

Classic Poetry Series

Spike Milligan
- poems -

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Spike Milligan(16 April 1918 – 27 February 2002)

Early life

Milligan was born in Ahmednagar, India, on 16 April 1918, the son of an Irish-born father, Captain Leo Alphonso Milligan, MSM, RA, who was serving in the British Indian Army. His mother, Florence Mary Winifred Kettleband, was born in England. He spent his childhood in Poona (India) and later in Rangoon (Yangon), capital of Burma (Myanmar). He was educated at the Convent of Jesus and Mary, Poona, and St Paul's Christian Brothers, de la Salle, Rangoon.

He lived most of his life in England and served in the British Army, in the Royal Artillery during World War II.

Poetry

Milligan also wrote verse, considered to be within the genre of literary nonsense. His poetry has been described by comedian Stephen Fry as "absolutely immortal - greatly in the tradition of Lear". His most famous poem, On the Ning Nang Nong, was voted the UK's favourite comic poem in 1998 in a nationwide poll, ahead of other nonsense poets including Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. This nonsense verse, set to music, became a favourite Australia-wide, performed week after week by the ABC children's programme Playschool. Milligan included it on his album No One's Gonna Change Our World in 1969 to aid the World Wildlife Fund. In December 2007 it was reported that, according to OFSTED, it is amongst the ten most commonly taught poems in primary schools in the UK.

While depressed, Milligan wrote serious poetry. He also wrote a novel Puckoon, parodying the style of Dylan Thomas[citation needed], and a very successful series of war memoirs, including Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall (1971), "Rommel?" "Gunner Who?": A Confrontation in the Desert (1974), Monty: His Part in My Victory (1976) and Mussolini: His Part in My Downfall (1978). Milligan's seven volumes of memoirs cover the years from 1939 to 1950 (his call-up, war service, first breakdown, time spent entertaining in Italy, and return to the UK).

He wrote comedy songs, including "Purple Aeroplane", which was a parody of The Beatles' song "Yellow Submarine". Glimpses of his bouts with depression, which led to the nervous breakdowns, can be found in his serious poetry, which is compiled in Open Heart University.

Death

Even late in life, Milligan's black humour had not deserted him. After the death of friend Harry Secombe from cancer, he said, "I'm glad he died before me, because I didn't want him to sing at my funeral." A recording of Secombe singing was played at Milligan's memorial service. He also wrote his own obituary, in which he stated repeatedly that he "wrote the Goon show and died".

Milligan died from liver disease, at the age of 83, on 27 February 2002, at his home in Rye, East Sussex. On the day of his funeral, 8 March 2002, his coffin was carried to St Thomas's Church in Winchelsea, Sussex, and was draped in the flag of the Republic of Ireland. He had once quipped that he wanted his headstone to bear the words "I told you I was ill." He was buried at St Thomas's Church cemetery in Winchelsea, East Sussex, but the Chichester Diocese refused to allow this epitaph. A compromise was reached with the Irish translation, "Dúirt mé leat go raibh mé breoite", and additionally in English, "Love, light, peace".

A Combustible Woman From Thang

A combustible woman from Thang
Exploded one day with a BANG!
The maid then rushed in
And said with a grin,
'Pardon me, madam - you rang?'

Spike Milligan

A Silly Poem

Said Hamlet to Ophelia,
I'll draw a sketch of thee,
What kind of pencil shall I use?
2B or not 2B?

Spike Milligan

Bazonka

Say Bazonka every day
That's what my grandma used to say
It keeps at bay the Asian Flu'
And both your elbows free from glue.
So say Bazonka every day
(That's what my grandma used to say)

Don't say it if your socks are dry!
Or when the sun is in your eye!
Never say it in the dark
(The word you see emits a spark)
Only say it in the day
(That's what my grandma used to say)

Young Tiny Tim took her advice
He said it once, he said it twice
he said it till the day he died
And even after that he tried
To say Bazonka! every day
Just like my grandma used to say.

Now folks around declare it's true
That every night at half past two
If you'll stand upon your head
And shout Bazonka! from your bed
You'll hear the word as clear as day
Just like my grandma used to say!

Spike Milligan

Bongaloo

'What is a Bongaloo, Daddy?'
'A Bongaloo, Son,' said I,
'Is a tall bag of cheese
Plus a Chinaman's knees
And the leg of a nanny goat's eye.'

