

# Poems in a Time of Coronavirus - Issue No. 10



This anthology contains poems, a book and a song chosen by a group of friends from St Paul's Church Grove Park Chiswick on the theme of 'Books / Writing', shared with each other via Zoom on 4 June 2020.

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## ***A Letter To My Aunt* by Dylan Thomas**

To you, my aunt, who would explore  
The literary Chankley Bore,  
The paths are hard, for you are not  
A literary Hottentot  
But just a kind and cultured dame  
Who knows not Eliot (to her shame).  
Fie on you, aunt, that you should see  
No genius in David G.,  
No elemental form and sound  
In T.S.E. and Ezra Pound.  
Fie on you, aunt! I'll show you how  
To elevate your middle brow,  
And how to scale and see the sights  
From modernist Parnassian heights.

First buy a hat, no Paris model  
But one the Swiss wear when they yodel,  
A bowler thing with one or two  
Feathers to conceal the view;  
And then in sandals walk the street  
(All modern painters use their feet  
For painting, on their canvas strips,  
Their wives or mothers, minus hips).

Perhaps it would be best if you  
Created something very new,  
A dirty novel done in Erse  
Or written backwards in Welsh verse,  
Or paintings on the backs of vests,  
Or Sanskrit psalms on lepers' chests.  
But if this proved imposs-i-ble  
Perhaps it would be just as well,  
For you could then write what you please,  
And modern verse is done with ease.

Do not forget that 'limpet' rhymes  
With 'strumpet' in these troubled times,

**Chosen and read by Shelagh Allsop**

And commas are the worst of crimes;  
Few understand the works of Cummings,  
And few James Joyce's mental slummings,  
And few young Auden's coded chatter;  
But then it is the few that matter.  
Never be lucid, never state,  
If you would be regarded great,  
The simplest thought or sentiment,  
(For thought, we know, is decadent);  
Never omit such vital words  
As belly, genitals and -----,  
For these are things that play a part  
(And what a part) in all good art.  
Remember this: each rose is wormy,  
And every lovely woman's germy;  
Remember this: that love depends  
On how the Gallic letter bends;  
Remember, too, that life is hell  
And even heaven has a smell  
Of putrefying angels who  
Make deadly whoopee in the blue.  
These things remembered, what can stop  
A poet going to the top?

A final word: before you start  
The convulsions of your art,  
Remove your brains, take out your heart;  
Minus these curses, you can be  
A genius like David G.

Take courage, aunt, and send your stuff  
To Geoffrey Grigson with my luff,  
And may I yet live to admire  
How well your poems light the fire.

### ***And Yet The Books* by Czeslaw Milosz**

And yet the books will be there on the shelves, separate beings,  
That appeared once, still wet  
As shining chestnuts under a tree in autumn,  
And, touched, coddled, began to live  
In spite of fires on the horizon, castles blown up,  
Tribes on the march, planets in motion.  
“We are, ” they said, even as their pages  
Were being torn out, or a buzzing flame  
Licked away their letters. So much more durable  
Than we are, whose frail warmth  
Cools down with memory, disperses, perishes.  
I imagine the earth when I am no more:  
Nothing happens, no loss, it’s still a strange pageant,  
Women’s dresses, dewy lilacs, a song in the valley.  
Yet the books will be there on the shelves, well born,  
Derived from people, but also from radiance, heights.

### ***London Airport* by Christopher Logue**

Last night in London Airport  
I saw a wooden bin  
labelled UNWANTED LITERATURE  
IS TO BE PLACED HEREIN.  
So I wrote a poem  
and popped it in.

**Both chosen and read by Katharine Makower**

## ***The Land Of Story-Books* by Robert Louis Stevenson**

At evening when the lamp is lit,  
Around the fire my parents sit;  
They sit at home and talk and sing,  
And do not play at anything.

Now, with my little gun, I crawl  
All in the dark along the wall,  
And follow round the forest track  
Away behind the sofa back.

There, in the night, where none can spy,  
All in my hunter's camp I lie,  
And play at books that I have read  
Till it is time to go to bed.

