49 POETRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (JULY 2022)

I wish to dedicate this to the memory of Pauline Salmon, our devoted and artistic mother (died aged 94 on June 18th 2022), who loved children and loved poetry.

Were you bored with a lot of the poetry that *you* had to study at school? Or puzzled, or just depressed since rote learning, homework and punitive marks took much of the pleasure away? I liked it that when "The Castaways or Vote for Caliban"* first came out, I seem to remember Adrian Mitchell saying that he specifically DIDN'T want *anyone* to set this poem for exam purposes. And I also think he was very annoyed to see that it *was* put on an O Level syllabus and that he ended up enrolling as a candidate to take the paper on his poem and analyse it – and then failed the exam, like the subversive he was, because he didn't answer in the 'set' manner required. (* You will find this poem in the Appendix below)

So, let's see if we can cheer things up a bit. What follows is totally subjective but it represents my own experiences of nearly fifty years of teaching poetry and *trying* (and in a few cases succeeding – also see Appendix **) to share my enthusiasms. It helps to realise that poetry is largely just a game, and that it comprises lullabies, hymns, ballads, rap, advertising jingles, graffiti, epics, epitaphs, epigrams, riddles, laments…), often played with rules, just like most games, but also *without* adhering to rules sometimes, like some *other* sorts of games: children's more anarchic play, sex, or… all-out war.

Here, then, is a game to start us off. We could call it "Old Possum Olympics" if we wanted but you can also call it whatever you like, or use another poem – I just think it works pretty well with "Macavity: The Mystery Cat". Not the whole poem, which would be too long - especially for everyone in a class to participate properly. You need a stopwatch (children are happy to be timers and modern telephones work equally well) and the following lines:

Macavity: The Mystery Cat

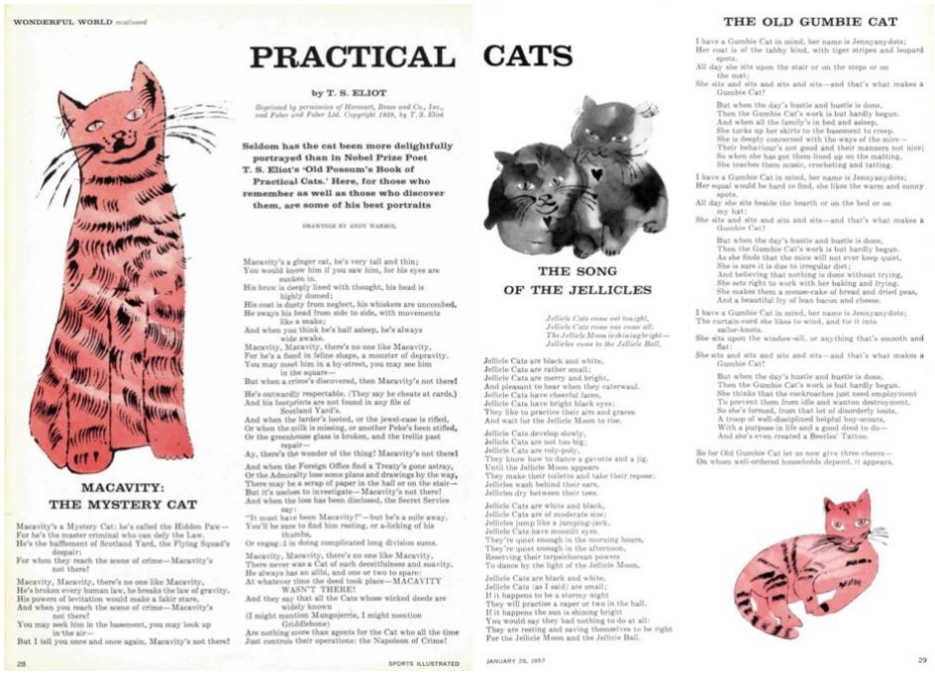
Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw -
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime - *Macavity's not there*!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime - *Macavity's not there*!
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air -
But I tell you once and once again, *Macavity's not there*!

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square -
But when a crime's discovered, then *Macavity's not there*!

By the way, without looking at the fine print too closely, try to guess the illustrator of these 'practical' cats…!



WONDERFUL WORLD realized

PRACTICAL CATS

by T. S. ELIOT

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Seldom has the cat been more delightfully portrayed than in Nobel Prize Poet T. S. Eliot's 'Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.' Here, for those who remember as well as those who discover them, are some of his best portraits

DRAWINGS BY ANDY WARHOL

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed,
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.
Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square—
But when a crime's discovered, then Macavity's not there!
He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair—
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! Macavity's not there!
And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair—
But it's useless to investigate—Macavity's not there!
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
"It must have been Macavity!"—but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumbs,
Or engag..d in doing complicated long division sums.
Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:
At whatever time the deed took place—MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!

MACAVITY: THE MYSTERY CAT

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw—
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime—Macavity's not there!
Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime—Macavity's not there!
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air—
But I tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there!

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SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

THE SONG OF THE JELLICLES

Jellicle Cats come out tonight,
Jellicle Cats come one come all:
The Jellicle Moon is shining bright—
Jellicles come to the Jellicle Ball.

Jellicle Cats are black and white,
Jellicle Cats are rather small;
Jellicle Cats are merry and bright,
And pleasant to hear when they caterwaul.
Jellicle Cats have cheerful faces,
Jellicle Cats have bright black eyes;
They like to practice their airs and graces
And wait for the Jellicle Moon to rise.

