

Today at the Pool

I saw my doctor
wearing a pink bikini.

She looked fine
and I felt better too.

Rob Lock (1942-)

Woman and Scarab

She sees him floating in the water trough –
a crumpled fist denting the water's metal.
An autumn sun glares back at itself
blazing this nub of a beetle adrift
in his tiny coracle, paddles flailing.

The woman scoops it up in a wet handful,
rolls him onto her fleece. Droplets swell and sink
into its fibres. Twin stamens rise, he lifts his head
and the dark casings of his back fling out
two bolts of silk, radiant in the heat.

She watches, motionless. The sky is waiting.
Swallows gather, looping their wild geometries.
Now, he flits: a sudden frantic fuzz of wings
that lifts him into the wind he'll ride
all the way to Africa.

Jill Sharp (1952-)

The Quiet of Friends

We hurry for the warm milk:
three insulated jugs waiting
for evening prayer to end.

Foam falls at their throats
as they pour sweet and simple,
disappearing into white china.

We three friends cradle our cups,
careful as children with their first
real glass, breaking the rules.

We tread the moss and stone,
slip by torchlight to the bridge.
No-one spills a word.

Stars in the lake-water
make pinholes through the earth.
We stand pressed arm to arm.

Our cups share hot breaths with the night.
We are together, small against the sky,
holding onto comfort and warm milk.

Sarah K. Darby (1975-)



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A Poet Speaks of Newspapers

Such, sons of Britain! are the guides ye trust;
So wise their counsel, their reports so just:—
Yet, though we cannot call their morals pure,
Their judgement nice, or their decisions sure;
Merit they have to mightier works unknown,
A style, a manner, and a fate their own.

We, who for longer fame with labour strive,
Are pain'd to keep our [poetry] alive;
Studious we toil, with patient care refine,
Nor let our love protect one languid line.
Severe ourselves, at last our works appear,
When, ah! we find our readers more severe;
For, after all our care and pains, how few
Acquire applause, or keep it if they do!

Not so these sheets, ordain'd to happier fate,
Praised throughout their day, and but that day their date;
Their careless authors only strive to join
As many words, as make an even line;
As many lines, as fill a row complete;
As many rows, as furnish up a sheet:
From side to side, with ready types they run,
The measure's ended, and the work is done;
Oh, born with ease, how envied and how blest!
Your fate to-day and your to-morrow's rest.
To you all readers turn, and they can look
Pleased on a paper, who abhor a book . . .

from 'The Newspaper' by George Crabbe (1754–1832)

Sleep

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower,
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?
What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing
In a green island, far from all men's knowing?
More healthful than the leafiness of dales
More secret than a nest of nightingales?
More serene than Cordelia's countenance?
More full of visions than a high romance?

What, but thee Sleep? Soft closer of our eyes!
Low murmurer of tender lullabies!
Light hoverer around our happy pillows!
Wreather of poppy buds, and weeping willows!
Silent entangler of a beauty's tresses!
Most happy listener! when the morning blesses
Thee for enlivening all the cheerful eyes
That glance so brightly at the new sun-rise.
from 'Sleep and Poetry' by John Keats (1795–1821)

Salt and Sunny Days

Oh, silent glory of the summer day!
How, then, we watched with glad and indolent eyes
The white-sailed ships dream on their shining way,
Till, fading, they were mingled with the skies.
Have we not watched her, too, on nights that steep
The soul in peace of moonlight, softly move
As a most passionate maiden, who in sleep
Laughs low, and tosses in a dream of love?
And when the heat broke up, and in its place,
Came the strong, shouting days and nights, that run,
All white with stars, across the labouring ways
Of billows warm with storm, instead of sun,
In gray and desolate twilights, when no feet
Save ours might dare the shore, did we not come
Through winds that all in vain against us beat
Until we had the warm sweet-smelling foam

Full in our faces, and the frantic wind
Shrieked round us, and our cheeks grew numb, then warm,
Until we felt our souls, no more confined,
Mix with the waves, and strain against the storm?
Oh! the immense, illimitable delight
It is, to stand by some tempestuous bay,
What time the great sea waxes warm and white
And beats and blinds the following wind with spray!

Philip Bourke Marston (1850–87)

Milk for the Cat

When the tea is brought in at five o'clock,
And all the neat curtains are drawn with care,
The little black cat with bright green eyes
Is suddenly purring there.

At first she pretends, having nothing to do,
She has come in merely to blink by the grate,
But, though tea may be late or the milk may be sour,
She is never late.

And presently her agate eyes
Take a soft large milky haze,
And her independent casual glance
Becomes a stiff, hard gaze.

Then she stamps her claws or lifts her ears,
Or twists her tail and begins to stir,
Till suddenly all her lithe body becomes
One breathing, trembling purr.

The children eat and wriggle and laugh;
The two old ladies stroke their silk:
But the cat is grown small and thin with desire,
Transformed to a creeping lust for milk.

The white saucer like some full moon descends
At last from the clouds of the table above;
She sighs and dreams and thrills and glows,
Transfigured with love.

She nestles over the shining rim,
Buries her chin in the creamy sea;
Her tail hangs loose; each drowsy paw
Is doubled under each bending knee.

A long, dim ecstasy holds her life;
Her world is an infinite shapeless white,
Till her tongue has curled the last holy drop,
Then she sinks back into the night,

Draws and dips her body to heap
Her sleepy nerves in the great arm-chair,
Lies defeated and buried deep
Three or four hours unconscious there.

Harold Munro (1879–1932)