

TO SECRETARY SANDRA'S GOLF-BALL

Your type has set the image of
The School's official missives,
dictating rigorous policies and
deleting all expletives,
but after Form One's verses,
even worse, their tasteless jokes -
I'm sure your cogs can cope
with all my poetry evokes.

WATCHING OLD PEOPLE

There must be easier pastimes
than this slow Chinese drip
into contempt by strip-light,
gauging women's ages by rings
on necks, round eyes, on fingers -
pale dragons hoarding gaudy
compensation for decline.

Inside each toughened epiderm
is its baby, toes bath-wrinkled
blinking yellow eyes at a strange world.
Only death peels skin-layers back
to egg shell fragility, till
some quintessence shines through.
Then you see kinder ways to watch.

MEN?

My little boy, who's only three,
says he's a man and don't need me;
all my life, these big, strong men
have not needed me, again and again.

NOTHING PERSONAL

Worm-like, you burrow blindly
into any accommodating hole,
earthed in the blood-beat.

Then, rejecting the cooled heart
of your temporary refuge, you
shriveled, puckering in the light.

Less than worm, self-insufficient,
yet too easily detached,
translating into words only
'Thank you, hole, for being available.'

THE ARAN JUMPER

He left when I'd just set the pattern;

I didn't think he meant it,
called, '*Wait till the end of the row*'
and heard the door close, quietly.

Strange. I'm not superstitious but
I always knit the pearl rows quicker
just in case. And that's when he left.

Like missing cracks in pavements which
I suppose is easier in size threes.
Tens his were. Are. Stretching across

whole paving stones and daring the cracks.
We seem to be through with skipping and covering.
I wasn't even listening, I was thinking

yarn forward and cable, orderly blue growth.
He chose the colour too. I've tried
to carry on but I keep missing stitches.

Somehow he kept the pattern set.

SPRING PRAYER

PANDORA'S BOX

Pandora's box is too small,
once emptied of bloated evils.

How can you believe its promise
of puppies in spring?

Optimist, paint clouds in prison,
deny from heaven the deaths

that trail from honeyed woods.
You eat, unwitting, maggots

with your apple; you can't spit out
this serpent at your core.

Don't shut your cell-lid! Tiny
in your opium shelter

you'll miss the beauty of scales shed
to fall as petals in our garden.

INTEGRITY

Daddy plays his hi-fi,
Mummy just hears music;

Baby bites her nails to shreds,
jumps in boring boyfriends' beds,

wonders why she once was shy -
links lost, all fragmented.

Separate, disintegrate,
then find out when it's all too late,

soul's sweat is body's weight;
we think distinctions we create.

BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR MY FATHER

We planned some sort of celebration
before we knew how serious it was,
how little chance you'd reach the date,
be seventy.

I thought so hard of presents,
wondered if to name a star would do,
some London scheme - an 'astral agency'.

Harder headed people said they'd sell me
two per cent of ocean, discount price,
to make your name immortal. Yet,

perhaps I wasn't so naïve; what proof
you're not returned to air and water,
birthday gifts conferred, though not by me?

NEVER FORGET YOUR WELSH

Sinews tensed and arms unsheathed from working sleeves,
miners swing on gates and lean by garden walls
on sunny sloping streets.

Today, the gossip
flies more carefully than usual; some had liked the boy
and had told his father so, or meant to
when his eyes spat tears.

Proud that man was as he walked to claim the tools
his boy had cared for, owned and lived by;
proud in grief and hiding bitter, pointless ‘ifs’.

‘If’ he’d been there, spoken some key word,
that self-inflicted death from mental wound
might not have happened.

‘If’ his son’s dour work-mates had been open
to his pain - instead they’d called him ‘Saes’,
exiled him by language from the country he thought his.

Only when he’d found the boy’s tools missing, stolen,
did the father break; he said

‘I’m Welsh as you are, valleys all my life
just like my son.’

In proof he poured out, line by perfect line
the Lord’s prayer in their mother tongue
(all that he knew and in that all, himself).

‘Can any of you here say this like me?’

No answer, but the tools appeared. He left.
Hanging over gates at dusk, in groups, the men
scuff hobnail boots and kick the silence dead.