

HIGHER LEVEL 2018

# This is Poetry



**Brian Forristal & Billy Ramsell**

FORUM PUBLICATIONS LTD.

# Contents

## Glossary of Poetry Ideas and Terms 06

### Poems

<b>John Keats</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>John Montague</b>	<b>96</b>
To one who has been long in city pent	10	Killing The Pig	98
On First Looking into Chapman's Homer	12	The Trout	100
When I have fears that I may cease to be	14	The Locket	102
La Belle Dame Sans Merci	16	The Cage	104
Ode to a Nightingale	18	Windharp	106
Ode to a Grecian Urn	21	All Legendary Obstacles	108
To Autumn	24	The Same Gesture	110
Bright Star	26	The Wild Dog Rose	112
		Like Dolmens Round My Childhood...	116
		A Welcoming Party	120
<b>Gerard Manley Hopkins</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin</b>	<b>122</b>
God's Grandeur	30	Lucina Schynning in Silence of the Night	124
As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame	32	The Second Voyage	126
Spring	34	Deaths and Engines	128
Pied Beauty	35	Street	130
The Windhover	36	Fireman's Lift	132
Inversnaid	38	All For You	134
Felix Randal	40	Following	136
No Worst, There is None	42	Kilcash	138
I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark	44	Translation	141
Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord...	46	The Bend in the Road	143
		On Lacking the Killer Instinct	145
		To Niall Woods and Xenya Ostrovskaia, married in Dublin...	147
<b>Robert Frost</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>Eavan Boland</b>	<b>149</b>
The Tuft of Flowers	50	The War Horse	151
The Road Not Taken	52	The Famine Road	153
Mending Wall	54	Child of Our Time	155
After Apple-Picking	56	The Black lace Fan My Mother Gave Me	156
Birches	58	The Shadow Doll	158
'Out, Out -'	60	White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland	160
Spring Pools	62	Outside History	162
Acquainted With The Night	64	This Moment	164
Design	66	The Pomegranate	165
Provide, Provide	68	Love	167
		<b>Paul Durcan</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Philip Larkin</b>	<b>70</b>	Nessa	171
Wedding-Wind	72	The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage	173
At Grass	74	The Difficulty that is Marriage	175
Church Going	76	Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail	176
An Arundel Tomb	80	Parents	178
The Whitsun Weddings	82	En Famille, 1979	179
MCMXIV	86	Madman	180
Ambulances	88	'Windfall', 8 Parnell Hill, Cork	181
The Trees	90	Six Nuns Die in Convent Inferno	185
The Explosion	92	Sport	191
Cut Grass	94	Father's day, 21 June 1992	194
		The Arnolfini Marriage	196
		Ireland 2002	198
		Rosie Joyce	199
		The MacBride Dynasty	203

## Philip Larkin

Philip Arthur Larkin was born on 9 August 1922 in Coventry. He was the second child, and only son, of Sydney and Eva Larkin. Although he later characterised his relationship with his father as a cold one, it was nevertheless his father who introduced him to the work of T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden – writers who would later come to influence Larkin's own poetry.

Larkin was home-schooled until he turned eight, at which point he attended the King Henry VIII School between 1930 and 1939. Larkin struggled academically because of his poor eyesight, which went undiagnosed for many years, and because of a stammer he had developed at a young age. Because of this, he said, 'classes were just me sitting with bated breath dreading lest I should be called on to say something.' Despite this, he made regular contributions to the school magazine, which he also helped to edit. He began writing – 'ceaselessly', as he described it – in his mid-teens.

After school, Larkin went to university at St. John's College, Oxford in 1939, where he studied English. 'Oxford terrified me,' he later said. 'Public-school boys terrified me ... And there was the stammer. I still stammered quite badly up to the age of maybe thirty.' The Second World War had just started and many young men his age were forced to curtail their academic pursuits to enlist in the army. However, Larkin failed his medical test because of his poor eyesight and thus was able to see out the full three years of his degree. He graduated in 1943 with first class honours in English.

