Class three poems

Mary Gilmore

Nationality

I have grown past hate and bitterness,
I see the world as one;
But though I can no longer hate,
My son is still my son.

All men at God’s round table sit,
and all men must be fed;
But this loaf in my hand,
This loaf is my son’s bread.

Eve-Song

I span and Eve span
A thread to bind the heart of man;
But the heart of man was a wandering thing
That came and went with little to bring:
Nothing he minded what we made,
As here he loitered, and there he stayed.

I span and Eve span
A thread to bind the heart of man;
But the more we span the more we found
It wasn't his heart but ours we bound.
For children gathered about our knees:
The thread was a chain that stole our ease.
And one of us learned in our children's eyes
That more than man was love and prize.
But deep in the heart of one of us lay
A root of loss and hidden dismay.

He said he was strong. He had no strength
But that which comes of breadth and length.
He said he was fond. But his fondness proved
The flame of an hour when he was moved.
He said he was true. His truth was but
A door that winds could open and shut.

And yet, and yet, as he came back,
Wandering in from the outward track,
We held our arms, and gave him our breast,
As a pillowing place for his head to rest.
I span and Eve span,
A thread to bind the heart of man!

‘Gallipoli’

He had never been born he was mine:
Since he was born he never was mine:
Only the dream is our own.

Where the world called him there he went;
When the war called him, there he bent,
Now he is dead.

He was I; bone of my bone,
Flesh of my flesh, in truth;
For his plenty I gave my own,
His drouth was my drouth.

When he laughed I was glad,
In his strength forgot I was weak,
In his joy forgot I was sad
Now there is nothing to ask or to seek;
He is dead.

I am the ball the marksman sent,
Missing the end and falling spent;
I am the arrow, sighted fair
That failed, and finds not anywhere.
He who was I is dead.

# Five Visions of Captain Cook

By [Kenneth Slessor](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kenneth-slessor)

**I**

Cook was a captain of the Admiralty

When sea-captains had the evil eye,

Or should have, what with beating krakens off

And casting nativities of ships;

Cook was a captain of the powder-days

When captains, you might have said, if you had been

Fixed by their glittering stare, half-down the side,

Or gaping at them up companionways,

Were more like warlocks than a humble man—

And men were humble then who gazed at them,

Poor horn-eyed sailors, bullied by devils’ fists

Of wind or water, or the want of both,

Childlike and trusting, filled with eager trust—

Cook was a captain of the sailing days

When sea-captains were kings like this,

Not cold executives of company-rules

Cracking their boilers for a dividend

Or bidding their engineers go wink

At bells and telegraphs, so plates would hold

Another pound. Those captains drove their ships

By their own blood, no laws of schoolbook steam,

Till yards were sprung, and masts went overboard—

Daemons in periwigs, doling magic out,

Who read fair alphabets in stars

Where humbler men found but a mess of sparks,

Who steered their crews by mysteries

And strange, half-dreadful sortilege with books,

Used medicines that only gods could know

The sense of, but sailors drank

In simple faith. That was the captain

Cook was when he came to the Coral Sea

And chose a passage into the dark.

How many mariners had made that choice

Paused on the brink of mystery! ‘Choose now!’

The winds roared, blowing home, blowing home,

Over the Coral Sea. ‘Choose now!’ the trades

Cried once to Tasman, throwing him for choice

Their teeth or shoulders, and the Dutchman chose

The wind’s way, turning north. ‘Choose, Bougainville!’

The wind cried once, and Bougainville had heard

The voice of God, calling him prudently

Out of the dead lee shore, and chose the north,

The wind’s way. So, too, Cook made choice,

Over the brink, into the devil’s mouth,

With four months’ food, and sailors wild with dreams

Of English beer, the smoking barns of home.

So Cook made choice, so Cook sailed westabout,

So men write poems in Australia.