Jellicle Cats develop slowly,
Jellicle Cats are not too big;
Jellicle Cats are rolly-poly,
They know how to dance a gavotte and a jig.
Until the Jellicle Moon appears
They make their toilette and take their repose:
Jellicles wash behind their ears,
Jellicles dry between their toes.

Jellicle Cats are white and black,
Jellicle Cats are of moderate size;
Jellicles jump like a jumping-jack,
Jellicle Cats have moonlit eyes.
They're quiet enough in the morning hours,
They're quiet enough in the afternoon,
Reserving their terpsichorean powers
To dance by the light of the Jellicle Moon.

Jellicle Cats are black and white,
Jellicle Cats (as I said) are small:
If it happens to be a stormy night
They will practise a caper or two in the hall.
If it happens the sun is shining bright
You would say they had nothing to do at all:
They are resting and saving themselves to be right
For the Jellicle Moon and the Jellicle Ball.

JANUARY 28, 1957

THE OLD GUMBIE CAT

I have a Gumbie Cat in mind, her name is Jennyanydots;
Her coat is of the tabby kind, with tiger stripes and leopard spots.
All day she sits upon the stair or on the steps or on the mat;
She sits and sits and sits and sits—and that's what makes a Gumbie Cat!

But when the day's bustle and bustle is done,
Then the Gumbie Cat's work is but hardly begun.
And when all the family's in bed and asleep,
She turks up her skirts to the basement to creep.
She is deeply concerned with the ways of the mice—
Their behaviour's not good and their manners not nice;
So when she has got them lined up on the matting,
She teaches them music, crocheting and tatting.

I have a Gumbie Cat in mind, her name is Jennyanydots;
Her equal would be hard to find, she likes the warm and sunny spots.
All day she sits beside the hearth or on the bed or on my hat:
She sits and sits and sits and sits—and that's what makes a Gumbie Cat!

But when the day's bustle and bustle is done,
Then the Gumbie Cat's work is but hardly begun.
As she finds that the mice will not ever keep quiet,
She is sure it is due to irregular diet;
And believing that nothing is done without trying,
She sets right to work with her baking and frying.
She makes them a mouse-cake of bread and dried peas,
And a beautiful fry of lean bacon and cheese.

I have a Gumbie Cat in mind, her name is Jennyanydots;
The curtain-cord she likes to wind, and tie it into sailor-knots.
She sits upon the window-sill, or anything that's smooth and flat:
She sits and sits and sits and sits—and that's what makes a Gumbie Cat!

But when the day's bustle and bustle is done,
Then the Gumbie Cat's work is but hardly begun.
She thinks that the cockroaches just need employment
To prevent them from idle and wanton destroyment.
So she's formed, from that lot of disorderly louts,
A troop of well-disciplined helpful boy-scouts,
With a purpose in life and a good deed to do—
And she's even created a Beetles' Tattoo.

So for Old Gumbie Cat let us now give three cheers—
Or whom well-ordered households depend, it appears.

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Yes, somewhat of a surprise - here is Andy Warhol from his 1957 early years as a budding illustrator. Well, we all have to start somewhere…

You can set the strictness of the rules, but the idea is to say the lines AS FAST AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN without tripping over or slurring words. Don't worry! Children are the sternest umpires, and you can attach penalty points for missed words, *bad* stumbling, just as you wish. The idea is to have on the pedestal by the end of the lesson the 'World Record for' SRA (Speed Reading Aloud) and many Runners-up. Of course, they will love the rest of the poem, but that's not what you need concentrate on first.

Next up, how about some drama, using "The King's Breakfast" and reversing genders to make it more fun? In teams of roughly 4 or 5, divide up the roles – the Narrator (M/F), the King, the Queen, the Dairymaid and, most importantly, the Cow.

The King's Breakfast

The King asked
The Queen, and
The Queen asked
The Dairymaid:
"Could we have some
butter for
The Royal slice of bread?"
The Queen asked the
Dairymaid,
The Dairymaid
Said, "Certainly,
I'll go and tell the cow
Now
Before she goes to bed."

The Dairymaid
She curtsied,
And went and told
The Alderney:
"Don't forget the butter
for
The Royal slice of bread."
The Alderney
Said sleepily:
"You'd better tell
His Majesty
That many people
nowadays
Like marmalade
Instead."

The Dairymaid
Said, "Fancy!"
And went to
Her Majesty.
She curtsied to the
Queen, and
She turned a little red:
"Excuse me,
Your Majesty,
For taking of
The liberty,
But marmalade is tasty, if
It's very
Thickly
Spread."

The Queen said
"Oh!:
And went to
His Majesty:
"Talking of the butter for
The royal slice of bread,
Many people
Think that
Marmalade
Is nicer.
Would you like to try a
little
Marmalade
Instead?"

The King said,
"Bother!"
And then he said,
"Oh, deary me!"
The King sobbed, "Oh,
deary me!"
And went back to bed.
"Nobody,"
He whimpered,
"Could call me
A fussy man;
I only want
A little bit
Of butter for
My bread!"

The Queen said,
"There, there!"
And went to
The Dairymaid.
The Dairymaid
Said, "There, there!"
And went to the shed.
The cow said,
"There, there!
I didn't really
Mean it;
Here's milk for his
porringer,
And butter for his bread."

