

Mary read the following three poems

Valentine by Carol Ann Duffy

Not a red rose or a satin heart.
I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
like the careful undressing of love.
Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
a wobbling photo of grief.
I am trying to be truthful.
Not a cute card or a kissogram.
I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.
Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,
if you like.
Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.



Friday Afternoon by Alison Brackenbury (English poet born 1953)

It was the autumn's last day, when the roof
was skimmed by wings - Red Admiral butterfly? -
a glance of black against the sky, like truth.

It was the day on which the goldfinch flung
its yellow wing against the glass, as though
it had drunk all the sweetness from the sun,

by which, in the wild garden, hips were seen
swelled by last night's rain, crowns under leaves,
as though they could stay glossy, ever green.

A day when children played and did not fall,
when traffic stilled to world's edge, a gold crawl,
which I heard, sun-lapped, sleeping through it all.

How to cut a Pomegranate by Imtiaz

Dharker (Born in Pakistan, moved to Scotland
as a child)

Never,' said my father,
'Never cut a pomegranate
through the heart. It will weep blood.
Treat it delicately, with respect.

Just slit the upper skin across four quarters.
This is a magic fruit,
so when you split it open, be prepared
for the jewels of the world to tumble out,
more precious than garnets,
more lustrous than rubies,
lit as if from inside.
Each jewel contains a living seed.
Separate one crystal.
Hold it up to catch the light.
Inside is a whole universe.
No common jewel can give you this.'

Afterwards, I tried to make necklaces
of pomegranate seeds.
The juice spurted out, bright crimson,
and stained my fingers, then my mouth.

I didn't mind. The juice tasted of gardens
I had never seen, voluptuous
with myrtle, lemon, jasmine,
and alive with parrots' wings.

The pomegranate reminded me
that somewhere I had another home.



Elinor's first poem should be a mourning for the building, which we now know, can never be rebuilt just as it was after the two devastating fires which killed it

Three Stanzas For Charles Rennie Mackintosh

by Liz Lochhead

I

'It is but a plain building that is required.'
North light, set dimensions for studios, that budget inspired,
In no way constrained, you. Dear Ghost, Dear Genius,
A plain wonder of a building's what you gave to us.
Volume, light, line, astonishing rhythms of space,
Guts, harmony, surprises, seamliness, a great place
To work in, learn in, live in, take for granted.
Much more than they ever knew they wanted
Was what you gave Fra Newbery, the Governors, the World, the Future –
Changing for ever the possibilities of architecture.
A prime modernist squarely in the Scotch Baronial tradition
And proud of it! Definitely beyond definition.
Your details delight us endlessly with their endless variation –
Always decorated construction, never constructed decoration.

II

'Art is the flower,' you said, 'Life is the green leaf'.
Time is the judge. Time is the thief.

III

Die Hoffnung ist - graphic, 1901.
Wee motif: the blaeberry of the Mackintosh Clan.
The other? Abstracted, a sprig of heather for your Margaret.
There is hope lettered in your own alphabet –
Blaeberry and heather twinned in that symbolism you devised.
So what if that motto you made your own was plagiarised?
There is hope – yes – in honest error, none
In the mere stylist's icy perfection.



Another Westminster Bridge by Alice Oswald

go and glimpse the lovely inattentive water
discarding the gaze of many a bored street walker
where the weather trespasses into strip-lit offices
through tiny windows into tiny thoughts and authorities
and the soft beseeching tapping of typewriters
take hold of a breath-width instant, stare
at water which is already elsewhere
in a scrapwork of flashes and glittery flutters
and regular waves of apparently motionless motion
under the teetering structures of administration
where a million shut-away eyes glance once
restlessly at the river's ruts and glints
count five, then wander swiftly
away over the stone wing-bone of the city

