

# Poems in a Time of Coronavirus - Issue No. 4



This anthology contains prose and poems chosen by a group of friends from St Paul's Church Grove Park Chiswick on the theme of 'Sports, Passions or Hobbies', read to each other via Zoom on 23 April 2020.

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## ***Hunter Trials* by John Betjeman**

It's awfully bad luck on Diana  
Her ponies have swallowed their bits  
She fished down their throats with a spanner  
And frightened them all into fits

So now she's attempting to borrow  
Do lend her some bits Mummy do  
I'll lend her my own for tomorrow  
But today I'll be wanting them too

Just look at Prunella on Guzzle  
The wizardest pony on earth  
Why doesn't she slacken his muzzle  
And tighten the breech in his girth

I say Mummy there's Mrs. Geysler  
And doesn't she look pretty sick  
I bet it's because Mona Lisa  
Was hit on the hock with a brick

Miss Blewitt says Monica threw it  
But Monica says it was Joan  
And Joan's very thick with Miss Blewitt  
So Monica's sulking alone

And Margaret failed in her paces  
Her withers got tied in a noose  
So her coronets caught in the traces  
And now all her fetlocks are loose

Oh it's me now I'm terribly nervous  
I wonder if Smudges will shy  
She's practically certain to swerve us  
Her Pelham is over one eye

Oh wasn't it naughty of Smudges  
Oh Mummy I'm sick with disgust  
She threw me in front of the judges  
And my silly old collarbone's bust

**Chosen and read by Simon Surtees**

### ***Kata* by Lavinia Greenlaw**

A dance between movement and space,  
between image and imperative.  
Each step, an arrival  
of the familiar within the unknown.  
The gravity of form  
and the mechanism of each gesture  
as profound and dissolved  
as the body's memory of a stranger  
who said nothing but in passing  
met with you in stillness:  
wanting to go no faster than this.

**Chosen and read by Shelagh Allsop**

### ***Dream Variations* by Langston Hughes**

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
    Dark like me—  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
    Black like me.

**Chosen and read by Mary Barnard**

### ***Nonsense Poem* author unknown**

Behold the wonders of the mighty deep  
Where crabs and lobsters learn to creep  
And little fishes learn to swim  
And clumsy sailors tumble in!

**Chosen and read by Nan Owen**

### ***A Subalterns Love Song* by John Betjeman**

Miss J. Hunter Dunn, Miss J. Hunter Dunn,  
Furnish'd and burnish'd by Aldershot sun,  
What strenuous singles we played after tea,  
We in the tournament - you against me!

Love-thirty, love-forty, oh! weakness of joy,  
The speed of a swallow, the grace of a boy,  
With carefulest carelessness, gaily you won,  
I am weak from your loveliness, Joan Hunter Dunn.

Miss Joan Hunter Dunn, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn,  
How mad I am, sad I am, glad that you won,  
The warm-handled racket is back in its press,  
But my shock-headed victor, she loves me no less.

Her father's euonymus shines as we walk,  
And swing past the summer-house, buried in talk,  
And cool the verandah that welcomes us in  
To the six-o'clock news and a lime-juice and gin.

The scent of the conifers, sound of the bath,  
The view from my bedroom of moss-dappled path,  
As I struggle with double-end evening tie,  
For we dance at the Golf Club, my victor and I.

On the floor of her bedroom lie blazer and shorts,  
And the cream-coloured walls are be-trophied with sports,  
And westering, questioning settles the sun,  
On your low-leaded window, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn.

The Hillman is waiting, the light's in the hall,  
The pictures of Egypt are bright on the wall,

My sweet, I am standing beside the oak stair  
And there on the landing's the light on your hair.

By roads "not adopted", by woodlanded ways,  
She drove to the club in the late summer haze,  
Into nine-o'clock Camberley, heavy with bells  
And mushroomy, pine-woody, evergreen smells.

Miss Joan Hunter Dunn, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn,  
I can hear from the car park the dance has begun,  
Oh! Surrey twilight! importunate band!  
Oh! strongly adorable tennis-girl's hand!

Around us are Rovers and Austins afar,  
Above us the intimate roof of the car,  
And here on my right is the girl of my choice,  
With the tilt of her nose and the chime of her voice.

And the scent of her wrap, and the words never said,  
And the ominous, ominous dancing ahead.  
We sat in the car park till twenty to one  
And now I'm engaged to Miss Joan Hunter Dunn.

**Chosen and read by Victoria Lynch**

## **Assorted poems by Muhammad Ali**

*Muhammad Ali enlivened many of his news conference and training sessions with poems. They caused many people to laugh, some to cringe.*

*Ali could be Robert Frost in a robe; Maya Angelou with a championship belt, though his sometimes simplistic stanzas sometimes leaned more toward something out of a Dr. Seuss book. He was a true beat poet -- as in, he loved having a rhyme to have a reason to thump his latest rival.*

*These helped make Ali one of the poet laureates of boxing.*

"Everyone knew when I stepped in town,  
I was the greatest fighter around.  
A lot of people called me a clown,  
But I am the one who called the round.  
The people came to see a great fight,  
But all I did was put out the light.  
Never put your money against Cassius Clay,  
For you will never have a lucky day."  
*-- In 1962, when Ali was still Cassius Clay.*