The Queen took
The butter
And brought it to
His Majesty;
The King said,
"Butter, eh?"
And bounced out of bed.
"Nobody," he said,
As he kissed her
Tenderly,
"Nobody," he said,
As he slid down the
banisters,
"Nobody,
My darling,
Could call me
A fussy man -
BUT
I do like a little bit of
butter to my bread!"

Alan Alexander Milne

Whatever you may think of AA Milne (I once saw "Christopher Robin" selling books in his bookshop in Dartmouth…) the poem is a particularly fine one from the point of view of rhythm and humour. Here, extra team points can be awarded for dramatic expression, inventive staging, costume, or whatever.

Did you know, by the way, where "Skimbleshanks, The Railway Cat" came from? Eliot, the ultra-modernist (just about…) revered Rudyard Kipling, surprise, surprise! It's no bad thing to show children how clever, subversive poets like to bounce stuff off the "masters". Here is Kipling's poem with those beguiling rhythms that Eliot wanted to imitate.

The Long Trail **by Rudyard Kipling**

There's a whisper down the field where the year has shot her yield,
  And the ricks stand grey to the sun,
Singing: 'Over then, come over, for the bee has quit the clover,
  'And your English summer's done.'
    You have heard the beat of the off-shore wind,
    And the thresh of the deep-sea rain;
    You have heard the song—how long? how long?
    Pull out on the trail again!
Ha' done with the Tents of Shem, dear lass,
We've seen the seasons through,
And it's time to turn on the old trail, our own trail, the out trail,
Pull out, pull out, on the Long Trail—the trail that is always new!

It's North you may run to the rime-ringed sun
  Or South to the blind Horn's hate;
Or East all the way into Mississippi Bay,
  Or West to the Golden Gate—
    Where the blindest bluffs hold good, dear lass,
    And the wildest tales are true,
    And the men bulk big on the old trail, our own trail, the out trail,
    And life runs large on the Long Trail—the trail that is always new.

The days are sick and cold, and the skies are grey and old,
  And the twice-breathed airs blow damp;
And I'd sell my tired soul for the bucking beam-sea roll
  Of a black Bilbao tramp,
    With her load-line over her hatch, dear lass,
    And a drunken Dago crew,
    And her nose held down on the old trail, our own trail, the out trail
    From Cadiz south on the Long Trail—the trail that is always new.

It’s clear, perhaps, which is the better poem. Eliot’s, surely, though we may sneakingly enjoy Kipling’s romantic imperial dreaming as a dusty foot-note in history, written by a clever word-smith. So, here is another Eliot poem that younger pupils will surely like to try reading out loud, for the sounds and rhythms as much as for anything else.

Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat by T. S. Eliot

There's a whisper down the line at 11.39
When the Night Mail's ready to depart,
Saying "Skimble where is Skimble has he gone to hunt the thimble?
We must find him or the train can't start."
All the guards and all the porters and the stationmaster's daughters
They are searching high and low,
Saying "Skimble where is Skimble for unless he's very nimble
Then the Night Mail just can't go."
At 11.42 then the signal's nearly due
And the passengers are frantic to a man—
Then Skimble will appear and he'll saunter to the rear:
He's been busy in the luggage van!

He gives one flash of his glass-green eyes
And the signal goes "All Clear!"
And we're off at last for the northern part
Of the Northern Hemisphere!

You may say that by and large it is Skimble who's in charge
Of the Sleeping Car Express.
From the driver and the guards to the bagmen playing cards
He will supervise them all, more or less.
Down the corridor he paces and examines all the faces
Of the travellers in the First and the Third;
He establishes control by a regular patrol
And he'd know at once if anything occurred.
He will watch you without winking and he sees what you are thinking
And it's certain that he doesn't approve
Of hilarity and riot, so the folk are very quiet
When Skimble is about and on the move.
You can play no pranks with Skimbleshanks!
He's a Cat that cannot be ignored;
So nothing goes wrong on the Northern Mail
When Skimbleshanks is aboard.

Oh, it's very pleasant when you’ve found your little den
With your name written up on the door.
And the berth is very neat with a newly folded sheet

And there's not a speck of dust on the floor.
There is every sort of light-you can make it dark or bright;
There's a handle that you turn to make a breeze.
There's a funny little basin you're supposed to wash your face in
And a crank to shut the window if you sneeze.
Then the guard looks in politely and will ask you very brightly
"Do you like your morning tea weak or strong?"
But Skimble's just behind him and was ready to remind him,
For Skimble won't let anything go wrong.
And when you creep into your cosy berth
And pull up the counterpane,
You ought to reflect that it's very nice
To know that you won't be bothered by mice—
You can leave all that to the Railway Cat,
The Cat of the Railway Train!

In the watches of the night he is always fresh and bright;
Every now and then he has a cup of tea
With perhaps a drop of Scotch while he's keeping on the watch,
Only stopping here and there to catch a flea.
You were fast asleep at Crewe and so you never knew
That he was walking up and down the station;
You were sleeping all the while he was busy at Carlisle,
Where he greets the stationmaster with elation.
But you saw him at Dumfries, where he speaks to the police
If there's anything they ought to know about:
When you get to Gallowgate there you do not have to wait—
For Skimbleshanks will help you to get out!
He gives you a wave of his long brown tail
Which says: "I'll see you again!
You'll meet without fail on the Midnight Mail
The Cat of the Railway Train."

Perhaps in its own way this is just as ‘romantic’ as Kipling’s. (All of this is particularly hard for French children - and adults - whose language does NOT stress syllables).