Anne chose these next two poems

For Gallantry (1942) by Davinia Hamilton (self-translated by the poet from her native Maltese)

from the field you'd have seen it
the plane nosing the clouds
flashing silver
a bright smile
shattering the torpor of the morning
the siren didn't sound
i read the reports later
it was an attack with no warning
it was an ordinary morning in ġhajnsielem
guzeppi, my grandfather, aged 12, closed his eyes
again, resisting the day
lulled by the music of breakfast
the kettle skirled
the teaspoon jangled
soon his mother would be backlit in the door frame,
corpulent and loud, always smelling of flour with an
apron stretched over the bowl of her belly, sucking
her teeth
sar il-ġin
already a pie cooling on the wire tray
for now, she buttered bread and sprinkled sugar into
tea cups
the steel bird gave a languid purr
the missile whistled
his mother looked up
from the field you'd have seen it
quick
inside
the moment exploded before the bomb did
the children momentarily
animal foreknowing
hairs stood on end
then came the blast
then came the fire
the world a blazing red
five of them dead
guzeppi displaced
alive in the ruins
everything changes
in the blink of an eye
before the milk can be stirred in
the family leaves the village
his father can no longer bear
the cedar trees
the smell of a fresh catch
moves them to the city
goes to bed early

the children pretend they cannot hear when he
sobs late into the night
george
the king
gives us a cross bearing his name
for gallantry
guzeppi has to look up the word
to the island fortress of malta
the most bombed place on earth
to bear witness
there are children begging for scraps in the
streets
to a heroism and devotion
fifteen thousand tonnes of death
we will endure
the governor says
pins the cross to the flag
in english.



Lethe by Shamim Azad (British, originally from Bangladesh)

I remember everything
about the houses I lived in
The living room, the balcony, the garden,
even the kitchen
I just forgot my first home
My mother's womb.

Fiona's chosen poems

Timetable by Kate Clanchy (Glasgow born poet teacher in an Oxford comprehensive school)

We all remember school, of course:
the lino warming, shoe bag smell, expanse
of polished floor. It's where we learned
to wait: hot cheeked in class, dreaming,
bored, for cheesy milk, for noisy now.
We learned to count, to rule off days,
and pattern time in coloured squares:
purple English, dark green Maths.
We hear the bells, sometimes,
for years, the squeal and crack
of chalk on black. We walk, don't run,
in awkward pairs, hoping for the open door,
a foreign teacher, fire drill. And love
is long aertex summers, tennis sweat,
and somewhere, someone singing flat.
The art room, empty, full of light.



A Glass of Tea by Shukria Rezaei (Afghan refugee, re-settled in Oxford. Written at age 15)(after Rumi)

Last year, I held a glass of tea to the light. This year,
I swirl like a tealeaf in the street of Oxford.
Last year, I stared into navy blue sky. This year,
I am roaming under colourless clouds.
Last year, I watched the dazzling sun dance
gracefully. This year,
The faint sun moves futurlessly.
Migration drove me down this bumpy road,
Where I fell and smelt the soil, where I arose and
sensed the cloud.
Now I am a bird, flying in the breeze,
Lost over the alien earth.
Don't stop and ask me questions.
Look into my eyes and feel my heart.
It is bruised, aching and sore.
My eyes are veiled with onion skin.
I sit helplessly in an injured nest,
not knowing how to fix it.
And my heart, I'd say
is displaced
struggling to find its place.

Fiere by Jackie Kay

If ye went tae the tapmost hill, Fiere
Whaur we used tae clamb as girls,
Ye'd see the snow the day, Fiere,
Settling on the hills.
You'd mind o' anither day, mibbe,
We ran doon the hill in the snow,
Sliding and singing oor way tae the foot,
Lassies laughing thegither – how braw.
The years slipping awa; oot in the weather.
And noo we're suddenly auld, Fiere,
Oor friendship's ne'er been weary.
We've aye seen the wurld differently.
Whaur would I hae been weyoot my jo,
My fiere, my fiery, my dearie O?
Oor hair micht be silver noo,
Oor walk a wee bit doddery,
But we've had a whirl and a blast, girl,
Thru' the cauld blast winter, thru spring, summer.
O'er a lifetime, my fiere, my bonnie lassie,
I'd defend you – you, me; blithe and blather,
Here we gang doon the hill, nae matter,
Past the bracken, bothy, bonny braes, barley.
Oot by the roaring Sea, still havin a blether.
We who loved sincerely; we who loved sae fiercely.
The snow ne'er looked sae barrie,
Nor the winter trees sae pretty.
C'mon, c'mon my dearie – tak my hand, my fiere!



