

# Poems in a Time of Coronavirus - Issue No. 8



This anthology contains prose and poems chosen by a group of friends from St Paul's Church Grove Park Chiswick on the theme of 'Spring', read to each other via Zoom on 21 May 2020.

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***dandelion* by Robert Macfarlane**

Dazzle me, little sun-of-the-grass!

And spin me, tiny time-machine!

*(Tick-tock, sun clock, thistle and dock)*

No longer known as

*Dent-de-Lion*, Lion's Tooth or Windblow

*(Tick-tock, sun clock, thistle and dock)*

Evening Glow, Milkwitch or Parachute, so

Let new names take and root, thrive and grow,

*(Tick-tock, sun clock, thistle and dock)*

I would make you some, such as

Bane of Lawn Perfectionists

Or Fallen Star of the Football Pitch

or Scatterseed, but

Never would I call you only, merely, simply, 'weed'.

*(Tick-tock, sun clock, thistle and dock)*

**Chosen and read by Shelagh Allsop**



Illustration, by Jackie Morris, from 'The Lost Words'

## ***Spring Wind In London* by Katherine Mansfield**

I Blow across the stagnant world,  
I blow across the sea,  
For me, the sailor's flag unfurled,  
For me, the uprooted tree.  
My challenge to the world is hurled;  
The world must bow to me.

I drive the clouds across the sky,  
I huddle them like sheep;  
Merciless shepherd-dog am I  
And shepherd-watch I keep.  
If in the quiet vales they lie  
I blow them up the steep.

Lo! In the tree-tops do I hide,  
In every living thing;  
On the moon's yellow wings I glide,  
On the wild rose I swing;  
On the sea-horse's back I ride,  
And what then do I bring?

And when a little child is ill  
I pause, and with my hand  
I wave the window curtain's frill  
That he may understand  
Outside the wind is blowing still;  
...It is a pleasant land.

O stranger in a foreign place,  
See what I bring to you.  
This rain--is tears upon your face;  
I tell you--tell you true  
I came from that forgotten place  
Where once the wattle grew,--

All the wild sweetness of the flower  
Tangled against the wall.  
It was that magic, silent hour....  
The branches grew so tall  
They twined themselves into a bower.  
The sun shown... and the fall

Of yellow blossom on the grass!  
You feel that golden rain?  
Both of you could not hold, alas,  
(both of you tried, in vain)  
A memory, stranger. So I pass....  
It will not come again

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

### ***The Argument of his Book* by Robert Herrick**

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,  
Of April, May, of June, and July flowers.  
I sing of May-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,  
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal-cakes.  
I write of youth, of love, and have access  
By these to sing of cleanly wantonness.  
I sing of dews, of rains, and piece by piece  
Of balm, of oil, of spice, and ambergris.  
I sing of Time's trans-shifting; and I write  
How roses first came red, and lilies white.  
I write of groves, of twilights, and I sing  
The court of Mab, and of the fairy king.  
I write of Hell; I sing (and ever shall)  
Of Heaven, and hope to have it after all.

**Chosen and read by Catherine Jessop**

### ***Platero Y Yo (Platero and I)* by Juan Ramon Jimenez An Andalusian Elegy                      Written 1905-1911**

SPRING

*Oh, what sparkles and what scents!  
Oh, see how the meadows laugh!  
Oh, what music in the early morn!  
Popular Ballad*

One morning, when half awake, I am put out of sorts by the devilish chattering of little children. At last, unable to sleep any longer, I jump out of bed in despair. Then as I look out at the fields through the open window, I realise that those guilty of the uproar are the birds. I go out to the orchard and thank god for the blue day. Unrestrained concert from fresh throats without number! Capriciously, the swallow sends her warblings spiralling down the well; the blackbird whistles over the fallen orange; the fire bright oriole chatters in the oak; the titmouse spins long, fine laughter from the top of the eucalyptus; and in the great pine, the sparrows carry on a turbulent discussion. What a morning it is! The sun scatters over the earth its gold and silver joy; butterflies of a hundred hues play everywhere, among the flowers, through the house, in the fountain. The fields all around burst and crack open in a ferment of healthy new life. We seem to be within a great honeycomb of light, the burning centre of an immense flaming rose.

**Chosen and read by Peter Capell**

## ***Miracle on St David's Day* by Gillian Clarke**

They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude  
- The Daffodils - William Wordsworth

An afternoon yellow and open-mouthed  
with daffodils. The sun treads the path  
among cedars and enormous oaks.  
It might be a country house, guests strolling,  
the rumps of gardeners between nursery  
shrubs.

I am reading poetry to the insane.  
An old woman, interrupting, offers  
as many buckets of coals as I need.  
A beautiful chestnut-haired boy listens  
entirely absorbed. A schizophrenic

on a good day, they tell me later.  
In a cage of first March sun a woman  
sits not listening, not seeing, not feeling.  
In her neat clothes, the woman is absent.  
A big mild man is tenderly led

to his chair. He has never spoken.  
His labourer's hands on his knees, he rocks  
gently to the rhythms of the poems.  
I read to their presences, absences,  
to the big, dumb labouring man as he rocks.