'How strange is a Bongaloo, Daddy?'
'As strange as strange,' I replied.
'When the sun's in the West
It appears in a vest
Sailing out with the noonday tide.'

'What shape is a Bongaloo, Daddy?'
'The shape, my Son, I'll explain:
It's tall round the nose
Which continually grows
In the general direction of Spain.'

'Are you sure there's a Bongaloo, Daddy?'
'Am I sure, my Son?' said I.
'Why, I've seen it, not quite
On a dark sunny night

Do you think that I'd tell you a lie?

Spike Milligan

Bump

Things that go 'bump' in the night
Should not really give one a fright.
It's the hole in each ear
That lets in the fear,
That, and the absence of light!

Spike Milligan

Contagion

Elephants are contagious!
Be careful how you tread.
An Elephant that's been trodden on
Should be confined to bed!

Leopards are contagious too.
Be careful tiny tots.
They don't give you a temperature
But lots and lots - of spots.

The Herring is a lucky fish
From all disease inured.
Should he be ill when caught at sea;
Immediately - he's cured!

Spike Milligan

Down The Stream The Swans All Glide

Down the stream the swans all glide;
It's quite the cheapest way to ride.
Their legs get wet,
Their tummies wetter:
I think after all
The bus is better

Spike Milligan

Emptiness

I've learned mine can't be filled,
only alchemized. Many times
it's become a paragraph or a page.
But usually I've hidden it,
not knowing until too late
how enormous it grows in its dark.
Or how obvious it gets
when I've donned, say, my good
cordovans and my fine tweed vest
and walked into a room with a smile.
I might as well have been a man
with a fez and a faux silver cane.
Better, I know now, to dress it plain,
to say out loud
to some right person
in some right place
that there's something not there
in me, something I can't name.
That some right person
has just lit a fire under the kettle.
She hasn't said a word.
Beneath her blue shawl
she, too, conceals a world.
But she's been amazed
how much I seem to need my emptiness,
amazed I won't let it go.

Spike Milligan

Eurolove

I cannot
and I will not
No, I cannot love you less
Like the flower to the butterfly
The corsage to the dress

She turns my love to dust
my destination empty
my beliefs scattered: Diaspora!

Who set this course - and why?
Now my wings beat -
without purpose
Yet they speed.....

Spike Milligan

Feelings

There must be a wound!
No one can be this hurt
and not bleed.

How could she injure me so?
No marks
No bruise

Worse!
People say 'My, you're looking well'
.....God help me!
She's mummified me -
ALIVE!

Spike Milligan

Go North, South, East, And West, Young Man

Drake is going west, lads
So Tom is going East
But tiny Fred
Just lies in bed,
The lazy little beast.

Spike Milligan

Goodbye S.S.

Go away girl, go away
and let me pack my dreams
Now where did I put those yesteryears
made up with broken seams
Where shall I sweep the pieces
my God they still look new
There's a taxi waiting at the door
but there's only room for you

Spike Milligan

Granny

Through every nook and every cranny
The wind blew in on poor old Granny
Around her knees, into each ear
(And up nose as well, I fear)

All through the night the wind grew worse
It nearly made the vicar curse
The top had fallen off the steeple
Just missing him (and other people)

It blew on man, it blew on beast
It blew on nun, it blew on priest
It blew the wig off Auntie Fanny-
But most of all, it blew on Granny!

Spike Milligan

Halved

The essence of true beauty
Lingers in all-encompassing rainbows
Of your joy and laughter

You hold my hand and smile
As we ensconce ourselves in our world of fire
Our love is all there is

I touch your face
Your gentleness astounds me
I'm held in the honour of your love

Then overnight, the world turns sour
61 minutes past the ElevenTHH HourRR
I'M A L O N E

Spike Milligan

Have A Nice Day

'Help, help, ' said a man. 'I'm drowning.'
'Hang on, ' said a man from the shore.
'Help, help, ' said the man. 'I'm not clowning.'
'Yes, I know, I heard you before.
Be patient dear man who is drowning,
You, see I've got a disease.
I'm waiting for a Doctor J. Browning.
So do be patient please.'
'How long, ' said the man who was drowning. 'Will it take for the Doc to arrive? '
'Not very long, ' said the man with the disease. 'Till then try staying alive.'
'Very well, ' said the man who was drowning. 'I'll try and stay afloat.
By reciting the poems of Browning
And other things he wrote.'
'Help, help, ' said the man with the disease, 'I suddenly feel quite ill.'
'Keep calm.' said the man who was drowning, ' Breathe deeply and lie quite still.'
'Oh dear, ' said the man with the awful disease. 'I think I'm going to die.'
'Farewell, ' said the man who was drowning.
Said the man with the disease, 'goodbye.'
So the man who was drowning, drowned
And the man with the disease past away.
But apart from that,
And a fire in my flat,
It's been a very nice day.