**II**

Flowers turned to stone! Not all the botany

Of Joseph Banks, hung pensive in a porthole,

Could find the Latin for this loveliness,

Could put the Barrier Reef in a glass box

Tagged by the horrid Gorgon squint

Of horticulture. Stone turned to flowers

It seemed—you’d snap a crystal twig,

One petal even of the water-garden,

And have it dying like a cherry-bough.

They’d sailed all day outside a coral hedge,

And half the night. Cook sailed at night,

Let there be reefs a fathom from the keel

And empty charts. The sailors didn’t ask,

Nor Joseph Banks. Who cared? It was the spell

Of Cook that lulled them, bade them turn below,

Kick off their sea-boots, puff themselves to sleep,

Though there were more shoals outside

Than teeth in a shark’s head. Cook snored loudest himself.

One day, a morning of light airs and calms,

They slid towards a reef that would have knifed

Their boards to mash, and murdered every man.

So close it sucked them, one wave shook their keel,

The next blew past the coral. Three officers,

In gilt and buttons, languidly on deck

Pointed their sextants at the sun. One yawned,

One held a pencil, one put eye to lens:

Three very peaceful English mariners

Taking their sights for longitude.

I’ve never heard

Of sailors aching for the longitude

Of shipwrecks before or since. It was the spell

Of Cook did this, the phylacteries of Cook.

Men who ride broomsticks with a mesmerist

Mock the typhoon. So, too, it was with Cook.

**III**

Two chronometers the captain had,

One by Arnold that ran like mad,

One by Kendal in a walnut case,

Poor devoted creature with a hangdog face.

Arnold always hurried with a crazed click-click

Dancing over Greenwich like a lunatic,

Kendal panted faithfully his watch-dog beat,

Climbing out of Yesterday with sticky little feet.

Arnold choked with appetite to wolf up time,

Madly round the numerals his hands would climb,

His cogs rushed over and his wheels ran miles,

Dragging Captain Cook to the Sandwich Isles.

But Kendal dawdled in the tombstoned past,

With a sentimental prejudice to going fast,

And he thought very often of a haberdasher’s door

And a yellow-haired boy who would knock no more.

All through the night-time, clock talked to clock,

In the captain’s cabin, tock-tock-tock,

One ticked fast and one ticked slow,

And Time went over them a hundred years ago.

**IV**

Sometimes the god would fold his wings

And, stone of Caesars turned to flesh,

Talk of the most important things

That serious-minded midshipmen could wish,

Of plantains, and the lack of rum

Or spearing sea-cows—things like this

That hungry schoolboys, five days dumb,

In jolly-boats are wonted to discuss.

What midshipman would pause to mourn

The sun that beat about his ears,

Or curse the tide, if he could horn

His fists by tugging on those lumbering oars?

Let rum-tanned mariners prefer

To hug the weather-side of yards,

‘Cats to catch mice’ before they purr,

Those were the captain’s enigmatic words.

Here, in this jolly-boat they graced,

Were food and freedom, wind and storm,

While, fowling-piece across his waist,

Cook mapped the coast, with one eye cocked for game.

**V**

After the candles had gone out, and those

Who listened had gone out, and a last wave

Of chimney-haloes caked their smoky rings

Like fish-scales on the ceiling, a Yellow Sea

Of swimming circles, the old man,

Old Captain-in-the-Corner, drank his rum

With friendly gestures to four chairs. They stood

Empty, still warm from haunches, with rubbed nails

And leather glazed, like aged serving-men

Feeding a king’s delight, the sticky, drugged

Sweet agony of habitual anecdotes.

But these, his chairs, could bear an old man’s tongue,

Sleep when he slept, be flattering when he woke,

And wink to hear the same eternal name

From lips new-dipped in rum.

‘Then Captain Cook,

I heard him, told them they could go

If so they chose, but he would get them back,

Dead or alive, he’d have them,’

The old man screeched, half-thinking to hear ‘Cook!