"Now Clay swings with a right, what a beautiful swing.  
And the punch raises the Bear clear out of the ring.  
Liston is still rising, and the ref wears a frown.  
For he can't start counting `til Sonny comes down.  
Now Liston disappears from view.  
The crowd is getting frantic,  
But our radar stations have picked him up. He's somewhere over the Atlantic.  
Who would have thought when they came to the fight  
That they'd witness the launching of a human satellite.  
Yes, the crowd did not dream when they lay down their money  
That they would see a total eclipse of the Sonny.  
I am the greatest."  
*-- Part of a poem before his upset title victory over Sonny Liston Feb. 25, 1964.*

"Joe's gonna come out smokin',  
But I ain't gonna be jokin'.  
This might shock and amaze ya,  
But I'm going to destroy Joe Frazier."  
*-- Before losing to Joe Frazier in their first fight March 8, 1971.*

"You think the world was shocked when Nixon resigned?  
Wait `til I whup George Foreman's behind.  
Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.  
His hand can't hit what his eyes can't see.  
Now you see me, now you don't.  
George thinks he will, but I know he won't.  
I done wrassled with an alligator, I done tussled with a whale.  
Only last week I murdered a rock, injured a stone, hospitalized a brick.

"I'm so mean, I make medicine sick."

-- *Before regaining the title by upsetting George Foreman Oct. 30, 1974.*

"I got speed and endurance.

You'd better increase your insurance."

-- *To Larry Holmes before his one-sided loss in a bid to become a heavyweight champion for the fourth time Oct. 2, 1980.*

**Chosen and read by Carolyn Ashford-Russell**

### ***Victory Calypso - Cricket, Lovely Cricket* - writer unknown. Performed by Lord Beginner**

Peter introduced a piece of Calypso celebrating the West Indies win over England at Lord's in June 1950 – a defining moment in West Indies – see the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06P0RdZyjT4>

The article below gives the background to the win and to the song:

<https://www.espnricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/251196.html>

**Chosen and clip organised by Peter Capell**

### ***Vitai Lampada – an excerpt by Sir Henry Newbolt***

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night—  
Ten to make and the match to win—  
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,  
An hour to play and the last man in.  
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,  
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,  
But his captain's hand on his shoulder smote  
'Play up! play up! and play the game! '

**Chosen and read by Jackie Rayer**

### ***Viv by Faustin Charles***

Like the sun rising and setting  
Like the thunderous roar of a bull rhino  
Like the sleek, quick grace of a gazelle,  
The player springs into the eye  
And lights the world with fires

Of a million dreams, a million aspirations.  
The batsman-hero climbs the skies,  
Strikes the earth-ball for six  
And the landscape rolls with the ecstasy of the magic play.

Through the covers, the warrior thrusts a majestic cut  
Lighting the day with runs  
As bodies reel and tumble,  
Hands clap, eyes water  
And hearts move inside out.

The volcano erupts!  
Blows the game apart.

**Chosen and read by Catherine Jessop**

### ***The Glorious Madness of Wisden – an excerpt by Howard Jacobson***

As I explained when I rose to speak, my more passive lifelong participation in cricket – i.e. listening to it at all hours of the day and night on radio – had, over the years, slipped into a mild form of insanity.....lying there in my bed in the early hours of the morning, listening to the commentary coming in from Melbourne or Sydney, I would exhort Fred Trueman or Bob Willis to take a wicket and, provided I was concentrating adequately, a wicket was exactly what they took.

Of the forms of superstition that rob the human mind of reason, sporting superstition is at once the most innocent and the least susceptible to cure, so easy is it to persuade yourself that even if you are not controlling the game from your bed entirely, you are still controlling a major part of it. Geoff Boycott didn't always hit a century when I slept with the light on and the dog out, but Ian Chappell was invariably dismissed for a low score when I went to bed without pyjama bottoms.

Believe me, reader, when I tell you that the famous partnership of close to 200 put together by Mike Denness and Keith Fletcher during the 1974-75 tour of Australia was achieved only because I switched from my left side to my right with every alternate ball Dennis Lillee bowled. In the end it was Max Walker who broke the partnership, and that only happened because I had to go to the toilet.

Whether my pleas to be included in Wisden as the unseen force guiding English cricket will be heeded, I won't know until next year's 150th edition. I suspect not.

**Chosen and read by Sam Hearn**

### ***At Lord's* by Francis Thompson**

It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,  
Though my own red roses there may blow;  
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,  
Though the red roses crest the caps, I know.  
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,  
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,  
And I look through my tears on a soundless-clapping host  
As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,  
To and fro: –  
O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!

**Chosen and read by Katharine Makower**

### ***Drake's Drum* by Sir Henry Newbolt**

Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand miles away,  
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)  
Slung atween the round shot in Nombre Dios Bay,  
An' dreamin' arl the time O' Plymouth Hoe.  
Yarnder lumes the Island, yarnder lie the ships,  
Wi' sailor lads a-dancing' heel-an'-toe,  
An' the shore-lights flashin', an' the night-tide dashin',  
He sees et arl so plainly as he saw et long ago.

Drake he was a Devon man, an' ruled the Devon seas,  
(Capten, art tha' sleepin' there below?)  
Roving' tho' his death fell, he went wi' heart at ease,  
A' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.  
"Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,  
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;  
If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,  
An' drum them up the Channel as we drumm'd them long ago."

Drake he's in his hammock till the great Armadas come,  
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)  
Slung atween the round shot, listenin' for the drum,  
An' dreamin arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.  
Call him on the deep sea, call him up the Sound,  
Call him when ye sail to meet the foe;  
Where the old trade's plyin' an' the old flag flyin'  
They shall find him ware an' wakin', as they found him long ago!

**Chosen and read by Bill White**

## ***Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley**

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away

**Chosen and read by Sue Hearn**