Linna's choice of poems

Physics for the unwary student by Pippa Goldschmidt (poet and short story writer, now living in Germany)

1. Imagine that you are trying to balance on the surface of an expanding balloon. List all the different ways in which this resembles reality.
2. Thousands of sub-atomic particles stream through you night and day. Does this account for those peculiar flashes of light you sometimes see?
3. You are trapped in a lift which is plummeting to the ground. Describe what you feel.
4. You are in a spaceship travelling towards a black hole. As you pass the event horizon and become cut off from the rest of the Universe, what do you observe?
6. What happens if you stop believing in gravity? Will you slide off the Earth?
7. What happens if you stop believing?

Staying Alive by Linna Monteath

They come out like us, these hollyhocks
Crumpled and crushed,
Fists clenched,
Pushing towards the light.
Their growing up is gradual,
Complex, convoluted;
Their full bloom, miraculous in its beauty.

Stoically they face what they were born to,
No turning to the sun for them.
Rough winds will shake the stem
Rain in rods beat them up,
Yet those good looks will last their span.
In time, tired outer petals falter
Like tissue skin on older hands,
But the whorled heart retains its vigour.



Outwith by Katie Ailes (originally from Pennsylvania, now living and working in Scotland)

Revising my visa essay,
applying for three more years
here, I read my own scribbled words:
*Comparable opportunities for critical
study
do not exist outwith Scotland.*

Outwith: a term unfamiliar, yet
scrawled in my own hand,
doubtlessly mine, and I wonder:
I came here all rude American brass, all
*trash can, fanny pack, Where's the
castle?*

Then Glasgow rolled itself under my
tongue,
a grey marble lolling my mouth open
with Os:
Glasgow, Kelvingrove, going to Tesco,
then thistling my speech wi sleekit lisps,
wee packets a crisps,
my lips like the lids
of those glass bottles of sand
I used to collect from every beach:
my mouth a shore holding each grain
that altered the flow of my speech,
my pen flowing 's' into the cursive
waves
of 'socialised,' 'civilised,' 'acclimatised,'
answering *Aye!* by accident
then smiling.

I may be from *out*
but I am now *with*.

Three poems I chose. The first is a Mirror Poem, to be read both ways—top to bottom, then bottom to top

Raymond, at 60 by Julia Copus 2012 (English b.1969)

The 185 from Catford Bridge, the 68 from Euston –
those same buses climbing the long hill into the evening.
This is what stays with him best now, this and watching,
in the ward where mother has finally died,
the way the rain has fallen on the window –
a soft rain sifting down like iron filings.
The whole of that evening he'd kept his eyes fixed on the rain,
out there in the O of the buses' steel-rimmed headlamps.
Now I am I, he thought, his two dark eyes ablaze – as if he'd
found God
the very moment she'd left him. He took off his hat,
and he put his dry lips to her cheek and kissed her,
unsettled by her warmth, the scent of her skin
so unexpected he found himself suddenly
back on Bondway, crushed to her breast, in a gesture
that meant, he knew now, *You are loved*. There he was, with her
pulling his bobble-hat over his ears in that finicky way she had.
What was he? Eleven? Twelve? Too old, in any case, for her to be
holding his hand the entire short walk from the house
that first time she'd taken him down to watch the buses.

That first time she'd taken him down to watch the buses,
holding his hand the entire short walk from the house,
what was he? Eleven? Twelve? Too old, in any case, for her to be
pulling his bobble-hat over his ears in that finicky way she had
that meant (he knew now) *You are loved*. There he was with her
back on Bondway, crushed to her breast, in a gesture
so unexpected he found himself suddenly
unsettled by her warmth, the scent of her skin,
and he put his dry lips to her cheek and kissed her.
The very moment she'd left him, he took off his hat.
Now I am I, he thought, his two dark eyes ablaze – as if he'd
found God
out there in the O of the buses' steel-rimmed headlamps.
The whole of that evening he'd kept his eyes fixed on the rain,
a soft rain sifting down like iron filings,
the way the rain had fallen on the window
in the ward where Mother had finally died.
This is what stays with him best now, this and watching
those same buses climbing the hill long into the evening:
the 185 from Catford Bridge, the 68 from Euston...

