

# **ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY**

**G.C.E. (A/L)**

**ENGLISH**

**(To be implemented from 2017)**

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1.

SONNET 73

*William Shakespeare*

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do  
    hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the  
    cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet  
    birds sang.  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take  
    away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd  
    by.  
This thou perceiv'st which makes thy  
    love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave  
    ere long.

2.

**SONNET 141**

*William Shakespeare*

In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,  
For they in thee a thousand errors note;  
But 'tis my heart that loves what they  
despise,

Who in despite of view is pleas'd to dote.  
Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune  
delighted;

Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,  
Nor taste nor smell desire to be invited  
To any sensual feast with thee alone;  
But my five wits nor my five senses can  
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving  
thee,

Who leaves unsway'd the likeness of a man,  
Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch  
to be.

Only my plague thus far I count my gain,  
That she that makes me sin awards me  
pain.

3.

**Batter my heart (Holy Sonnet 14)**

*John Donne*

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurped town, to another due,  
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am betrothed unto your enemy:  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

4.

**Song : Go and Catch a Falling Star**

*John Donne*

Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root,  
Tell me where all past years are,  
Or who cleft the devil's foot,  
Teach me to hear mermaid's singing,  
And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,  
Things invisible to see,  
Ride ten thousand days and nights,  
Till age snow white hairs on thee.  
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,  
All strange wonders that befell thee,  
And swear  
No where  
Lives a woman true and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know;  
Such a pilgrimage were sweet.  
Yet do not, I would not go,  
Though at next door we might meet.  
Though she were true when you met her,  
And last till you write your letter,  
Yet she  
Will be  
False, ere I came, to two or three.

5.

**TO THE MEMORY OF MR. OLDHAM**

*John Dryden*

Farewell, too little and too lately known,  
Whom I began to think and call my own:  
For sure our souls were near allied, and thine  
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.  
One common note on either lyre did strike,  
And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike,  
To the same goal did both our studies drive:  
The last set out the soonest did arrive.  
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,  
Whilst his young friend performed and won the race,  
O early ripe! To thy abundant store  
What could advancing age have added more?

It might (what Nature never gives the young)  
Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue,  
But satire needs not those, and wit will shine  
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line  
A noble error, and but seldom made,  
When poets are by too much force betrayed.  
Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime,  
Still showed a quickness; and maturing time  
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme  
Once more, hail, and farewell! Farewell, thou young,  
But ah! too short, Marcellus of our tongue!  
Thy brows with ivy and with laurels bound;  
But Fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

### AN EXTRACT FROM CANTO 3

#### RAPE OF THE LOCK

*Alexander Pope*

A two-edged weapon from her shining case:  
So ladies, in romance, assist their knight,  
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.  
He takes the gift with reverence, and extends  
The little engine on his fingers' ends;  
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,  
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.  
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,  
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;  
And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in her ear;  
Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the foe drew near.  
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought  
The close recesses of the virgin's thought:

As on the nosegay in her breast reclin'd,  
He watch'd th' ideas rising in her mind,  
Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art,  
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.  
Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,  
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retired.  
The peer now spreads the glitt'ring forfex wide,  
T'inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.  
Ev'n then, before the fatal engine closed,  
A wretched sylph too fondly interposed;  
Fate urged the shears, and cut the sylph in twain,  
(But airy substance soon unites again)  
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever  
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!  
Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,  
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.  
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,  
When husbands or when lap-dogs breathe their last;  
Or when rich China vessels, fall'n from high,  
In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie!



7.

## **Chimney Sweeper**

*William Blake*

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry “weep! weep! weep! weep!”  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I said,  
“Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for when your head’s bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind  
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,  
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

8.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

*John Keats*

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stained mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade for away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where plasy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs,  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
Already with thee! Tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
But here there is no light,

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;

Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain  
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn !the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu ! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu ! adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music :- Do I wake or sleep?

9.

**A SLUMBER DID MY SPIRIT SEAL**

*William Wordsworth*

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears:  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees;  
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,  
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

10.

