

OIB British Option

Language & Literature Synoptic Topic

Post-war Writing of the 1950s & 1960s

Six Poems

Elizabeth Jennings: *The Enemies* (1955)

Thom Gunn: *On the Move* (1957)

Anne Sexton: *Her Kind* (1960)

Ted Hughes: *Wodwo* (1967)

Adrian Henri: *Tonight at Noon* (1967)

Gary Snyder: *A Curse on the Men in Washington, Pentagon* (1968)

These poems are collected in this booklet solely for classroom and examination use by students and teachers preparing the OIB (British version) Language and Literature Synoptic Topics for the oral examination. This booklet is not for use or circulation in any other context.

The Enemies
ELIZABETH JENNINGS

Last night they came across the river and
Entered the city. Women were awake
With lights and food. They entertained the band,
Not asking what the men had come to take
5 Or what strange tongue they spoke
Or why they came so suddenly through the land.

Now in the morning all the town is filled
With stories of the swift and dark invasion;
The women say that not one stranger told
10 A reason for his coming. The intrusion
Was not for devastation:
Peace is apparent still on hearth and field.

Yet all the city is a haunted place.
Man meeting man speaks cautiously. Old friends
15 Close up the candid looks upon their face.
There is no warmth in hands accepting hands;
Each ponders, 'Better hide myself in case
Those strangers have set up their homes in minds
I used to walk in. Better draw the blinds
20 Even if the strangers haunt in my own house.'

On the Move
THOM GUNN

The blue jay scuffling in the bushes follows
Some hidden purpose, and the gust of birds
That spurts across the field, the wheeling swallows,
Has nested in the trees and undergrowth.
5 Seeking their instinct, or their poise, or both,
One moves with an uncertain violence
Under the dust thrown by a baffled sense
Or the dull thunder of approximate words.

On motorcycles, up the road, they come:
10 Small, black, as flies hanging in heat, the Boys,
Until the distance throws them forth, their hum
Bulges to thunder held by calf and thigh.
In goggles, donned impersonality,
In gleaming jackets trophied with the dust,
15 They strap in doubt – by hiding it, robust –
And almost hear a meaning in their noise.

Exact conclusion of their hardiness
Has no shape yet, but from known whereabouts
They ride, direction where the tyres press.
20 They scare a flight of birds across the field:
Much that is natural, to the will must yield.
Men manufacture both machine and soul,
And use what they imperfectly control
To dare a future from the taken routes.

25 It is a part solution, after all.
One is not necessarily discord
On earth; or damned because, half animal,
One lacks direct instinct, because one wakes
Afloat on movement that divides and breaks.
30 One joins the movement in a valueless world,
Choosing it, till, both hurler and the hurled,
One moves as well, always toward, toward.

A minute holds them, who have come to go:
The self-defined, astride the created will
35 They burst away; the towns they travel through
Are home for neither bird nor holiness,
For birds and saints complete their purposes.
At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
40 One is always nearer by not keeping still.

Her Kind
ANNE SEXTON

I have gone out, a possessed witch,
haunting the black air, braver at night;
dreaming evil, I have done my hitch
over the plain houses, light by light:
5 lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind.
A woman like that is not a woman, quite.
I have been her kind.

I have found the warm caves in the woods,
filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,
10 closets, silks, innumerable goods;
fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:
whining, rearranging the disaligned.
A woman like that is misunderstood.
I have been her kind.

15 I have ridden in your cart, driver,
waved my nude arms at villages going by,
learning the last bright routes, survivor
where your flames still bite my thigh
and my ribs crack where your wheels wind.
20 A woman like that is not ashamed to die.
I have been her kind.

Wodwo
TED HUGHES

What am I? Nosing here, turning leaves over
Following a faint stain on the air to the river's edge
I enter water. Who am I to split
The glassy grain of water looking upward I see the bed
5 Of the river above me upside down very clear
What am I doing here in mid-air? Why do I find
this frog so interesting as I inspect its most secret
interior and make it my own? Do these weeds
know me and name me to each other have they
10 seen me before do I fit in their world? I seem
separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped
out of nothing casually I've no threads
fastening me to anything I can go anywhere
I seem to have been given the freedom
15 of this place what am I then? And picking
bits of bark off this rotten stump gives me
no pleasure and it's no use so why do I do it
me and doing that have coincided very queerly
But what shall I be called am I the first
20 have I an owner what shape am I what
shape am I am I huge if I go
to the end on this way past these trees and past these trees
till I get tired that's touching one wall of me
for the moment if I sit still how everything
25 stops to watch me I suppose I am the exact centre
but there's all this what is it roots
roots roots roots and here's the water
again very queer but I'll go on looking

Tonight at Noon
ADRIAN HENRI

Tonight at noon
Supermarkets will advertise 3p extra on everything
Tonight at noon
Children from happy families will be sent to live in a home
5 Elephants will tell each other human jokes
America will declare peace on Russia
World War I generals will sell poppies on the street on November 11th
The first daffodils of autumn will appear
When the leaves fall upwards to the trees

10 Tonight at noon
Pigeons will hunt cats through city backyards
Hitler will tell us to fight on the beaches and on the landing fields
A tunnel full of water will be built under Liverpool
Pigs will be sighted flying in formation over Woolton

15 And Nelson will not only get his eye back but his arm as well
White Americans will demonstrate for equal rights
In front of the Black house
And the monster has just created Dr. Frankenstein

20 Girls in bikinis are moonbathing
Folksongs are being sung by real folk
Art galleries are closed to people over 21
Poets get their poems in the Top 20
There's jobs for everybody and nobody wants them
In back alleys everywhere teenage lovers are kissing in broad daylight

25 In forgotten graveyards everywhere the dead will quietly bury the living
and
You will tell me you love me
Tonight at noon

A Curse on the Men in Washington, Pentagon

GARY SNYDER

OM A KA CA TA PA YA SA SVAHA¹

As you shoot down the Vietnamese girls and men
in their fields
burning and chopping,
poisoning and blighting,

5 So surely I must hunt the white man down
in my heart.

The crew-cutted Seattle boy
The Portland boy who worked for U.P.
that was me.

10 I won't let him live. The 'American'
I'll destroy. The 'Christian'
has long been dead.

They won't pass onto my children.
I'll give them Chief Joseph, the Bison herds,
15 Ishi, sparrowhawk, the Fir trees
The Buddha, their own naked bodies,
Swimming and dancing and singing
instead.

As I kill the white man,
20 The 'American'
in me
And dance out the Ghost dance:
To bring back America, the grass and the streams,

¹ A Tantric Buddhist mantra for causing a city to tremble

To trample your throat in your dreams,

25 This magic I work, this loving I give
that my children may flourish

And yours won't thrive.

HI'NISWA' VITA'KI'NI²

² The chorus of a Cheyenne Indian ghost dance song – 'We shall live again'