Lewis Carroll (see my previous posting on him) was playing the same game of subversive imitation - wickedly for some adults, delightfully for children. Here is the ultra-boring Robert Southey poem which the (Ir)Reverend Charles Dodgson took to the cleaners.

The Old Man's Complaints. And how he gained them

You are old, Father William, the young man cried,
  The few locks which are left you are grey;
You are hale, Father William, a hearty old man,
  Now tell me the reason I pray.

In the days of my youth, Father William replied,
   I remember'd that youth would fly fast,
And abused not my health and my vigour at first
   That I never might need them at last.

You are old, Father William, the young man cried,
   And pleasures with youth pass away,
And yet you lament not the days that are gone,
   Now tell me the reason I pray.

In the days of my youth, Father William replied,
   I remember'd that youth could not last;
I thought of the future whatever I did,
   That I never might grieve for the past.

You are old, Father William, the young man cried,
   And life must be hastening away;
You are cheerful, and love to converse upon death!
   Now tell me the reason I pray.

I am cheerful, young man, Father William replied,
   Let the cause thy attention engage;
In the days of my youth I remember'd my God!
   And He hath not forgotten my age.

Here is Lewis Carroll's take on such awful pedantry, and it reads as freshly now as it did at the time of *Alice In Wonderland* when the Caterpillar, high on opiates, recited it.

FATHER WILLIAM

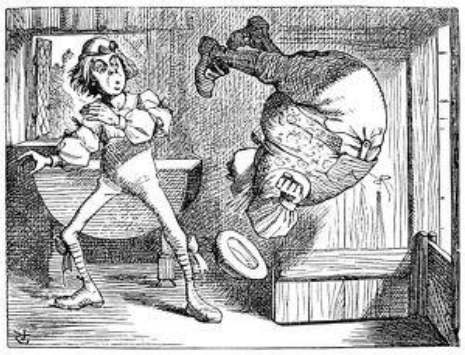
"You are old, father William," the young man said,
  "And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head —
  Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," father William replied to his son,
  "I feared it would injure the brain;
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
  Why, I do it again and again."

"You are old," said the youth, "as I mentioned before,
  And have grown most uncommonly fat;
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door —
  Pray, what is the reason of that?"

"In my youth," said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,
"I kept all my limbs very supple
By the use of this ointment — one shilling the box —
Allow me to sell you a couple."

"You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak
For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak —
Pray, how did you manage to do it?"



"In my youth," said his father, "I took to the law,
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life."

"You are old," said the youth; one would hardly suppose
That your eye was as steady as ever;
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose —
What made you so awfully clever?"

"I have answered three questions, and that is enough,"
Said his father; "don't give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!"

Children enjoy (yes, they do!) learning this particular one off by heart. The best way is for them to read it in pairs, taking turns at being either the pedantic son or the mad old father. It's good to have prizes, not only for the clever ones, who memorise easily, but also for the slower ones, who manage as best they can and take pride in exceeding their expectations.

Back to Games. Many adults get stumped by Wallace Stevens – (I've written about him in earlier postings) – his 'modernism' is as unsettling, at times, as Picasso's paintings or Stravinsky's music must have seemed at the time. Children, however, when they capture the game element, have few inhibitions and simply respond to words and images without too many preconceptions. I've always found their responses very interesting when faced with "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird". Tell children not to worry about strange words they don't know. Even I, I tell them, have to look up 'euphony'. (not EU regulations on phone compliance but the quality of being pleasant to the ear.

This is a poem that seems to attract parody or reverend imitation (or both). It's best, I think, to let children's imaginations wander freely before showing them some of the 'imitations' below. BUT, since children have fewer contacts with nature these days, I would suggest they listen to a recording of the blackbird's beautiful, full-throated song. I will spare you the 1-hour-plus offering on YouTube and give you instead one lasting just 4 minutes.

https://youtu.be/EB1lgjg9e4Y

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird by Wallace Stevens

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/wallace-stevens

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

OK, it's not an easy poem if you're looking for exact 'meanings'. But what about suggestions or hints? These are oblique and dreamlike sequences. Take just the last stanza. How can something be evening all *afternoon*? Well, winter *can* sometimes seem like that. Winter dusk can sometimes last. And how can it be snowing and "about to snow"? Well…? Snow can be uncertain…. Why has the bird "sat" in the "cedar-limbs" instead of *perched on* the cedar *branches*? Is the bird becoming human…? Certainly in XII we are given the point of view of the bird. All movement, as Einstein might have said, is relative… Is the ending ominous - negative, or positive? What makes you think so? Questions are forced on us all the way through the poem. In what sense can a man, a woman and a blackbird possibly be thought of

as “one”? Well, if a man and a woman – in marriage- can be symbolically thought of as “one” (‘one flesh’), might it not be fair to include other elements that make us up symbolically? Prospero at the end of “The Tempest” acknowledges that Caliban is “this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine” – as if Caliban is an extension of Prospero’s being. Perhaps we *should* acknowledge blackbirds as a symbolic part of ourselves.

Here is another poet’s “play” with the poem (IV gives him away as thoroughly English!):

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackboard By Peter Redgrave

I
The blackboard is clean.
The master must be coming.

II
The vigilant mosquito bites on a rising pitch.
The chalk whistles over the blackboard.

III
Among twenty silent children
The only moving thing
Is the white finger.