**TO A SNOWDROP**

*William Wordsworth*

LONE Flower, hemmed in with snows and white as they  
But hardier far, once more I see thee bend  
Thy forehead, as if fearful to offend,  
Like an unbidden guest. Though day by day,  
Storms, sallying from the mountain-tops, waylay  
The rising sun, and on the plains descend;  
Yet art thou welcome, welcome as a friend  
Whose zeal outruns his promise! Blue-eyed May  
Shall soon behold this border thickly set  
With bright jonquils, their odours lavishing  
On the soft west-wind and his frolic peers;  
Nor will I then thy modest grace forget,  
Chaste Snowdrop, venturous harbinger of Spring,  
And pensive monitor of fleeting years!

11

**Remember**

*Christina Rossetti*

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

12.

**Among School Children**

*William Butler Yeats*

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;  
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;  
The children learn to cipher and to sing,  
To study reading-books and history,  
To cut and sew, be neat in everything  
In the best modern way—the children's eyes  
In momentary wonder stare upon  
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent  
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she  
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event  
That changed some childish day to tragedy—  
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent  
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,  
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,  
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage  
I look upon one child or t'other there  
And wonder if she stood so at that age—  
For even daughters of the swan can share  
Something of every paddler's heritage—  
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,  
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:  
She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats into the mind—  
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it  
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind  
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?  
And I though never of Ledaean kind  
Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,  
Better to smile on all that smile, and show

There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap  
Honey of generation had betrayed,  
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape  
As recollection or the drug decide,  
Would think her son, did she but see that shape  
With sixty or more winters on its head,  
A compensation for the pang of his birth,  
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays  
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;  
Solider Aristotle played the taws  
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;  
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras  
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings  
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:  
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,  
But those the candles light are not as those  
That animate a mother's reveries,  
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.  
And yet they too break hearts—O Presences  
That passion, piety or affection knows,  
And that all heavenly glory symbolize—  
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,  
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,  
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.  
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?



13.

**Spring and Fall**

*to a young child*

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

Márgarét, áre you gríeving  
Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
Leáves like the things of man, you  
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?  
Ah! ás the heart grows older  
It will come to such sights colder  
By and by, nor spare a sigh  
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;  
And yet you will weep and know why.  
Now no matter, child, the name:  
Sórror's spríngs áre the same.  
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:  
It ís the blight man was born for,  
It is Margaret you mourn for.

14.

**Design**

***Robert Frost***

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth--  
Assorted characters of death and blight  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth--  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?  
What brought the kindred spider to that height,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?  
What but design of darkness to appall?--  
If design govern in a thing so small.

15.

**Suicide in the Trenches**

*Siegfried Sassoon*

I knew a simple soldier boy  
Who grinned at life in empty joy,  
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,  
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,  
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,  
He put a bullet through his brain.  
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.

16.

**Morning at the Window**

*T.S. Eliot*

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,  
And along the trampled edges of the street  
I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids  
Sprouting despondently at area gates.

The brown waves of fog toss up to me  
Twisted faces from the bottom of the street,  
And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts  
An aimless smile that hovers in the air  
And vanishes along the level of the roofs.

17.

**Money**

*Philip Larkin*

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:

‘Why do you let me lie here wastefully?

I am all you never had of goods and sex.

You could get them still by writing a few cheques.’

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:

They certainly don’t keep it upstairs.

By now they’ve a second house and car and wife:

Clearly money has something to do with life

—In fact, they’ve a lot in common, if you enquire:

You can’t put off being young until you retire,

And however you bank your screw, the money you save

Won’t in the end buy you more than a shave.

I listen to money singing. It’s like looking down

From long french windows at a provincial town,

The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad

In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.

18.

