

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](#)

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 trumpety 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 darkneses 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](#)

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.

# D.M. Stéphane Mallarmé

*Dead in Valvins*

by Christopher Brennan

From book: *Poems (1913)* [ [Previous](#) | [Next](#) ]

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Dead in Valvins

9. IX. 1898

Red autumn in Valvins around thy bed  
was watchful flame or yet thy spirit induced  
might vanish away in magic gold diffused  
and kingdom o'er the dreaming forest shed.

What god now claims thee priest, O chosen head,  
most humble here that wast, for that thou knew'st  
thro' what waste nights thy lucid gaze was used  
to spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread?

Silence alone, that o'er the lonely song  
impends, old night, or, known to thee and near,  
long autumn afternoon o'er stirless leaves

suspended fulgent haze, the smouldering throng  
staying its rapt assumption-pyre to hear  
what strain the faun's enamour'd leisure weaves.

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# [Deep mists of longing blur the land . .]

by [Christopher Brennan](#)

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Deep mists of longing blur the land  
as in your late October eve:  
almost I think your hand might leave  
its old caress upon my hand —

for sure this floating world of dream  
hath touch'd that far reality  
of memory's heaven; nor would I deem  
the chance a strange one, if to thee

my feet should stray ere fall the night,  
or, reaching to that lucent shore,  
these eyes should wake on tenderer light  
to greet the spring and thee once more.

1895

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From book: [Poems \(1913\)](#)

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