

Poems in a Time of Coronavirus



This anthology contains poems chosen by a group of friends
 from St Paul's Church Grove Park Chiswick,
 read to each other via Zoom on 2 April 2020
 and compiled by Sue Hearn.

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***So does everybody else, only not so much* by Ogden Nash**

O all ye exorcizers come and exorcize now, and ye clergymen draw nigh and clerge,
For I wish to be purged of an urge.
It is an irksome urge, compounded of nettles and glue,
And it is turning all my friends back into acquaintances, and all my acquaintances into
people who look the other way when I heave into view.
It is an indication that my mental buttry is butterless and my mental larder lardless,
And it consists not of "Stop me if you've heard this one," but of "I know
you've heard this one because I told it to you myself, but I'm going to tell it to you
again regardless,"
Yes I fear I am living beyond my mental means.
When I realize that it is not only anecdotes that I reiterate but what is far worse,
summaries of radio programs and descriptions of caroons in newspapers and magazines.
I want to resist but I cannot resist recounting the bright sayings of celebrities that
everybody already is familiar with every word of; I want to refrain but cannot refrain
from telling the same audience on two successive evenings the same little snatches of
domestic gossip about people I used to know that they have never heard of.
When I remember some titllating episode of my childhood I figure that if it's worth
narrating once it's worth narrating twice, in spite of lackluster eyes and dropping jaws,
And indeed I have now worked my way backward from titllating episodes in my own
childhood to titillating episodes in the childhood of my parents or even my
parents-in-laws,
And what really turns my corpuscles to ice,
I carry around clippings and read them to people twice.
And I know what I am doing while I am doing it and I don't want to do it but I can't
help doing it and I am just another Ancient Mariner,
And the prospects for my future social life couldn't possibly be barrener.
Did I tell you that the prospects for my future social life couldn't be barrener?

Chosen and read by Simon Surtees

<https://allpoetry.com/So-Does-Everybody-Else,-Only-Not-So-Much>

***Spring* by Gerard Manley Hopkins**

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.
What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Chosen and read by Sheila White

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51002/spring-56d22e75d65bd>

An excerpt from *A Psalm of Life* by Henry Longfellow

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

Chosen and read by Victoria Lynch

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44644/a-psalm-of-life>

***The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* by Christopher Marlowe**

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the Rocks,
Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow Rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing Madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of Roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty Lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and Ivy buds,
With Coral clasps and Amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

Chosen and read by Catherine Jessop

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44675/the-passionate-shepherd-to-his-love>

An excerpt from *Ducks* by F W Harvey

When God had finished the stars and whirl of coloured suns
He turned His mind from big things to fashion little ones;
Beautiful tiny things (like daisies) He made, and then
He made the comical ones in case the minds of men
Should stiffen and become
Dull, humourless and glum,
And so forgetful of their Maker be
As to take even themselves - quite seriously.
Caterpillars and cats are lively and excellent puns:
All God's jokes are good - even the practical ones!
And as for the duck, I think God must have smiled a bit
Seeing those bright eyes blink on the day He fashioned it.
And he's probably laughing still at the sound that came out of its bill!

Chosen and read by Nan Owen

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ducks/>

***Going to Church* by Charlotte Mitchell**

"It is the most heavenly little church
Simple and restful and heavenly" she said
"You must see it, it's amazing
You can walk across the hills to it
There, where all those sheep are grazing
Or take the road, it's quicker"
"Do you go there on Sundays?" I said
"No, I don't, I'm frightened of the Vicar
But there's only a service once a month
So, sometimes I phone
To find out which of the Sundays God will be there on his own"

Chosen and read by Audrey Jennings

Shetland Reel (for Aly Bain) by Norman MacCaig

The fiddle bow slides and hops and dances
At a speed that should sound hectic but doesn't.
Down-bow becomes three up-bows in places
I would never have thought of, following
The jags and curves of the tune as though it were
Helicoptering at a hundred miles an hour
Along a drystone dyke on a humpy landscape.

The result - a tune: a witty celebration
Of nimbleness and joy, fit to be played
In a tenement room, in a hall, in the lee
Of a Shetland peatstack where the Aurora
Remembers its other name, the Merry Dancers.

Chosen and read by *Peter Capell*

Warning by Jenny Joseph

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Chosen and read by Sam Hearn

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/warning/>

An excerpt from *The Old Vicarage at Grantchester* by Rupert Brooke

Ah God! to see the branches stir
Across the moon at Grantchester!
To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten
Unforgettable, unforgotten
River-smell, and hear the breeze
Sobbing in the little trees.
Say, do the elm-clumps greatly stand
Still guardians of that holy land?
The chestnuts shade, in reverend dream,
The yet unacademic stream?
Is dawn a secret shy and cold
Anadyomene, silver-gold?
And sunset still a golden sea
From Haslingfield to Madingley?

And after, ere the night is born,
Do hares come out about the corn?
Oh, is the water sweet and cool,
Gentle and brown, above the pool?
And laughs the immortal river still
Under the mill, under the mill?
Say, is there Beauty yet to find?
And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies, and truths, and pain? ... oh! yet
Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?