IV
O young white cricketers,
Aching for the greensward,
Do you not see how my moving hand
Whitens the black board?

V
A man and a child
Are one.
And man and a child and a blackboard
Are three.

VI
Some wield their sticks of chalk
Like torches in dark rooms.
I make up my blackboard
Like the face of an actor.

VII
I was of three minds
Like a room
In which there are three blackboards.

VIII
I dream.
I am an albino.

IX
I wake.
I forget a word.
The chalk snaps on the blackboard.

X
Twenty silent children
Staring at the blackboard.
On one wall of each of twenty nurseries
The light has gone out.

XI
He ambles among the white rocks of Dover,
Crushing pebbles with black boots.
He is a small blackboard
Writing on chalk.

XII
It is the Christmas holidays.
The white snow lies in the long black branches.
The blackboard In the silent schoolroom
Perches on two stubby branches.

XIII
The flesh that is white
Wastes over the bones that are chalk,
Both in the day
And through the black night.

Now, that's what I call - having a lot of fun…!And here is the Welsh clergyman poet, RS Thomas, not known for a sense of humour, also having similar fun with the same poem.

Thirteen Blackbirds Look at a Man **by R.S. Thomas**

1
It is calm.
It is as though
we lived in a garden
that had not yet arrived
at the knowledge of
good and evil.
But there is a man in it.

2
There will be
rain falling vertically
from an indifferent
sky. There will stare out
from behind its
bars the face of the man
who is not enjoying it.

3
Nothing higher
than a blackberry
bush. As the sun comes up
fresh, what is the darkness
stretching from horizon
to horizon? It is the shadow
here of the forked man.

4
We have eaten
the blackberries and spat out
the seeds, but they lie
glittering like the eyes of a man.

5
After we have stopped
singing, the garden is disturbed
by echoes; it is
the man whistling, expecting
everything to come to him.

6
We wipe our beaks
on the branches
wasting the dawn's
jewellery to get rid
of the taste of a man.

7
Neverthless,
which is not the case
with a man, our
bills give us no trouble.

8
Who said the
number was unlucky?
It was a man, who,
trying to pass us,
had his licence endorsed
thirteen times.

9
In the cool
of the day the garden
seems given over
to blackbirds. Yet
we know also that somewhere
there is a man in hiding.

10
To us there are
eggs and there are
blackbirds. But there is the man,
too, trying without feathers
to incubate a solution.

11
We spread our
wings, reticulating
our air-space. A man stands
under us and worries
at his ability to do the same.

12
When night comes
like a visitor
from outer space
we stop our ears
lest we should hear tell
of the man in the moon.

13
Summer is
at an end. The migrants
depart. When they return
in spring to the garden,
will there be a man among them?

Will children catch the ‘bills’ joke and the speeding ‘license’ joke? Ask them?

It’s strange what children *do* notice when you clue them in to the importance of things like “looking” (who is looking at whom? why? who can say what a blackbird can or cannot see…?) – the symbolic importance of colours, song, numbers: 3, 13 etc. They have no hesitation about testing their ideas, using others’ ideas to advance their own. And then they can have fun with their own takes – Thirteen Ways of Looking at a….? What? Children can be so freely inventive, that’s why I always liked to teach junior classes as well as seniors. I’m sorry now I haven’t kept their contributions to the debate on what and how we perceive, and what art can and cannot do.

And what shall we say of Anon? Here for the record are a few memorable Anons from Vicki’s father who had a wonderful memory for poetry. Children adore absurdity (and if they don’t, they should be subjected to it until it pours out of their ears, eyes and any other appropriate orifice!).

I wish I had ten thousand bricks
To build my chimney higher,
To stop our next-door neighbour’s cat
From pissing on our fire.

And

I knew a man who always wore
A saucepan on his head.
I asked him why he did it,
I don’t know why, he said

It always hurts my head so much,
I am a silly man,
I should have changed it long ago
And worn a frying pan.

And this from my once-so-funny aunt, Brigitte, my mum’s older sister:

Are you a bore or a toreador?
A bishop, a spiv or a nark?
A hobbledehoy or the Prince of Navoy,
Or afraid to go home in the dark?

Whether you’re niggardly, nervous or numb,
Normal or nearly unique,
There’s no need to look so uncommonly glum,
Have you read *Punch* this week?

Of course, references to Punch are dated, though we could show children the Curate's Egg joke, to show them what people laughed at in the 'olden days'. It may take a little explaining – even to adults, who might not know to what extent curates would have to bow down and grovel at anything a bishop might say. Bishops were wealthy and curates weren't.

Actually this very famous joke was pinched from another magazine called *Judy*

Right Reverend Host: "I'm afraid you've got a bad Egg, Mr Jones!"; The Curate: "Oh no, my Lord, I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!"
True Humility by George du Maurier, originally published in *Punch*, 9 November 1895.

Here is the original:

Let us now turn to a well-known favourite – but ask yourself the question: What is this *really* all about?