Spike Milligan

I Must Go Down To The Sea Again

I must go down to the sea again,
to the lonely sea and the sky;
I left my shoes and socks there -
I wonder if they're dry?

Spike Milligan

If I Could Write Words

If I could write words
Like leaves on an autumn forest floor,
What a bonfire my letters would make.

If I could speak words of water,
You would drown when I said
'I love you.'

Spike Milligan

I'M Walking Backwards For Christmas

I'm walking backwards for Christmas,
Across the Irish Sea,
I'm walking backwards for Christmas,
It's the only thing for me.

I've tried walking sideways,
And walking to the front,
But people just look at me,
And say it's a publicity stunt.

I'm walking backwards for Christmas,
To prove that I love you.

An immigrant lad, loved an Irish colleen
From Dublin Galway Bay.
He longed for her arms,
But she spurned his charms,
And sailed o'er the foam away

She left the lad by himself, on his own
All alone, a-sorrowing
And sadly he dreamed, or at least that's the
way it seemed, buddy,
That an angel choir did sing -
An angel choir did sing.

I'm walking backwards for Christmas,
Across the Irish Sea.
I'm walking backwards for Christmas,
It's the finest thing for me.

And so I've tried walking sideways,
And walking to the front.
But people just laughed, and said,
'It's a publicity stunt'.

So I'm walking backwards for Christmas
To prove that I love you.

In The Land Of The Bumbley Boo

In the land of the Bumbley Boo
The People are red white and blue,
They never blow noses,
Or ever wear closes,
What a sensible thing to do!

In the land of the Bumbley Boo
You can buy Lemon pie at the zoo;
They give away foxes
In little Pink Boxes
And Bottles of Dandyion Stew.

In the land of the Bumbley Boo
You never see a Gnu,
But thousands of cats
Wearing trousers and hats
Made of Pumpkins and Pelican Glue!

Chorus
Oh, the Bumbley Boo! the Bumbley Boo!
That's the place for me and you!
So hurry! Let's run!
The train leaves at one!
For the land of the Bumbley Boo!
The wonderful Bumbley Boo-Boo-Boo!
The Wonderful Bumbley BOO!!!

Spike Milligan

Indian Boyhood

What happened to the boy I was?
Why did he run away?
And leave me old and thinking, like
There'd been no yesterday?
What happened then?
Was I that boy?
Who laughed and swam in the bund*
I there no going back?
No recompense?
Is there nothing?
No refund?

Spike Milligan

Jumbo Jet

I saw a little elephant standing in my garden,
I said 'You don't belong in here', he said 'I beg you pardon?',
I said 'This place is England, what are you doing here?',
He said 'Ah, then I must be lost' and then 'Oh dear, oh dear'.

'I should be back in Africa, on Saranghetti's Plain',
'Pray, where is the nearest station where I can catch a train?'.
He caught the bus to Finchley and then to Mincing lane,
And over the Embankment, where he got lost, again.

The police they put him in a cell, but it was far too small,
So they tied him to a lamppost and he slept against the wall.
But as the policemen lay sleeping by the twinkling light of dawn,
The lamppost and the wall were there, but the elephant was gone!

So if you see an elephant, in a Jumbo Jet,
You can be sure that Africa's the place he's trying to get!

Spike Milligan

Letters

I was thinking of letters,
We all have a lot in our life
A few good - a few sad
But mostly run of the mill-
I suppose that's my fault
For writing to run of the mill people.
I've never had a letter
I really wanted
It might come one day
But then, it will be just too late,
And that's when I don't want it.

Spike Milligan

Look At All Those Monkeys!

Look at all those monkeys
Jumping in their cage.
Why don't they all go out to work
And earn a decent wage?