While at Oxford, Larkin met the novelist Kingsley Amis, with whom he would have a lifelong friendship. Amis and Larkin influenced one another heavily. It is thought that Amis's seminal novel *Lucky Jim* is based partly on Larkin's life; Larkin certainly encouraged and advised Amis during its writing and Amis, in return, dedicated the book to Larkin. Amis was impressed by the wit and irreverence exhibited in Larkin's writing and he encouraged Larkin to cultivate these qualities, which would go on to define his body of work.

After graduating, Larkin was appointed librarian at Wellington, Shropshire, in November of 1943. He disliked the work initially but soon learned to appreciate



it. He studied to qualify as a professional librarian, but continued to write the entire time. 'Librarianship suits me,' he once said. 'I love the feel of libraries – and it has just the right blend of academic interest and administration that seems to match my particular talents.'

By 1945, ten of his poems (which later that year would be included in *The North Ship*) appeared in *Poetry from Oxford in Wartime*. Two novels, *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter* were published in 1946 and 1947 respectively.

In 1946, Larkin became assistant librarian at the University College of Leicester. It was here he met Monica Jones, a young assistant professor, with whom he would have an on-again off-again relationship for the rest of his life. Though they never married, and both had other love affairs, Larkin lived with Jones for many years and left the bulk of his estate to her in his will.

In 1950, Larkin became sub-librarian at Queen's University, Belfast. It was in Belfast that he applied fresh vigour to his poetry. In 1951 he published a small collection, *XX Poems*, of which there were only a hundred copies printed. Larkin regarded his tenure in Belfast as his most poetically productive period. Belfast provided him with precisely the kind of environment he needed to write: 'When I was working at the University there ... I wrote between eight and ten in the evenings, then went to the University bar till eleven, then played cards or talked with friends 'til one or two. The first part of



## At Grass

The eye can hardly pick them out  
 From the cold shade they shelter in,  
 Till wind distresses tail and mane;  
 Then one crops grass, and moves about  
 – The other seeming to look on – [5]  
 And stands anonymous again.

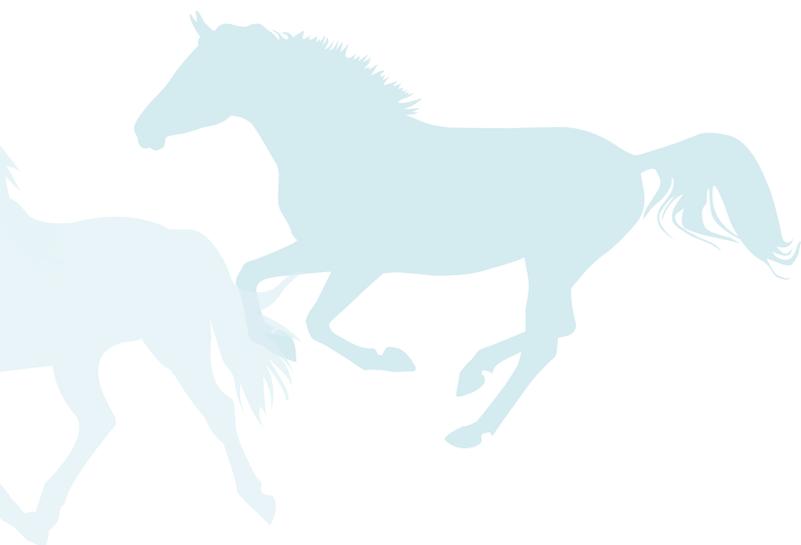
Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps  
 Two dozen distances sufficed  
 To fable them: faint afternoons  
 Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps, [10]  
 Whereby their names were artficed  
 To inlay faded, classic Junes –

Silks at the start: against the sky  
 Numbers and parasols: outside,  
 Squadrons of empty cars, and heat, [15]  
 And littered grass: then the long cry  
 Hanging unhushed till it subside  
 To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?  
 They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows. [20]  
 Summer by summer all stole away,  
 The starting-gates, the crowd and cries –  
 All but the unmolesting meadows.  
 Almanacked, their names live; they