I MUST GO DOWN TO THE SEA AGAIN (John Masefield)

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the seagulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

Is this really about wanting to go and revisit the sea? The romance of life on the ocean? Anyone who has been on a cruise ship will know that this is far removed from that sort of travel. Or is it more about restlessness and fantasies about solitude: "getting away from people" and abandoning oneself to the "wild" forces of nature, and ultimately death? There is little physical comfort offered in this spartan dream. The "fellow rover" is almost an afterthought. Who is hauling up the sails, cooking, manning the pumps if need be? And the words and images are often negative ("lonely", "flung spray", "seagulls crying", "whetted knife"). The poem drips with nostalgia, but it's nostalgia for a solitary vision of the sea and about getting away from other people. Little wonder that "The Lonely Sea and the Sky" was chosen as the title for Sir Francis Chichester's autobiography – the heroic *lone* sailor pitting himself against the elements. I love the poem, but questions must be asked of it. Why such rejection of social life? What was Masefield escaping from and to?

In this respect, we could invite children to look more closely (like a detective…) at another poem, perhaps unwittingly brilliant, by Alfred Lord Tennyson: "Ulysses".

ULYSSES by Alfred Lord Tennyson

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;

For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,

'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

It's a dramatic monologue, which means that we have only one voice guiding us in the poem, and that is Ulysses'. **Who is he speaking to?** is the first GOOD question. Well, old Odysseus, or Ulysses (his Roman name) is bored with life on his island of Ithaca and the old devil wants to fire up his "mariners" to take him on one last adventure, perhaps to their deaths, who know? But it will be g*lorious*.

In its day, this poem was seen as just that – a glorious 'call to arms' by a hero who cannot say "No" to Life. That's why the final lines are associated with the Scott Polar Institute.

Perhaps unwittingly, however, Tennyson allows an extraordinary tension to build up, where we see Ulysses for what he really is. A discontented, "idle" king who can't be bothered to rule properly (doling out "unequal laws" to his people, whom he despises!). He also seems to despise his faithful wife and his tedious son Telemachus to whom he leaves the governing of Ithaca ("He works his work, I mine"). What horrible *scorn*! What sort of father, husband or king *is* he? And his glorious rhetoric, the idyllic adventure of the sea moaning "round with many voices" is directed at 'mesmerising' his poor mariners, who are quite likely to go down with him – what's in it for them? – until they are bound to set off with him. The *problématique* here, is that we, as readers, should NOT be thus hypnotised by the lavish word-play. Tennyson gives us the tools with which we must call out the old rogue, Ulysses, just as we should anyone with such careless, irresponsible power.

In the same way, Robert Browning, in "My Last Duchess", which I've written about before in the posting No 4 about Poems and Storytelling, is *wittingly* this time, giving us another sort of dramatic monologue, where again, we can easily be beguiled by the voice of the Duke. It is after all entirely natural that when someone buttonholes us with a complaint, an injustice, we are automatically programmed to offer sympathy. His wife *must* have been flirting with the artist, flirting with anyone in trousers… He *needed* to take a firm stance against this pretty, but wayward young wife…

MY LAST DUCHESS by Robert Browning

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

When I used to read this poem out to classes (trying to infuse a silky malevolence into my voice), I would always sense the children's willingness to go along with this highly rhetorical, mesmerising, autocratic 'voice' (just look at his 'control' over the rhyme scheme). Why would someone like him complain *with no reason*? We, and children especially, take complaints seriously. But then, if you ask the right questions – *Who* is he talking to? *Why* is he telling the other man all of this? *What* exactly has happened? – we get surprising answers. The Duke is uncharacteristically coy about the *details*. "I gave commands. Then all smiles stopped". And it takes a bright spark, usually a girl, to blurt out in horror, "Oh! He's *murdered* her!" Worse, he couldn't be bothered to kill her himself ("Who'd stoop…?) he has *had* her murdered. *Jamel Khashoggi-style*! And then, *why* is he telling the Count's man all of this? So that his NEXT duchess knows the score before she arrives?

It's one of the most brilliantly clever poems in the English language and it directs the *way* we should read it. We, just like the Count's man, must be trained to work out the sub-text, what is going on below the level of what is simply stated. We are being forced to learn how to judge what we read properly, because the Duke has *so* much power, politically and linguistically, that he doesn't even care whether we see through him. It's what he (and by inference Browning) *wants* us to do. Like all great works of literature, this poem is riven with ambiguities. The Duke's megalomanic power might even be seen as quite attractive – some of the senior girls used to find him…*very* attractive! He can play with his audience. And he is a winner. No one is there to gainsay him, least of all his future father-in-law's emissary!

Clearly, however, these last two poems need an audience who can understand roughly what the persona is saying, so 11 or 12 at least, or even 13,14, 15 are the ages where they may need less guidance. But don't spoil it by giving the game away too easily. Let them work – in pairs, groups of boys *and* girls mixed – at seeing through what is being told to them. And the lesson is that we must ALWAYS question what we are hearing, particularly from people (men usually) in *power*.

Lastly, to end on a more humorous note, here is a besotted cockroach in thrall to a New York alley-cat. You may have come across Archy before, but if you haven't, it's not too late to get in on the joke – if you have, you will enjoy renewing your acquaintance. Children will quite enjoy the rather sophisticated humour, though they will not quite understand 'typewriter keys'. Archy is trying to write episodes in the life of Mehitabel, the cat who in her Ninth Life may just be the reincarnation of Cleopatra, or so she supposes. Archy, as a humble cockroach, can only hit the keys of the typewriter individually with his head, which gives a strangely 'modernist' feel to his c*hef d'oeuvres,* where capitals and punctuation requiring the SHIFT key are missing. I have loved Don Marquis's pieces for years (they started, believe it or not in 1916) and once secondary children 'get' the idea, they will also come to love the characters and their environment.