How can you say such silly things,
And you a son of mine?
Imagine monkeys travelling on
The Morden-Edgware line!

But what about the Pekinese!
They have an allocation.
'Don't travel during Peke hour',
It says on every station.

My Gosh, you're right, my clever boy,
I never thought of that!
And so they left the monkey house,
While an elephant raised his hat.

Spike Milligan

Maveric

Maveric Prowles
Had Rumbling Bowles
That thundered in the night.
It shook the bedrooms all around
And gave the folks a fright.
The doctor called;
He was appalled
When through his stethoscope
He heard the sound of a baying hound,
And the acrid smell of smoke.
Was there a cure?
'The higher the fewer'
The learned doctor said,
Then turned poor Maveric inside out
And stood him on his head.
'Just as I thought
You've been and caught
An Asiatic flu -
You musn't go near dogs I fear
Unless they come near you.'
Poor Maveric cried.
He went cross-eyed,
His legs went green and blue.
The doctor hit him with a club
And charged him one and two.
And so my friend
This is the end,
A warning to the few:
Stay clear of doctors to the end
Or they'll get rid of you.

Spike Milligan

Me

Born screaming small into this world-
Living I am.
Occupational therapy twixt birth and death-
What was I before?
What will I be next?
What am I now?
Cruel answer carried in the jesting mind
of a careless God
I will not bend and grovel
When I die. If He says my sins are myriad
I will ask why He made me so imperfect
And he will say 'My chisels were blunt'
I will say 'Then why did you make so
many of me'.

Spike Milligan

Mirror, Mirror

A young spring-tender girl
combed her joyous hair
'You are very ugly' said the mirror.
But,
on her lips hung
a smile of dove-secret loveliness,
for only that morning had not
the blind boy said,
'You are beautiful'?

Spike Milligan

My Sister Laura

My sister Laura's bigger than me
And lifts me up quite easily.
I can't lift her, I've tried and tried;
She must have something heavy inside.

Spike Milligan

Omen Of Emptiness

The clock has turned enough
to reach a planet
Life is endless night
I hear wings beating in
the dark of my room
A giant Raven is waiting –

for me to fall asleep.

Spike Milligan

On The Ning Nang Nong

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
and the monkeys all say BOO!
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!
And the tea pots jibber jabber joo.
On the Nong Ning Nang
All the mice go Clang
And you just can't catch 'em when they do!
So its Ning Nang Nong
Cows go Bong!
Nong Nang Ning
Trees go ping
Nong Ning Nang
The mice go Clang
What a noisy place to belong
is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!!

Spike Milligan

Oojah-Ka-Piv

The people who live
On the Oojah-ka-Piv
Stand around in bundles of nine

When asked how it feels
They reply 'Curried Eels!'
Otherwise - everything's going fine!

Spike Milligan

Orstralia

Orstralia – Orstralia

We think of you each day

Orstralia – Orstralia

At work or at play.

We think of yew in the morning

And in the evening too

We even wake up at mid-night

So that we can think of you.

Orstralia – Orstralia

We love you from the heart

The kidney, the Liver and the giblets,

And every other part.

Spike Milligan

Philip Le Barr

Philip Le Barr,
Was knock down by a car,
On the road to Mandalay.
He was knocked down again
By a dust cart in Spain
And again in Zanzibar.
So,
He travled at night
In the pale moon light
Away from the traffic growl
But terrible luck
He was hit by a duck
Driven by an owl.

Spike Milligan

Porridge

Why is there no monument
To Porridge in our land?
It it's good enough to eat,
It's good enough to stand!

On a plinth in London
A statue we should see
Of Porridge made in Scotland
Signed, "Oatmeal, O.B.E."
(By a young dog of three)

Spike Milligan

Pussy-Cat

Pussy-cat

What are vices?

Catching rats

And eating mices!

Spike Milligan

Scorflufus

There are many diseases,
That strike people's kneeses,
Scorflufus! is one by name
It comes from the East
Packed in bladders of yeast
So the Chinese must take half the blame.

There's a case in the files
Of Sir Barrington-Pyles
While hunting a fox one day
Shot up in the air
And remained hanging there!
While the hairs on his socks turned grey!

Aye! Scorflufus had struck!
At man, beast, and duck.
And the knees of the world went Bong!
Some knees went Ping!
Other knees turned to string
From Balham to old Hong Kong.