He is suddenly standing, silently,  
huge and mild, but I feel afraid. Like slow  
movement of spring water or the first bird  
of the year in the breaking darkness,  
the labourer's voice recites *The Daffodils*'.

The nurses are frozen, alert; the patients  
seem to listen. He is hoarse but word-perfect.  
Outside the daffodils are still as wax,  
a thousand, ten thousand, their syllables  
unspoken, their creams and yellows still.

Forty years ago, in a Valleys school,  
the class recited poetry by rote.  
Since the dumbness of misery fell  
he has remembered there was a music  
of speech and that once he had something to say.

When he's done, before the applause, we observe  
the flowers' silence. A thrush sings  
and the daffodils are aflame.

**Chosen and read by Katharine Makower**

### ***The BlueBell Wood* by Felix Dennis**

We walked within an ancient wood  
Beside the Heart-of-England way  
Where oak and beech and hazel stood,  
Their leaves the pale shades of May.

By bole and bough, still black with rain,  
The sunlight filtered where it would  
Across a glowing, radiant stain—  
We stood within a bluebell wood!

And stood and stood, both lost for words,  
As all around the woodland rang  
And echoed with the cries of birds  
Who sang and sang and sang and sang...

My mind has marked that afternoon  
To hoard against life's stone and sling;  
Should I go late, or I go soon,  
The bluebells glow— the birds still sing.

**Chosen and read by Victoria Lynch**

### ***Two tramps in mud time – an excerpt* by Robert Frost**

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.  
You know how it is with an April day  
When the sun is out and the wind is still,  
You're one month on in the middle of May.  
But if you so much as dare to speak,  
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,  
A wind comes off a frozen peak,  
And you're two months back in the middle of  
March.

**Chosen and read by Jackie Rayer**

**Full poem: [Two tramps in mud time](#)**

### ***Wood Pictures in Spring* by John Clare**

The rich brown-umber hue the oaks unfold  
When spring's young sunshine bathes their trunks in gold,  
So rich, so beautiful, so past the power  
Of words to paint--my heart aches for the dower  
The pencil gives to soften and infuse  
This brown luxuriance of unfolding hues,  
This living luscious tinting woodlands give  
Into a landscape that might breathe and live,  
And this old gate that claps against the tree  
The entrance of spring's paradise should be--  
Yet paint itself with living nature fails:  
The sunshine threading through these broken rails  
In mellow shades no pencil e'er conveys,  
And mind alone feels fancies and portrays.

**Chosen and read by Simon Surtees**

### ***Spring is sprung* - Anon**

Spring is sprung, the grass is riz.  
I wonder where the birdies is.  
The birdies on the wing, but that's absurd.  
I always thought the wing was on the bird.

Spring has sprung, the grass has ris',  
I wonder where the birdie is?  
There he is up in the sky,  
He dropped some whitewash in my eye!  
I'm alright, I won't cry,  
I'm just glad that cows can't fly!

**Chosen and read by Hillie MacLaren**

**This is often (incorrectly) attributed to Ogden Nash. It was made well known in the UK by Spike Milligan**

## ***Poisoning Pigeons in the park* by Tom Lehrer**

Spring is here  
A-suh-puh-ring is here  
Life is skittles and life is beer  
I think the loveliest time  
Of the year is the spring  
I do, don't you? 'Course you do  
But there's one thing  
That makes spring complete for me  
And makes every Sunday  
A treat for me

All the world seems in tune  
On a spring afternoon  
When we're poisoning pigeons in the park  
Every Sunday you'll see  
My sweetheart and me  
As we poison the pigeons in the park  
When they see us coming  
The birdies all try an' hide  
But they still go for peanuts  
When coated with cyanide  
The sun's shining bright  
Everything seems all right  
When we're poisoning pigeons in the park

We've gained notoriety  
And caused much anxiety  
In the Audubon Society  
With our games  
They call it impiety  
And lack of propriety  
And quite a variety  
Of unpleasant names  
But it's not against any religion  
To want to dispose of a pigeon

**Chosen by Sam Hearn**

Youtube clip: [Poisoning Pigeons in the park](#)

So if Sunday you're free  
Why don't you come with me  
And we'll poison the pigeons in the park  
And maybe we'll do  
In a squirrel or two  
While we're poisoning pigeons in the park

We'll murder them all  
Amid laughter and merriment  
Except for the few  
We take home to experiment  
My pulse will be quickenin'  
With each drop of strychnine  
We feed to a pigeon  
(It just takes a smidgin!)  
To poison a pigeon in the park

## ***Tiggers* by A A Milne**

The wonderful thing about Tiggers, is Tiggers are wonderful things.  
Their tops are made out of rubber, their bottoms are made out of springs.  
They're bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy, fun, fun, fun, fun, fun.  
But the most wonderful thing about Tiggers, is I'm the only one.  
I'lll'm the only one!

**Chosen and read by Sue Hearn**

Youtube clip: [Tiggers](#)