Here is one of the earliest poems:

the song of mehitabel

this is the song of mehitabel
of mehitabel the alley cat
as i wrote you before boss
mehitabel is a believer
in the pythagorean
theory of the transmigration
of the soul and she claims
that formerly her spirit
was incarnated in the body
of cleopatra
that was a long time ago
and one must not be
surprised if mehitabel
has forgotten some of her
more regal manners

i have had my ups and downs
but wotthehell wotthehell
yesterday sceptres and crowns
fried oysters and velvet gowns
and today i herd with bums
but wotthehell wotthehell
i wake the world from sleep
as i caper and sing and leap
when i sing my wild free tune
wotthehell wotthehell
under the blear eyed moon
i am pelted with cast off shoon
but wotthehell wotthehell

do you think that i would change
my present freedom to range
for a castle or moated grange
wotthehell wotthehell
cage me and i d go frantic
my life is so romantic
capricious and corybantic
and i m toujours gai toujours gai

i know that i am bound
for a journey down the sound
in the midst of a refuse mound
but wotthehell wotthehell
oh i should worry and fret
death and i will coquette
there s a dance in the old dame yet
toujours gai toujours gai

i once was an innocent kit
wotthehell wotthehell
with a ribbon my neck to fit
and bells tied onto it
o wotthehell wotthehell
but a maltese cat came by
with a come hither look in his eye
and a song that soared to the sky
and wotthehell wotthehell
and i followed adown the street
the pad of his rhythmical feet
to permit me again to repeat
wotthehell wotthehell

my youth i shall never forget
but there s nothing i really regret
wotthehell wotthehell
there s a dance in the old dame yet
toujours gai toujours gai

the things that i had not ought to
i do because i ve gotto
wotthehell wotthehell
and i end with my favorite motto
toujours gai toujours gai

boss sometimes i think
that our friend mehitabel
is a trifle too gay

Other characters enter the equation, including this lovely piece about Warty Biggens, a humble, or not so humble, toad.

archy meets warty bliggens the toad

i met a toad
the other day by the name
of warty bliggens
he was sitting under
a toadstool
feeling contented
he explained that when the cosmos
was created
that toadstool was especially
planned for his personal
shelter from sun and rain
thought out and prepared
for him

do not tell me said warty bliggens
that there is not a purpose in the universe
the thought is blasphemy

a little more conversation revealed
that warty bliggens considers himself to be
the center of the said
universe
the earth exists
to grow toadstools for him
to sit under
the sun to give him light
by day and the moon
and wheeling constellations
to make beautiful
the night for the sake of
warty bliggens

to what act of yours
do you impute
this interest on the part
of the creator
of the universe
i asked him
why is it that you
are so greatly favored

ask rather
said warty bliggens
what the universe
has done to deserve me

if i were a human being i would
not laugh
too complacently
at poor warty bliggens
for similar
absurdities
have only too often
lodged in the crinkles
of the human cerebrum

archy

And one last poem where Mehitabel tells the story of her kittens.

well boss
mehitabel the cat
has reappeared in her old
haunts with a
flock of kittens
three of them this time

archy she says to me
yesterday
the life of a female
artist is continually
hampered what in hell
have i done to deserve
all these kittens
i look back on my life
and it seems to me to be
just one damned kitten
after another
i am a dancer archy
and my only prayer
is to be allowed
to give my best to my art
but just as i feel
that i am succeeding
in my life work
along comes another batch
of these damned kittens
it is not archy
that i am shy on mother love
god knows i care for
the sweet little things
curse them

but am i never to be allowed
to live my own life
i have purposely avoided
matrimony in the interests
of the higher life
but i might just
as well have been a domestic
slave for all the freedom
i have gained
i hope none of them
gets run over by
an automobile
my heart would bleed
if anything happened
to them and i found it out
but it isnt fair archy
it isnt fair
these damned tom cats have all
the fun and freedom
if i was like some of these
green eyed feline vamps i know
i would simply walk out on the
bunch of them and
let them shift for themselves
but i am not that kind
archy i am full of mother love
my kindness has always
been my curse
a tender heart is the cross i bear
self sacrifice always and forever
is my motto damn them
i will make a home
for the sweet innocent
little things
unless of course providence
in his wisdom should remove
them they are living
just now in an abandoned
garbage can just behind
a made over stable in greenwich
village and if it rained
into the can before i could
get back and rescue them
i am afraid the little
dears might drown
it makes me shudder just
to think of it
of course if i were a family cat
they would probably
be drowned anyhow
sometimes i think

the kinder thing would be
for me to carry the
sweet little things
over to the river
and drop them in myself
but a mother s love archy
is so unreasonable
something always prevents me
these terrible
conflicts are always
presenting themselves
to the artist
the eternal struggle
between art and life archy
is something fierce
my what a dramatic life i have lived
one moment up the next
moment down again
but always gay archy always gay
and always the lady too
in spite of hell
well boss it will
be interesting to note
just how mehitabel
works out her present problem
a dark mystery still broods
over the manner
in which the former
family of three kittens
disappeared
one day she was talking to me
of the kittens
and the next day when i asked
her about them
she said innocently
what kittens
interrogation point
and that was all
i could ever get out
of her on the subject
we had a heavy rain
right after she spoke to me
but probably that garbage can
leaks so the kittens may
have not yet
been drowned

archy

When I said “humorous”, of course, I include dark humour. I hope children will not be too shocked.