**The Cathedral Builders**

*John Ormond*

They climbed on sketchy ladders towards God,  
with winch and pulley hoisted hewn rock into heaven,  
inhabited the sky with hammers,  
defied gravity,  
deified stone,  
took up God's house to meet him,  
and came down to their suppers  
and small beer,  
every night slept, lay with their smelly wives,  
quarrelled and cuffed the children,  
lied, spat, sang, were happy, or unhappy,  
and every day took to the ladders again,  
impeded the rights of way of another summer's swallows,  
grew greyer, shakier,  
became less inclined to fix a neighbour's roof of a fine evening,  
saw naves sprout arches, clerestories soar,  
cursed the loud fancy glaziers for their luck,  
somehow escaped the plague,  
got rheumatism,  
decided it was time to give it up,  
to leave the spire to others,  
stood in the crowd, well back from the vestments at the  
consecration,  
envied the fat bishop his warm boots,  
cocked a squint eye aloft,  
and said, 'I bloody did that.'

19.

**An Introduction**

*Kamala Das*

I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.  
I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,  
I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one.  
Don't write in English, they said, English is  
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave  
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in  
Any language I like? The language I speak,  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
All mine, mine alone.  
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,  
It is as human as I am human, don't  
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my  
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing  
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it  
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is  
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and  
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech  
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the  
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing  
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they  
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs  
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.  
When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me

But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.  
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.  
I shrank pitifully.  
Then ... I wore a shirt and my  
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit  
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.  
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better  
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to  
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.  
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a  
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when  
Jilted in love ... I met a man, loved him. Call  
Him not by any name, he is every man  
Who wants a woman, just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless  
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,  
The answer is, "It is I. Anywhere and,  
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I  
In this world, he is tightly packed like the  
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely  
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,  
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love  
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,  
I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed" I have no joys that are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I."



20.

**An Unknown Girl**

*Moniza Alvi*

In the evening bazaar  
studded with neon  
an unknown girl  
is hennaing my hand.  
She squeezes a wet brown line  
from a nozzle.  
She is icing my hand,  
which she steadies with hers  
on her satin-peach knee.  
In the evening bazaar  
for a few rupees  
an unknown girl  
is hennaing my hand.  
As a little air catches  
my shadow-stitched kameez  
a peacock spreads its lines  
across my palm.  
Colours leave the street  
float up in balloons.  
Dummies in shop-fronts  
tilt and stare  
with their Western perms.  
Banners for Miss India 1993,  
for curtain cloth  
and sofa cloth  
canopy me.  
I have new brown veins.  
In the evening bazaar  
very deftly

an unknown girl  
is hennaing my hand.  
I am clinging  
To these firm peacock lines  
like people who cling  
to the sides of a train.  
Now the furious streets  
are hushed.  
I'll scrape off  
the dry brown lines  
before I sleep,  
reveal soft as a snail trail  
the amber bird beneath.  
It will fade in a week.  
When India appears and reappears  
I'll lean across a country  
with my hands outstretched  
longing for the unknown girl  
in the neon bazaar.

21.

**Phenomenal Woman**

*Maya Angelou*

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size  
But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.  
I say,  
It's in the reach of my arms  
The span of my hips,  
The stride of my step,  
The curl of my lips.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

I walk into a room  
Just as cool as you please,  
And to a man,  
The fellows stand or  
Fall down on their knees.  
Then they swarm around me,  
A hive of honey bees.  
I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,

The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
When I try to show them

They say they still can't see.  
I say,  
It's in the arch of my back,  
The sun of my smile,  
The ride of my breasts,  
The grace of my style.  
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

Now you understand  
Just why my head's not bowed.  
I don't shout or jump about  
Or have to talk real loud.  
When you see me passing  
It ought to make you proud.  
I say,  
It's in the click of my heels,  
The bend of my hair,  
the palm of my hand,  
The need of my care,  
'Cause I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

**The Fisherman Mourned by his wife***Patrick Fernando*

When you were not quite thirty and the sun  
 had not yet tanned you into old-boat brown,  
 when you were not quite thirty and had not begun  
 to be embittered like the rest, nor grown  
 obsessed with death, then would you come  
 hot with continence upon the sea  
 chaste as a gull flying pointed home,  
 in haste to be with me!

