of yellow catkins.

Plant it, plant it,
Streel-head in the rain.



Alder by Kathleen Jamie

Are you weary, alder tree,
in this, the age of rain?

From your branches
droop clots of lichen

like fairy lungs. All week,
squalls, tattered mists:

alder, who unfolded
before the receding glaciers
first one leaf then another,
won't you teach me

a way to live
on this damp ambiguous earth?

The rain showers
release from you a broken tune
but when the sun blinks, as it must,
how you'll sparkle—

like a fountain in a wood
of untold fountains.

This is **Barbara's** own composition

The Storm

It stood alone, stark against the leaden sky,
The ravages of storm and gale
Marked on its now torn and broken limbs.
The neighbouring copse laid low
Awaits the saw and woodman's harvesting.

Despair could mark the work of tempest such as this
But life goes on regardless.
Where once stood mighty oak and copse
New shoots from cleared ground emerge
Proclaiming life amid the desolation.

A time will come when children's shouts
Will once again be heard
Amongst the stout and sturdy branches,
Drowning out the present cries of anguish
At Nature's seeming heartlessness.



Barbara also read

Hear This by Marchant Barron,
a young poet whose poems 'Conversations with
Trees' were featured among the trees of the Silk
Wood Trail at Westonbirt National Arboretum.

Listen, the woods are full of knotted words
that twine the trunks and twist within the leaves.
Wood seals the blood on blistered bark that seeps
beneath. The winded words unfold; leaves drop
and burrow deep and damp, intent to hide.
The voices rot and sing their requiem,
through chandeliers of broken rain, which fall
on trees that hear our words when we are lost.



**There was an Old Man of Dundee,
Who frequented the top of a tree;
When disturbed by the Crows,
he abruptly arose,
And exclaimed, "I'll return to Dundee!"**

This poem was written by **Barbara's cousin**
Thelma Faber

The Cowman and the Square Tree

Twice a day he walks the field,
for his health he now keeps walking,
fields where once he was the cowman,
stops, if stopped, is pleased by talking.

Talks of little incidents
that illustrate the fuss and folly
office workers, council men,
make of the unnecessary.

With a smile he tells the tale
of how they told him he must cut
his tree down, as it blocked the view
of the school sign they'd put there.

He had trained the shape of that tree
to stand square-topped upon its feet.

People noticed it - it was
a feature of the village street.

'No', said everyone, you mustn't,
we must not lose our square tree.
The sign must go, you must move that'.
He tells the tale with quiet glee.

So they sent out three men one morning
'Had to dig the sign up, see,
moved it only two foot sideways,
took 'em until half past three'.

Then he goes his way, still chuckling,
careful steps, but undeterred,
his life led to his own timetable,
just as he once milked the herd.

..... and here is **Lin's** own spine-tingling poem

Obsession

I saw a tree today,
I longed to paint it
But knew myself unequal to the task.

I saw a tree today,
Writhing upward out of the looming mists of wet evening.
It stepped,
Giant bold beside my path.

I saw a tree today,
I longed to paint it
In shades of grey and black, rain and night.

I saw a tree today,
I longed to capture it
But knew myself unequal to the task.

I saw a tree today,
In spirit
It possessed me.

I saw a giant today,
Gaunt arms outstretched to gather the night.
Twisted and hunchback,
Head hooded, tattered cloak bunched round
Against this dreich October six o'clock.

I saw a fearful ghoul today,
Striding through the rain.
It stalked sinister beside my path,
Bony fingers splayed to the oncoming dark.

I saw today,
A bony shadow of overimaginative fear,
In the dark, primitive recesses of winter night.

I saw a tree today,
Writhing upward out of the looming dark
Of a wet October evening.

I saw a tree today,
And knew myself obsessed.



My own choice is in sharp contrast.....

The Kindness of Trees by Jackie Kay

Deep in the forest there stood
A tree whose heart beat in the winter wood
Who understood everything that was bad
And everything that was good.

It extended long arms to woo you
As the winter wind blew and blew
And everything a child could think,
The tree already knew.

And every time a boy was sad,
The tree dropped a pine.
And every time a girl got mad,
The tree roared in the wind.

In the dead mid-winter night,
The tree blew a hello, goodbye;
When every child was asleep in bed,
The tree sang a lullaby.

And when Christmas time came round
The tree's song soared and soared.
And when gifts adorned the ground,
The tree blushed, made a ssh sound.

And people gathered round the tree:
To sing the winter song, in harmony;
One to keep the bright light glowing,
A song for what we know without knowing.

It had a sad and piercing melody -
A worry for the ash, sparrow, bee.
The polar bear, the ice melting.
A worry for you, me, dear tree.

In the depths of the winter wood,
The friendly tree stood, kind and good,
And breathes a word that caught the mood:
A pledge, a promise, a plea for good.

Two more poems read by Linna

The Rose Tree by W B Yeats

'O WORDS are lightly spoken,'
Said Pearse to Connolly,
'Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree;
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea.'
"It needs to be but watered,"
James Connolly replied,
"To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden's pride.'
"But where can we draw water,"
Said Pearse to Connolly,
"When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

(American poet 1935-2019)

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

A last poem chosen by Irene

Loveliest of Trees by A E Houseman

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

Other poems read by Dorothy and Thelma were old favourites which have appeared before.

A Birthday by Christina Rossetti

Sea Fever by John Masefield

Upon Westminster Bridge by William Wordsworth



**There was an old man in a tree,
Whose whiskers were lovely to see;
But the birds of the air
pluck'd them perfectly bare,
To make themselves nests in that tree.**

Thank you to Edward Lear who snuck in twice