APPENDIX

*The Castaways or Vote for Caliban!!! By Adrian Mitchell

The Pacific Ocean
A blue demi-globe
Islands like punctuation marks

A cruising airliner
Passenger unwrapping pats of butter
A hurricane arises
Tosses the plane into the sea

Five of them, flung on to an island beach
Survived

Tom the reporter
Susan the botanist
Jim the high-jump champion
Bill the carpenter
Mary the eccentric widow.

Tom the reporter sniffed out a stream of drinkable water.
Susan the botanist identified a banana tree.
Jim the high-jump champion jumped up and down and gave them each a bunch.
Bill the carpenter knocked up a table for their banana supper.
Mary the eccentric widow buried the banana skins,
But only after they had asked her twice.
They all gathered sticks and lit a fire.
There was an incredible sunset.

Next morning they held a committee meeting.
Tom, Susan, Jim and Bill
Voted to make the best of things.
Mary, the eccentric widow, abstained.

Tom the reporter killed several dozen pigs.
He tanned their skins into parchment
And printed the Island News with the ink of squids.

Susan the botanist developed new strains of banana
Which tasted of chocolate, beefsteak, peanut, butter,
Chicken and boot polish

Jim the high-jump champion organised games
Which he always won easily.

Bill the carpenter constructed a wooden water wheel
And converted the water's energy into electricity
Using iron ore from the hills, he constructed lampposts

They all worried about Mary, the eccentric widow.
Her lack of confidence and her...
But there wasn't time to coddle her
The volcano erupted, but they dug a trench
And diverted the lava into the sea
Where it formed a spectacular pier.
They were attacked by pirates but defeated them
With bammboo bazookas firing
Sea-urchins packed with home-made nitroglycerine
They gave the cannibals a dose of their own medicine
And survived an earthquake thanks to their skill in jumping

Tom had been a court reporter
So he became the magistrate and solved disputes
Susan the botanist established
A university which also served as a museum.
Jim the high-jump champion
Was put in charge of law enforcement -
Jump on them when they were bad.
Bill the carpenter built himself a church,
Preached there every Sunday

But Mary the eccentric widow ...
Each evening she wandered down the island's main street,
Past the Stock Exchange, the Houses of Parliament,
The prison and the arsenal.
Past the Prospero Souvenir Shop,
Past the Robert Louis Stevenson Movie Studios,
Past the Daniel Defoe Motel
She nervously wandered and sat on the end of the pier of lava,

Breathing heavily
As if at a loss,
As if at a lover,
She opened her eyes wide
To the usual incredible sunset.

by Adrian Mitchell

**

One pupil, whose name I've now forgotten, I'm afraid, emailed me late in the summer after she had taken the Baccalaureate, writing: 'I went camping in the south of France and every

morning, I'd wake and look out of the tent door, reciting: "Busy old fool, unruly sun, Why dost thou thus, Through windows, and through curtains call on us? Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?" My boyfriend had no idea what I was on about.'

More poems that go down well:

"O, What is that Sound" by WH Auden (children will like to invent the 'back story' that has to be imagined using clues from the text).

Teenagers are drawn to horror and this one, read menacingly with closed curtains, is a winner. (Not for the very young…!)

"The Trap" by Jon Stallworthy

The first night that the monster lurched
Out of the forest on all fours
He saw its shadow in his dream
Circle the house, as though it searched
For one it loved or hated. Claws
On gravel and a rabbit's scream
ripped the fabric of his dream.

Waking between dark and dawn
And sodden sheets. His reason quelled
The shadow and the nightmare sound.
The second night it crossed the lawn
A brute voice in the darkness yelled.
He struggled up, woke raving, found
His wallflowers trampled to the ground.

When rook wings beckoned the shadows back
He took his rifle down, and stood
All night against the leaded glass.
The moon ticked round. He saw the black
Elm-skeletons in the doomsday wood.
The sailing and the failing stars
And red coals dropping between bars.

The third night such a putrid breath
Fouled, flared his nostrils, that he turned,
Turned, but could not lift, his head.
A coverlet as thick as death
Oppressed him: he crawled out: discerned
Across the door his watchdog, dead.
"Build a trap," his neighbours said.

All that day he built his trap
With metal jaws and a spring as thick
As the neck of a man. One touch
Triggered the hanging teeth: jump, snap,
And lightning guillotined the stick
Thrust in its throat. With gun and torch
He set his engine in the porch.

The fourth night in their beds appalled
His neighbors heard the hunting roar
Mount, mount to an exultant shriek.
At daybreak timidly they called
His name, climbed through the splintered door
And found him sprawling in the wreck,
Naked…with a severed neck.

"The Owl and the Pussycat" Edward Lear- but also "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo" (The utter sadness of unrequited love, for both YBB AND the Lady Jingly Jones!)

"The Listeners" by Walter de la Mare and "The Way Through the Woods" by Kipling (But there is no road through the woods! It's the 13th line of the second of the 12-line stanzas). What is the back story? Here is:

The Way Through the Woods (Rudyard Kipling)

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods,
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools
Where the otter whistles his mate.
(They fear not men in the woods,
Because they see so few)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,

Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods. . . .

But there is no road through the woods.

"A Poison Tree" by William Blake

"The Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge – WITH the Gustave Doré illustrations if possible

"The Pied Piper of Hamelin" by Robert Browning
Also "Childe Rowland" also by Robert Browning

AND LOTS MORE….! But that's more than enough to get started with.