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease, [25]  
 Or gallop for what must be joy,  
 And not a fieldglass sees them home,  
 Or curious stop-watch prophecies:  
 Only the grooms, and the groom's boy,  
 With bridles in the evening come. [30]

- [6] **anonymous:** having no outstanding or unusual features, nondescript; of unknown name
- [8] **sufficed:** were enough or adequate
- [9] **fable:** convert into legend
- [10] **Stakes:** races in which the winning owner wins, or 'sweeps', the entry fees paid by the owners of all the other horses
- [10] **Handicaps:** races in which the runners have been 'handicapped' by carrying more weight according to their performance in other races
- [11] **artficed:** inscribed with great skill
- [12] **inlay:** to set into a surface; to embed decoratively
- [12] **Junes:** the big summer race meetings
- [13] **Silks:** reference to the jockeys' colourful silk shirts
- [14] **Numbers and parasols:** the bookies' odds displayed on boards and the umbrella-like canopies beneath which they would stand
- [15] **Squadrons:** multitudes or hoards; military units
- [18] **stop-press columns:** late news inserted in a newspaper either at the last moment before printing or after printing has begun
- [23] **unmolesting:** not interfering with or annoying
- [24] **Almanacked:** listed in an almanac or official register
- [27] **fieldglass:** binoculars
- [29] **grooms:** persons employed to take care of horses and stables
- [30] **bridles:** harnesses, consisting of a headstall, bit, and reins, fitted about a horse's head and used to restrain or guide the animal



## Comprehension

---

### Stanzas 1 to 3

1. Where are the horses located at the start of the poem? Where is the speaker in relation to them?
2. Why is it sometimes difficult to see the horses?
3. Describe the horses' movements or activity in the opening stanza.
4. The poet uses the word 'anonymous' to describe the horse when it stops moving. What do you think he means by this?
5. The poet imagines what these horses' lives would have been like fifteen years ago. Where does he imagine them being? What would they have been doing?
6. The poet imagines that back then 'Two dozen distances' or races would have 'sufficed/ To fable them'. What do you think he means by this?
7. How does the poet characterise the 'afternoons/ Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps'? Why do you think he describes these afternoons in this manner?
8. How does the poet describe the way the horses' names are inscribed on to the surface of the cups or trophies that they would have won?
9. In what way do you think the horses' names were 'artificed'? Is there more than one interpretation of this line?
10. The poet describes the world of the races. What are the 'Silks' referred to in line 13?
11. What do you think the 'Numbers and parasols' are a reference to? Why do you think the poet describes these as being 'against the sky'?
12. Why do you think the poet refers to the cars as being in 'Squadrons'? What does this suggest?
13. Lines 16 to 18 describe the winning of a race. Describe in your own words what happens in these lines.

### Stanzas 4 and 5

14. The poem shifts back to the horses as they are now, alone in a field. What sort of 'memories' does the speaker suggest might trouble the horses now?
15. To what does the speaker liken such memories? Why does he make this comparison?
16. 'They shake their heads.' What do you think this action signifies?
17. How does the poet describe the fading daylight in line 20? Explain in your own words the process that the poet is describing here.
18. In stanza 4, what does the poet suggest 'stole away' over the years?
19. Why do you think the poet refers to the meadows as 'unmolesting' in line 23?
20. How does the poet describe the demeanour of the horses in the last stanza? How do their current lives differ from the lives they lived when they were racing?
21. In your own words, explain what is meant by the phrase 'curious stop-watch prophecies'.
22. What is the extent of the horses' human contact now, according to the poet?

## Personal Response

---

1. How would you characterise the horses' lives now? How would you characterise the horses' lives when they were racing? Does the poem suggest that the races were in any way unpleasant for the horses?
2. What impression does the poet give of the summer races in the third stanza? How does he convey the atmosphere of these events?
3. Discuss the poet's many references to names throughout this poem. In your opinion, what is the poet saying about the importance of names?
4. Can you identify any examples of assonance or alliteration in this poem? What effect does this have?
5. Identify your favourite image or phrase from the poem and say why you like it.

## In Context

---

'For Larkin, nature and animals often represent a more civilised way of life than humanity does.' Discuss this statement with reference to 'At Grass' and at least two other poems on the course.