Now that, being dead, you are beyond detection,  
 and need not be discreet I confess  
 it was not love that married us nor affection  
 but elders' persuasion, not even loneliness.  
 Recall how first you were so impatient and afraid  
 my eyes were open in the dark unlike in love,  
 trembling, lest in fear, you'd let me go a maid,  
 trembling on the other hand for my virginity.

Three months the monsoon thrashed the sea, and you  
 remained at home; the sky cracked like a shell  
 in thunder, and the rain broke through.  
 At last when pouring ceased and storm winds fell,  
 when gulls returned new-plumed and wild  
 when in our wind-torn flamboyante  
 new buds broke, I was with child.

My face was wan while telling you and voice fell low,  
 and you seemed full of guilt and not to know  
 whether to repent or rejoice over the situation.

You nodded at the ground and went to sea.  
But soon I was to you more than God or temptation,  
and so were you to me.

Men come and go, some say they understand,  
our children weep, the youngest thinks you're fast asleep:  
theirs is fear and wonderment.

You had grown so familiar as my hand  
that I cannot with simple grief  
assuage dismemberment.

Outside the wind despoils of leaf  
trees that it used to nurse;  
once more the flamboyante is torn  
the sky cracks like a shell again,  
so someone practical has gone  
to make them bring the hearse  
before the rain

23.

**Animal Crackers**  
*by Richard de Zoysa*

"Draw me a lion."

So I set my pen  
to work. Produce a lazy, kindly beast . . .  
Colour it yellow.

"Does it bite?"

"Sometimes,  
but only when it's angry-  
if you pull its tail  
or say that it is just another cat . . ."  
But for the most part. Indolent, biddable,  
basking in the sun of ancient pride.

(Outside, the sunlight seems a trifle dulled  
and there's a distant roaring, like a pride  
of lions, cross at being awakened  
from long, deep sleep).

Then

"Draw me a tiger."

Vision of a beast  
compounded of Jim Corbett yarns  
and Blake  
stalks through my mind, blazing Nature's warning,  
black bars on gold.

"DRAW!"

You turn and draw the gun

on me, as if to show  
that three-years-old understands *force majeure*  
and as you pull the silly plastic trigger  
all hell breaks loose; quite suddenly the sky  
is full of smoke and orange stripes of flame.

BUT HERE THERE ARE NO TIGERS  
HERE THERE ARE ONLY LIONS.

And their jackals  
run panting, rabid in the roaring's wake,  
infecting all with madness as they pass  
while My Lord  
the Elephant sways in his shaded arbour,  
wrinkles his ancient brows, and wonders-  
if, did he venture out to quell this jungle-tide  
of rising flame, he'd burn his tender feet.

"Put down that gun. If you do, and you're good.  
I'll draw a picture of an elephant.  
A curious beast that you must understand . . ."

DONT LOOK OUT THE WINDOW-

Just a party down the lane  
a bonfire, and some fireworks, and they're burning-  
No, not a tiger- just some silly cat."

*Colombo, 25 July, 1983*



24.

**Explosion**

*Vivimarie Vanderpoorten*

On the day the truckload  
Of explosives  
Drove into the Central bank,  
For a long second  
Time staggered  
All sounds of a workday morning  
In the city  
Even the cawing of the crows  
Merged into a solitary  
Boom  
Prism of fire and fury

Lives ended  
Eyes were blinded  
Retired wage earners  
Collecting provident funds  
Were crushed  
Under brick and glass  
The nearby vegetable seller's  
hands were severed  
like cucumbers,  
Women in sari  
held their eyeballs in their palms  
and blood spattered  
the streets,  
erasing memory.

Out of the broken window  
of a damaged car-  
dead driver-  
the radio blared, unscathed  
on a commercial break  
a man's pleasant voice  
announced  
that big or small, insurance  
protects them all.

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