Chosen and read by Jackie Rayer

<https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/the-old-vicarage-grantchester/>



Television by Roald Dahl

The most important thing we've learned,
So far as children are concerned,
Is never, NEVER, NEVER let
Them near your television set --
Or better still, just don't install
The idiotic thing at all.
In almost every house we've been,
We've watched them gaping at the screen.
They loll and slop and lounge about,
And stare until their eyes pop out.
(Last week in someone's place we saw
A dozen eyeballs on the floor.)
They sit and stare and stare and sit
Until they're hypnotised by it,
Until they're absolutely drunk
With all that shocking ghastly junk.
Oh yes, we know it keeps them still,
They don't climb out the window sill,
They never fight or kick or punch,
They leave you free to cook the lunch
And wash the dishes in the sink --
But did you ever stop to think,
To wonder just exactly what
This does to your beloved tot?
IT ROTTS THE SENSE IN THE HEAD!
IT KILLS IMAGINATION DEAD!
IT CLOGS AND CLUTTERS UP THE MIND!
IT MAKES A CHILD SO DULL AND BLIND
HE CAN NO LONGER UNDERSTAND
A FANTASY, A FAIRYLAND!
HIS BRAIN BECOMES AS SOFT AS CHEESE!
HIS POWERS OF THINKING RUST AND FREEZE!
HE CANNOT THINK -- HE ONLY SEES!
'All right!' you'll cry. 'All right!' you'll say,
'But if we take the set away,
What shall we do to entertain
Our darling children? Please explain!'
We'll answer this by asking you,
'What used the darling ones to do?
'How used they keep themselves contented
Before this monster was invented?'
Have you forgotten? Don't you know?
We'll say it very loud and slow:
THEY ... USED ... TO ... READ! They'd READ and READ,
AND READ and READ, and then proceed
To READ some more. Great Scott! Gadzooks!
One half their lives was reading books!

The nursery shelves held books galore!
Books cluttered up the nursery floor!
And in the bedroom, by the bed,
More books were waiting to be read!
Such wondrous, fine, fantastic tales
Of dragons, gypsies, queens, and whales
And treasure isles, and distant shores
Where smugglers rowed with muffled oars,
And pirates wearing purple pants,
And sailing ships and elephants,
And cannibals crouching 'round the pot,
Stirring away at something hot.
(It smells so good, what can it be?
Good gracious, it's Penelope.)
The younger ones had Beatrix Potter
With Mr. Tod, the dirty rotter,
And Squirrel Nutkin, Pigling Bland,
And Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle and-
Just How The Camel Got His Hump,
And How the Monkey Lost His Rump,
And Mr. Toad, and bless my soul,
There's Mr. Rat and Mr. Mole-
Oh, books, what books they used to know,
Those children living long ago!
So please, oh please, we beg, we pray,
Go throw your TV set away,
And in its place you can install
A lovely bookshelf on the wall.
Then fill the shelves with lots of books,
Ignoring all the dirty looks,
The screams and yells, the bites and kicks,
And children hitting you with sticks-
Fear not, because we promise you
That, in about a week or two
Of having nothing else to do,
They'll now begin to feel the need
Of having something to read.
And once they start -- oh boy, oh boy!
You watch the slowly growing joy
That fills their hearts. They'll grow so keen
They'll wonder what they'd ever seen
In that ridiculous machine,
That nauseating, foul, unclean,
Repulsive television screen!
And later, each and every kid
Will love you more for what you did.

Chosen and read by Carolyn Ashford-Russell:
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/television/>

The Gift of Happiness by Yvette Jane

Do you find yourself thinking things like *'I'm not clever enough'* or *'I'm never going to be good at this'*? If so, it's time to press the delete button on negative self-talk and replace it with positive. Write down some inspiring phrases and read them to yourself daily.

Move from small talk to deeper conversations with friends. It's good to connect with people and share ideas. Bonding with others is one of the core factors for happiness.

Chosen and read by Suzy Kavsek

Sneezles by A A Milne

Christopher Robin
Had wheezles
And sneezles,
They bundled him
Into
His bed.
They gave him what goes
With a cold in the nose,
And some more for a cold
In the head.
They wondered
If wheezles
Could turn
Into measles,
If sneezles
Would turn
Into mumps;
They examined his chest
For a rash,
And the rest
Of his body for swellings and lumps.
They sent for some doctors
In sneezles
And wheezles
To tell them what ought
To be done.
All sorts and conditions
Of famous physicians
Came hurrying round
At a run.
They all made a note
Of the state of his throat,
They asked if he suffered from thirst;
They asked if the sneezles
Came after the wheezles,

Or if the first sneeze
Came first.
They said, "If you teazle
A sneeze
Or wheeze,
A measle
May easily grow.
But humour or pleazle
The wheeze
Or sneeze,
The measle
Will certainly go."
They expounded the reazles
For sneezles
And wheezles,
The manner of measles
When new.
They said "If he freezles
In draughts and in breezles,
Then PHTHEEZLES
May even ensue."

Christopher Robin
Got up in the morning,
The sneezles had vanished away.
And the look in his eye
Seemed to say to the sky,
"Now, how to amuse them to-day?"

Chosen and read by Sue Hearn

<https://allpoetry.com/Sneezles>

***Kubla Khan* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Chosen and read by Rev Michael Riley

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43991/kubla-khan>