# John Keats

## Themes

### Nature

When you read Keats' poetry you cannot help but feel that he saw or experienced nature differently from the rest of us. Where the rest of us merely see a 'night sky' he observes a 'starr'd face': where the rest of us see bits of cloud he sees 'symbols of a high romance'. To Keats the sound of a swarm of 'gnats' or midges on a summer's evening is like a 'mournful choir'. The poet's unusual sensitivity to the natural world is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his reaction to the nightingale's singing in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. The nightingale's song fills the poet with an overwhelming mix of emotions; he is happy, melancholy and numb all at the same time.

Keats was enthralled by the rich and varied details of the natural world. In 'To Autumn', for example, he focuses on the many sensual delights of this time of year, from the sights of harvested fields and all the ripening fruit to the wonderful sounds of the birds, animals and insects. But he was also moved and inspired by the vast expanses of the sky, seas and mountains. In 'Bright Star' the poet considers how the earth's oceans, mountains and moors must look from the star's vantage high in the night sky. There is something incredibly seductive and soothing about the 'moving waters' and the 'soft-fallen mask/ Of snow upon the mountains and the moors'. 'To one who has been long in city pent' celebrates the beauty of a clear blue sky, which Keats describes as the smiling and 'open face of heaven'. In 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' the poet celebrates the beauty of the starry night sky and describes his burning ambition to capture such beauty in his poetic works.

Keats's seems to consider the natural world to be most lovely when there is no human presence. In 'To Autumn' the poet describes the various processes of the harvest, from the winnowing of the grain to the pressing of the apples, but the only reference to human existence is the mention of the 'thatch-eyes' of the country dwellings. This notion that the natural world is at its most beautiful when there is no one around is also evident in 'To one who has been long in city pent', where the poet seems to relish the fact that he is alone to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside. In 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' the poet again takes time 'alone' away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life to stand at the ocean's edge as he contemplates eternity.

## Celebrating Artworks

Keats's poetry celebrates the pleasure and serenity people derive from artworks of all types. In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', for example, the poet is filled with joy and wonder at the sight of an ancient piece of sculpture. The scenes depicted on the urn's surface utterly absorb him and transport him briefly to another place and time. Keats imagines how the urn will help future generations to deal with their troubles or 'woe', describing it as a 'friend to man'. In 'Ode to a Nightingale', the bird's song is considered a piece of artistic ingenuity worthy of praise and celebration. The bird's complex 'full-throated' airs – at once blissful and melancholy, summery and sorrowful – emerge as a moving and bewitching work of art. As such, it seems to take its place alongside Homer's epic poems, Chapman's translations and the Grecian Urn.

'Chapman's Homer' is one of several poems where Keats celebrates the joy and pleasure of reading. Reading poetry, the poem suggests, can be a thrilling voyage of discovery. Exploring a new poet's work is like exploring a new country or island brimming with riches and fantastic sights. For Keats discovering Homer through Chapman's translation is as thrilling as discovering a new planet or a new ocean. 'To one who has been long in city pent' also celebrates the pleasure of reading. Keats cannot imagine anything more pleasant than finding a quiet spot in the countryside to relax with a good book. The reading of the 'gentle tale of love and languishment' allows for a momentary break from the stresses and strains of life.

## Artistic Creativity

Keats, like the other Romantic poets of his generation, venerated artistic creativity as one of the greatest human traits, regarding it as something sacred and mysterious. 'When I have fears' presents poetic inspiration as the 'magic hand of Chance', as an almost magical or mystical force. However, the poem also stresses that artistic creation requires hard work. The poet's ideas and inspirations have to be painstakingly worked on and transformed into poems, just as the harvest must be gathered with back-breaking toil. In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' the poet makes a reference to the care and time that went into the urn's creation, describing it as the product of 'silence and slow-time'.

