

Poetry Group Report - April 2025

By Marilyn Normanton

April's theme was childhood, a universal experience engendering much discussion and reminiscence.

First comes babyhood with Sylvia Plath, in gentler mood as a new mother, writing in ***Morning Song***, "All night your moth breath/ Flickers among the flat pink roses". "Cow heavy" she answers the urgent summons of her baby as "now you try/Your handful of notes;/ The clear vowels rise like balloons."

George Mackay Brown's ***School***, suggests the lassitude of a classroom, where the children, "heads... like green sheaths that will open soon" chant their tables, while outside a "lark glitters out a song" and "the globe of the world/ In a dark corner, has a splash of light." Spirits lift, as reminded of the imminence of the Easter holidays "twenty-one faces/ open like daffodils."

Walking Away by Cecil Day-Lewis beautifully evokes a parent's fears as they reflect on watching their growing child "walking away from me ... With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free." A parting that "Gnaws at my mind still", yet recognising "How selfhood begins with a walking away/And love is proved in the letting go."

Charles Causley's ***Timothy Winters*** has no such fond parent nurturing him, since "old man Winters likes his beer" and his mother "ran off with a bombardier". While "Grandma sits in the grate with a gin... Timothy's dosed with Aspirin." Written in 1957 but, sadly, a scenario not unfamiliar to those of us who have worked with children. Maya Angelou, victim of an abusive childhood, declares, ***Life Doesn't Frighten Me***. "Shadows on the wall/ Noises down the hall/ Life doesn't frighten me at all." Defiance of a frightened child or resilience of a survivor?

Seamus Heaney's ***Follower***, addresses role reversal as we age. The child looking back "was a nuisance" stumbling behind the plough in his father's "hobnailed wake." "But today/ It is my father who keeps stumbling/ Behind me and will not go away." To lighten the mood, we listened to ***Liverpool Lullaby***, sung appropriately by Cilla Black. "Oh, you are a mucky kid/ Mucky as a dustbin lid" but loved, nonetheless. "There's no one can take your place/ Go fast asleep for your mummy."

This was selection that stirred memories for us all. Both of our own childhoods, for better or worse and as parents, remembering the joys and occasional missteps we made as we raised our own children.

Convenor's note

We heard news following our poetry group that Roger Stanyon, one of our first members, has died. Roger loved art and poetry, in particular Wendy Cope, whose mischievous, witty and anarchic poems appealed to Roger and revealed something about him. He was a great contributor to the group and to the u3a, we will miss his warmth and generosity hugely.

Annie