Head of English by Carol Ann Duffy

Today we have a poet in the class.
A real live poet with a published book.
Notice the inkstained fingers, girls. Perhaps
we're going to witness verse hot from the press.
Who knows. Please show your appreciation
by clapping. Not too loud. Now

sit up straight and listen. Remember
the lesson on assonance, for not all poems,
sadly, rhyme these days. Still. Never mind.
Whispering's, as always, out of bounds -
but do feel free to raise some questions.
After all, we're paying forty pounds.

Those of you with English Second Language,
see me after break. We're fortunate
to have this person in our midst.
Season of mists and so on and so forth
I've written quite a bit of poetry myself
and doing Kipling with the Lower Fourth.

Right. That's enough from me. On with the Muse.
Open a window at the back. We don't
want winds of change about the place.
Take notes, but don't write reams. Just an essay
on the poet's themes. Fine. Off we go.
Convince us that there's something we don't know.
Well. Really. Run along now, girls. I'm sure
that gave an insight to an outside view.
Applause will do. Thank you
very much for coming here today. Lunch
in the hall? Do hang about. Unfortunately
I have to dash. Tracey will show you out.

Queen Maeve takes a Cab in Scotland by Magi Gibson (Queen Maeve was a warrior queen in Irish folklore)

He drives the taxi, eye firmly on the road
while her eyes explore the tattoo on his forearm -
a Saltire, and in white and blue -
SCOTLAND FOREVER.

While she admires the way his thick black lashes curl,
the way his eyes shine blue as sapphires when he
grins,
the firmness of his thighs beneath his jeans -
he tells her he loves Ireland (in his deep-voiced
lowland lilt)
and adds, with innocent surprise - that Irish women
love
a Scotsman on a Harley - in a kilt.

He's driving ever faster and
she's feeling ever hotter and
his meter's ticking fiercely
and she feels a strong attraction
and she's driven to distraction
almost at her destination.

Next time I call, she says as she slips some coins into
his palm
and lets him feel the softness of her skin,
Forget the cash. Wear the kilt.
Bring the Harley Davidson.....



Because we were a small group, extra poems were read by various members

A Glasgow Nonsense Rhyme for Molly by
Liz Lochhead

Molly Pin Li McLaren,
come home and look
at the pictures in your brand-new book –
a tree, a bird, a fish, a bell,
a bell, a fish, a tree, a bird.
Point, wee Molly, and say the word!

Oh, Molly, I wish
you the moon as white and round as a dish
and a bell, a tree, a bird and a fish.

Touch! Taste! Look! Smell!
(tree, fish, bird, bell)
And listen, wee Molly, listen well
to the wind,
to the wind in the tree go swish
(bird, bell, tree, fish)
to the shrill of the bird and the plop of the fish
and the clang of the bell
and the stories they tell
the stories they tell,
Molly, the tree, the bird, the fish and the bell.

No. 115 Dreams by Jackie Kay

The living room remembers Gran dancing to Count Basie.
The kitchen can still hear my aunts fighting on Christmas
day.
The hall is worried about the loose banister.
The small room is troubled by the missing hamster.
The toilet particularly dislikes my Grandfather.
The wallpaper covers up for the whole family.

And No. 115 dreams of lovely houses by the sea.
And No. 115 dreams of one night in the country.

The stairs are keeping schtum about the broken window.
The toilet's sick of the trapped pipes squealing so.
The walls aren't thick enough for all the screaming.
My parent's bedroom has a bed in a choppy sea.
My own bedroom loves the bones of me.
My brother's bedroom needs a different boy.

And No. 115 dreams of yellow light, an attic room.
And No. 115 dreams of a chimney, a new red roof.

And the red roof dreams of robin redbreasts
tap dancing on the red dance floor in the open air.

George Square by Jackie Kay

My seventy-seven-year-old father
put his reading glasses on
to help my mother do the buttons
on the back of her dress.
'What a pair the two of us are!'
my mother said, 'Me with my sore wrist,
you with your bad eyes, your soft thumbs!'

And off they went, my two parents
to march against the war in Iraq,
him with his plastic hips. Her with her arthritis,
to congregate at George Square, where the banners
waved at each other like old friends, flapping,
where they'd met for so many marches over their years,
for peace on earth, for pity's sake, for peace, for peace.