# To one has been long in city pent



## LINE BY LINE

### LINES 1 TO 8

The poem describes how pleasant it can be to spend a day in the country if you have been stuck in the city for a long time. For anyone who has been ‘long in city pent’ it is ‘very sweet’ to be out in the open expanses of the countryside, where you can gaze at the sky and not have your view obscured by tall buildings: ‘Tis very sweet to look into the fair/ And open face of heaven’. It is also a great pleasure to lie down in a bed of tall grass and read a good book.

The country is presented as a place of beauty and tranquility. The unclouded ‘blue’ sky is ‘fair’ or beautiful. The tall grass that sways gently in the breeze offers the visitor a ‘pleasant’ secluded place to relax: ‘pleasant lair/ Of wavy grass’. This is an ‘open’ space, a place where someone can ‘breathe’. The words ‘heaven’ and ‘firmament’ suggest great open expanses. Keats presents the countryside as a loving, benevolent place that warmly welcomes and embraces those who come to visit. The bright blue sky is compared to a smiling ‘face’.

The person who spends a day in the country will experience great joy. Keats cannot imagine a greater pleasure: ‘Who is more happy’. The experience will inspire a religious or spiritual response. For someone who has spent too long in the city, the sight of the open sky will inspire a ‘prayer’ of gratitude or awe. There is a sense in which God is smiling back at the person Keats imagines taking this trip to the country. The poet describes the ‘open face of heaven’ that smiles back at one who says a ‘prayer’.

The country offers those who have spent too long in the city respite, an opportunity to rest and relax. Keats describes how ‘Fatigued’ someone might feel when they arrive and how wonderful it is to just sink into a bed of tall grass. It is here that someone discovers their ‘heart’s content’.

### LINES 9 TO 14

The journey back to the city in the evening will bring mixed emotions. Keats imagines how the person making their way back will hear the song of the nightingale: ‘Catching the notes of Philomel’. Keats describes a single cloud drifting quickly across the sky: ‘the sailing cloudlet’s bright career’.

JOHN KEATS	Nature	Love	Celebrating Artworks	Artistic Creativity	Death	Change and Changelessness
CITY PENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country offers much needed break from stresses of modern city life.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrates the joy and pleasure of reading.</li> </ul>			
CHAPMAN'S HOMER			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrates the joy and pleasure of reading</li> <li>Celebrates the incredible excitement of discovering a great new author.</li> </ul>	Celebrates the scope of Homer's unique creative imagination.		
WHEN I HAVE FEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expresses a desire to capture the natural world in his verse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The poet celebrates his beloved's beauty and longs to be beside this 'fair creature'. But is love and desire a treacherous 'faery power' that can lead to suffering?</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlights the fertility of his own creative mind and his desire to 'trace' the world – but will he have time?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The poet is terrified that death could claim him before he has reached his potential.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The poet's concerns sink to nothingness when he contemplates eternity – each human life is nothing in the greater scheme of things.</li> </ul>
LA BELLE DAME		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes taken to be an allegory of how desire can enslave and torment us.</li> </ul>				
NIGHTINGALE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poet's ecstatic and overwhelming response to the nightingale's song.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The nightingale's singing is celebrated as an extraordinary and moving work of art.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrates the 'wings of poesy', the power of the poetic imagination to transport us. He imagines the entire world of the woodland.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laments how everyone must age and die. Poet also in love with death.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The nightingale and its song are presented as un-ageing and immortal.</li> </ul>
GRECIAN URN		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poem describes how desire can often lead to heartache and misery: 'leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrates the beauty of this object that can still enchant after so many centuries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlights the power of the poetic imagination as the poet conjures up an entire world.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laments how every generation must pass away. The society depicted on the urn suggests a more authentic way of life that embraces death.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thinks of the characters depicted on the urn as real people – envies the fact they are frozen in time.</li> </ul>
AUTUMN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poet's ecstatic and overwhelming response to autumn's melancholy beauty.</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the poet's fascination with death evident as he celebrates this time of year?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrates how the natural world is in a constant state of flux.</li> </ul>
BRIGHT STAR		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poet celebrates his beloved's beauty and desires to be with her forever.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Again we see the poet's infatuation with death. He would be happy enough to die if he could do so in his lover's arms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poet envies the star because it never changes.</li> </ul>