These are the hills, these are the woods,  
These are my starry solitudes;  
And there the river by whose brink  
The roaring lions come to drink.

I see the others far away  
As if in firelit camp they lay,  
And I, like to an Indian scout,  
Around their party prowled about.

So when my nurse comes in for me,  
Home I return across the sea,  
And go to bed with backward looks  
At my dear land of Story-books.

## ***I Met a Dragon Face to Face* by Jack Prelutsky**

I met a dragon face to face  
the year when I was ten,  
I took a trip to outer space,  
I braved a pirate's den,  
I wrestled with a wicked troll,  
and fought a great white shark,  
I trailed a rabbit down a hole,  
I hunted for a snark.

I stowed aboard a submarine,  
I opened magic doors,  
I traveled in a time machine,  
and searched for dinosaurs,  
I climbed atop a giant's head,  
I found a pot of gold,  
I did all this in books I read  
when I was ten years old.

**Both chosen and the first read by Peter Capell**

## ***Reading in Bed* by Helen H. Moore**

Oh, what could be better  
Than reading in bed,  
Or thinking about  
All the books that you've read?

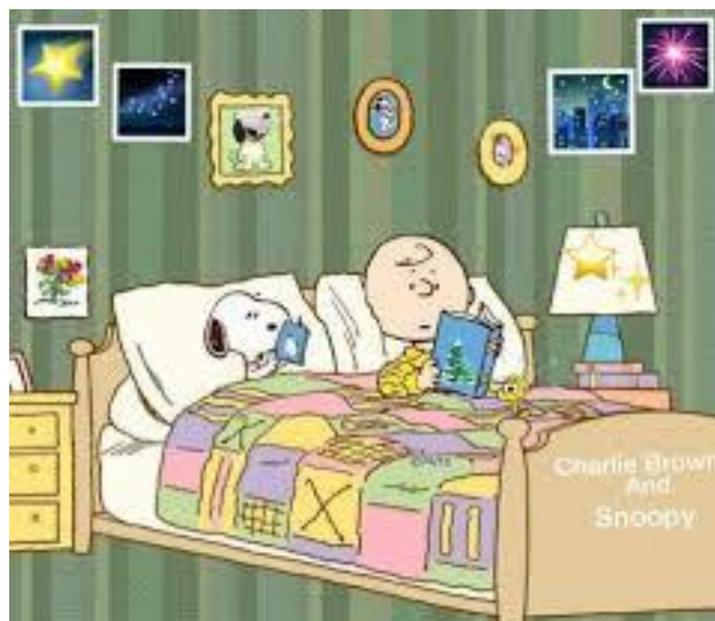
With someone who loves you,  
A father, a mother,  
A doll, or a pet,  
Or a sister or brother,

A grandma, a grandpa,  
An uncle, an aunt –  
(Can you think of anything better?  
I can't!)

While outside the sky  
Is all twinkling with light,  
From stars that shine down  
As we sleep through the night.

Oh, what could be better  
Than sleepin in bed,  
When the books that you love  
Fill the dreams in your head?

**Chosen and read by Hillie MacLaren**



## ***I Opened A Book* by Julia Donaldson**

I opened a book and in I strode  
Now nobody can find me.  
I've left my chair, my house, my road,  
My town and my world behind me.

I'm wearing the cloak, I've slipped on the ring,  
I've swallowed the magic potion.  
I've fought with a dragon, dined with a king  
And dived in a bottomless ocean.

I opened a book and made some friends.  
I shared their tears and laughter  
And followed their road with its bumps and bends  
To the happily ever after.

I finished my book and out I came.  
The cloak can no longer hide me.  
My chair and my house are just the same,  
But I have a book inside me.

**Chosen and read by Catherine Jessop**

## ***The Scholars* by W B Yeats**

BALD heads forgetful of their sins,  
Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
Edit and annotate the lines  
That young men, tossing on their beds,  
Rhymed out in love's despair  
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.  
All shuffle there; all cough in ink;  
All wear the carpet with their shoes;  
All think what other people think;  
All know the man their neighbour knows.  
Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way?