Cook again! Cook! It’s other cooks he’ll need,

Cooks who can bake a dinner out of pence,

That’s what he lives on, talks on, half-a-crown

A day, and sits there full of Cook.

Who’d do your cooking now, I’d like to ask,

If someone didn’t grind her bones away?

But that’s the truth, six children and half-a-crown

A day, and a man gone daft with Cook.’

That was his wife,

Elizabeth, a noble wife but brisk,

Who lived in a present full of kitchen-fumes

And had no past. He had not seen her

For seven years, being blind, and that of course

Was why he’d had to strike a deal with chairs,

Not knowing when those who chafed them had gone to sleep

Or stolen away. Darkness and empty chairs,

This was the port that Alexander Home

Had come to with his useless cutlass-wounds

And tales of Cook, and half-a-crown a day—

This was the creek he’d run his timbers to,

Where grateful countrymen repaid his wounds

At half-a-crown a day. Too good, too good,

This eloquent offering of birdcages

To gulls, and Greenwich Hospital to Cook,

Britannia’s mission to the sea-fowl.

It was not blindness picked his flesh away,

Nor want of sight made penny-blank the eyes

Of Captain Home, but that he lived like this

In one place, and gazed elsewhere. His body moved

In Scotland, but his eyes were dazzle-full

Of skies and water farther round the world—

Air soaked with blue, so thick it dripped like snow

On spice-tree boughs, and water diamond-green,

Beaches wind-glittering with crumbs of gilt,

And birds more scarlet than a duchy’s seal

That had come whistling long ago, and far

Away. His body had gone back,

Here it sat drinking rum in Berwickshire,

But not his eyes—they were left floating there

Half-round the earth, blinking at beaches milked

By suck-mouth tides, foaming with ropes of bubbles

And huge half-moons of surf. Thus it had been

When Cook was carried on a sailor’s back,

Vengeance in a cocked hat, to claim his price,

A prince in barter for a longboat.

And then the trumpery springs of fate—a stone,

A musket-shot, a round of gunpowder,

And puzzled animals, killing they knew not what

Or why, but killing . . . the surge of goatish flanks

Armoured in feathers, like cruel birds:

Wild, childish faces, killing; a moment seen,

Marines with crimson coats and puffs of smoke

Toppling face-down; and a knife of English iron,

Forged aboard ship, that had been changed for pigs,

Given back to Cook between the shoulder-blades.

There he had dropped, and the old floundering sea,

The old, fumbling, witless lover-enemy,

Had taken his breath, last office of salt water.

Cook died. The body of Alexander Home

Flowed round the world and back again, with eyes

Marooned already, and came to English coasts,

The vague ancestral darknesses of home,

Seeing them faintly through a glass of gold,

Dim fog-shapes, ghosted like the ribs of trees

Against his blazing waters and blue air.

But soon they faded, and there was nothing left,

Only the sugar-cane and the wild granaries

Of sand, and.palm-trees and the flying blood

Of cardinal-birds; and putting out one hand

Tremulously in the direction of the beach,

He felt a chair in Scotland. And sat down.

**South Country**

By [Kenneth Slessor](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kenneth-slessor)

After the whey-faced anonymity

Of river-gums and scribbly-gums and bush,

After the rubbing and the hit of brush,

You come to the South Country

As if the argument of trees were done,

The doubts and quarrelling, the plots and pains,

All ended by these clear and gliding planes

Like an abrupt solution.

And over the flat earth of empty farms

The monstrous continent of air floats back

Coloured with rotting sunlight and the black,

Bruised flesh of thunderstorms:

Air arched, enormous, pounding the bony ridge,

Ditches and hutches, with a drench of light,

So huge, from such infinities of height,

You walk on the sky’s beach

While even the dwindled hills are small and bare,

As if, rebellious, buried, pitiful,

Something below pushed up a knob of skull,

Feeling its way to air.



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