

Poetry Appreciation 2020

January 2020: NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

January means resolutions and we had resolved to start the New Year with a meeting in which we each chose a poet or poem that we had found difficult to enjoy or understand. This was a bit of a challenge but we'd thought it would be good to stretch our minds a bit.

Only four minds were actually stretched. Others were stricken suddenly with dreaded lurgies, two were suddenly called away to holiday in Vietnam and one mind confessed it actually went to sleep whilst preparing it's poem and woke up too late to come!

On the plus side no-one actually said that the dog ate their homework and the faithful four had a good afternoon coming to grips with works by Ted Hughes, Ezra Pound, Muriel Spark, T.S. Elliot, Eleanor Farjohn and Elizabeth Fisher. Our one failure was T.S. Elliot's "The Waste Land" which puzzled us all. Even it's presenter admitted had baffled him for decades.

February's subject of **Love** will hopefully gather all our members back to the fold.

July 2020: ANY TIME OF DAY OR NIGHT

Thanks to the expertise and organisational skills of Paul and Maggie our second Zoomed meeting was a great success. Eight members connected up to enjoy works on the subject of "*Any time of day or night*".

Over 20 poems were read and the feelings expressed ranged from a hatred of getting up in the morning to the bleakness of a lonely man wandering through a town at night.

"The Afternoon of a Prawn" and "From Westminster Bridge" were more cheerful and D.H. Lawrence wrote of the sheer boredom of trying to teach a class of unwilling and unruly boys in an afternoon.

We, however, had a very good afternoon and will meet again in August when we'll find poems about freedom and going out, holidays and such like things that we have been so missing. We will also try to write a Japanese Haiku. Having already had a go at this I have found it surprisingly addictive. August's meeting should be very interesting.

August 2020: HAIKUS

At August's zoomed meeting members read haikus they had either found or composed themselves.. As we usually read the works of established authors it was a change to try to produce something ourselves.

A haiku should consist of three lines of 5 then 7 then 5 syllables and should make Some reference to the seasons or nature. These are some of those we produced. Haiku production can become addictive. Have a go yourself.

A quartet of haikus to be read together:

Cuckoo sings haiku
Rising lark sings in the air
Sing your song of spring.

Spring brings life from the soil.
Summer warms the swelling bud.
Harvest fills the barns.

Seasons fly on wings.
Nature rules our life and loves

Earth rolls on her course.

Winter chills the ground
Death has reached the frozen root.
Life waits for the spring to come.

I said her eyebrows
Were drawn too high on her head
She looked surprised.

Long walks in sun through
Trees, new places, picnic for lunch,
Worries far away.

Corona virus,
Brings boredom, masks, restrictions.
Despoiling summer.

This one is from a toothbrush:

Come paste, together
We will beautify the world
With gleaming gnashers.

Another toothy one, translated from Japanese:

Clouds float in a sea
Of blue. Gentle brush electric
Caresses my teeth

October 2020: FOREIGN PLACES

Our Zoomed October meeting had the subject of foreign places, so being forbidden to travel in reality, we ranged far and wide in verse. Any country other than England was permissible so our nearest was Wales and our furthest Australia.

The one-time beauties of Syria, Lebanon and Afghanistan described in one poem made us think with sorrow of the state of these countries today and we discovered that one of our group had actually hitch-hiked in this area.

One poem by the Afro-American Maya Angelou opened our eyes to the injustices inflicted on Africa and its people by slavers and settlers and another called upon America to come clean and acknowledge its failings. This feeling was echoed in poems by an Australian aborigine writer speaking of the denigration of his people.

R.S. Thomas, an Englishman in spite of his name, wrote of the hardships of life as Welsh farmer and Auden gave us a rather enigmatic account arrival at the Gare du Midi.

It was a thought-provoking meeting. Up-lift was provided by " It's a Great Big Wonderful World" contributed by Ann to whom many thanks.

November 2020: OBSCURE POETS & POEMS

Our Zoom meetings are not just a delightful indulgence on the day, but also when finding the poems beforehand. A real treasure hunt! This month featured poets or poems we thought obscure.

- We began with **Wang Wei**, a poet of the Chinese Tang Dynasty (b.669 A.D.) and thought the short poem, 'On the Mountain Holiday Thinking of My Brothers in Shandong' intensely nostalgic and philosophical. **Li Bai** 'Waking from Drunkenness on a Spring Day' gave us a fascinating insight into life in those times
- Fast forward to a living poet, **John Birtwhistle**, better known as a librettist. We all loved his poem 'On Pebbly Beach' as it was evocative of youth, age and aloneness.
- **Fleur Adcock**, a New Zealander, is another contemporary poet. Lyn found many of her poems did not impress but some were outstanding. Her poem 'Water' is on the GCSE syllabus.
- 'Little Gidding' sounds pastoral but **T.S.Elliott** uses images of fire to represent timelessness and human frailty. We felt that obscure poems gave us more to discuss as long as they were not pretentious.
- **Nadine Brummer**, another modern poet, wrote 'At the Freud Exhibition' and the poem summed up, vividly, his well-known nudes in the phrase 'bodies we'd not bargained for'. I think Freud would have loved this poem. A complete contrast was 'Foxgloves' that contained imagery and nostalgia.
- The poet laureate, **Andrew Motion** wrote 'Ann Frank Huis', clearly evoking her trials and make us realise that even in a pandemic we are fortunate.
- That well known poet **Anonymous** gave us a ghoulish account of a lover sitting on 'The unquiet Grave'. Perfect for Halloween.
- **Alistair Reid** (b.1926) was a find; a Scottish poet who travelled widely and who's only permanent address was The New Yorker! 'Growing, Flying, Happening' encouraged us to stand amazed at the beauty of the natural world, and not stop to name things. 'Oddments, Inklings, Omens, Moments' summed up those strange feelings we sometimes have that we can't explain.
- **George Herbert** (b.1593) was a Welsh, metaphysical poet writing devotional poems. 'The Flower' was not well received as it the rhythm seemed to fragment it. It compared the life cycle of the flower to our own brief lives.
- More satisfaction from **Ted Hughes** in his portrayal of his daughter in 'Full Moon and Little Freida' describing childhood wonder.
- **Isabel de Gruchy**, S.Africa , has a new collection called 'Not Done Yet' that folks of a certain may identify with.
- **John Garden** wrote 'Coffee in Heaven' which made us coffee lovers smile as such a reassuring thought