**Chosen and read by Sam Hearn**

### ***The Author to Her Book* by Anne Bradstreet**

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,  
Who after birth didst by my side remain,  
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,  
Who thee abroad, expos'd to publick view,  
Made thee in raggs, halting to th' press to trudge,  
Where errors were not lessened (all may judg).  
At thy return my blushing was not small,  
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight;  
Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:  
I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw,  
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.  
I stretched thy joynts to make thee even feet,  
Yet still thou run'st more hobling then is meet;  
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
But nought save home-spun Cloth, i' th' house I find.  
In this array 'mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam.  
In Criticks hands, beware thou dost not come;  
And take thy way where yet thou art not known,  
If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none:  
And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,  
Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.

**Chosen and read by Mary Barnard**

## **Victorian samplers by Joan Pomfret (published in Embroidery Magazine in 1957)**

About a hundred years ago  
Most little girls were taught to sew  
A Sampler ... Quietly sitting there  
With patient needle, braided hair,  
They worked long rows of cross-stitch trees  
And alphabets, and things like these...  
But who, I wonder, chose the lines  
Which always finished their design?  
We fade as Leaves upon a Tree  
Stitch little Abigail, aged three;  
For Charity, at four (poor lass!)  
'Twas: We are Cut Down like the Grass.  
And ... more ambitious ... May I go  
With Courage through this Vale of Woe,  
The Path of Duty never shirk.  
Rebecca Green, aged five. Her work.  
The Sabbath Day was made for Man,  
This came from six year-old Joanne,  
Who also stitched this further truth:  
Man's heart is Evil from his Youth...  
Too soon, too soon the Moment fell,  
He had not Time to say Farewell  
But swiftly sped his Way to Heaven  
And that from Sarah Jane, aged Seven!

At eight, a Hymn (though far from gay)  
Became the order of the day,  
And Ruth in 1843  
Left these lines for Posterity...  
In the Churchyard are many Graves,  
Above our Friends are the green grass waves,  
They cannot hear us speak or tread,  
Or come to Church ... for they are Dead.  
I could go on .... At nine and ten  
They really had a good time then  
With : Dash thy Foot against a Stone...  
Man does not Live by Bread alone ...  
And even: With Thy Sheep, O Place Me,  
Nor among the Goats debase Me (!)

\* \* \*

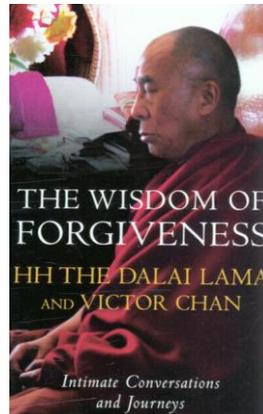
I'm glad I didn't learn to sew  
About a hundred years ago!

**Chosen and read by Jackie Rayer**



## ***The Wisdom of Forgiveness* by Victor Chan**

Read by Carolyn on a flight back to the UK from Bhutan. Much loved, and since recommended to others who shared her passion for the book.



Extraordinary documentation of the evolving friendship between the Dalai Lama and the man who followed him across Ireland and Eastern Europe, on a pilgrimage to India's holy sites, and through the Dalai Lama's near fatal illness.

Victor Chan was awarded an insight into His Holiness-his life, his fears, his faith, his compassion, his day-to-day practice-that no one had reported before.

Chan's own background made him uniquely qualified for this task. (The development of the obvious bond between the Tibetan monk and his Chinese pupil is a touching subtext.)

— Victor Chan, *The Wisdom of Forgiveness*

“To the Dalai Lama, suffering and adversity are the necessary conditions for developing patience and tolerance. These qualities are vital if we want to reduce negative emotions like hatred or anger. When things go well, we have less need to be patient and forgiving. It's only when we come across problems, when we suffer, that we truly learn these virtues. Once we internalize them, compassion flows naturally.”

**Book recommended by Carolyn Ashford-Russell**

## ***Digging* by Seamus Heaney**

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

**Chosen and read by Sue Hearn**

***A trip to the Library, from the musical 'She Loves Me' performed by Barbara Cook***

Youtube clip: [A trip to the Library](#)

Chosen and played by Simon Surtees