Should you hold your life dear,
Then the remedy's clear,
If you're offered some yeast - don't eat it!
Turn the offer down flat-
Don your travelling hat-
Put an egg in your boot - and beat it!

Spike Milligan

So Fair Is She

So fair is she!
So fair her face
So fair her pulsing figure

Not so fair
The maniacal stare
Of a husband who's much bigger.

Spike Milligan

Soldier Freddy

Soldier Freddy
was never ready,
But! Soldier Neddy,
unlike Freddy
Was always ready
and steady,

That's why,
When Soldier Neddy
Is-outside-Buckingham-Palace-on-guard-in-the-pouring-wind-and-rain-being-
steady-and-ready,
Freddy
is home in beddy.

Spike Milligan

Standing Room Only

This population explosion
Said Peter to St. Paul
Is really getting far too much
Just look at the crowd in the hall.
Even here, in Heaven
There isn't any room
I think the world could do with less
Much less fruit in the womb.
Thus Heaven is overcrowded
The numbers are starting to tell
So when the next lot knock at the gates
Tell 'em to 'Go to Hell'.

Spike Milligan

Summer Dawn

My sleeping children are still flying dreams
in their goose-down heads.

The lush of the river singing morning songs

Fish watch their ceilings turn sun-white.

The grey-green pike lances upstream

Kale, like mermaid's hair

points the water's drift.

All is morning hush

and bird beautiful.

I only,

I didn't have flu.

Spike Milligan

Teeth

English Teeth, English Teeth!
Shining in the sun
A part of British heritage
Aye, each and every one.
English Teeth, Happy Teeth!
Always having fun
Clamping down on bits of fish
And sausages half done.
English Teeth! HEROES' Teeth!
Hear them click! and clack!
Let's sing a song of praise to them -
Three Cheers for the Brown Grey and Black.

Spike Milligan

The Abc

'Twas midnight in the schoolroom
And every desk was shut
When suddenly from the alphabet
Was heard a loud "Tut-Tut!"

Said A to B, "I don't like C;
His manners are a lack.
For all I ever see of C
Is a semi-circular back!"

"I disagree," said D to B,
"I've never found C so.
From where I stand he seems to be
An uncompleted O."

C was vexed, "I'm much perplexed,
You criticise my shape.
I'm made like that, to help spell Cat
And Cow and Cool and Cape."

"He's right" said E; said F, "Whoopee!"
Said G, "'Ip, 'Ip, 'ooray!"
"You're dropping me," roared H to G.
"Don't do it please I pray."

"Out of my way," LL said to K.
"I'll make poor I look ILL."
To stop this stunt J stood in front,
And presto! ILL was JILL.

"U know," said V, "that W
Is twice the age of me.
For as a Roman V is five
I'm half as young as he."

X and Y yawned sleepily,
"Look at the time!" they said.
"Let's all get off to beddy byes."
They did, then "Z-z-z."

Spike Milligan

The Dog Lovers

So they bought you
And kept you in a
Very good home
Central heating
TV
A deep freeze
A very good home-
No one to take you
For that lovely long run-
But otherwise
'A very good home'
They fed you Pal and Chun
But not that lovely long run,
Until, mad with energy and boredom
You escaped- and ran and ran and ran
Under a car.
Today they will cry for you-
Tomorrow they will buy another dog.

Spike Milligan

The Lion

If you're attacked by a Lion
Find fresh underpants to try on
Lay on the ground quite still
Pretend you are very ill
Keep like that day after day
Perhaps the lion will go away

Spike Milligan

The Soldiers At Lauro

Young are our dead
Like babies they lie
The wombs they blest once
Not healed dry
And yet - too soon
Into each space
A cold earth falls
On colder face.
Quite still they lie
These fresh-cut reeds
Clutched in earth
Like winter seeds
But they will not bloom
When called by spring
To burst with leaf
And blossoming
They sleep on
In silent dust
As crosses rot
And helmets rust.

Spike Milligan

There Are Holes In The Sky

There are holes in the sky
Where the rain gets in
But they're ever so small
That's why the rain is thin.

Spike Milligan

Two Children

Two children (small), one Four, one Five,
Once saw a bee go in a hive,
They'd never seen a bee before!
So waited there to see some more.
And sure enough along they came
A dozen bees (and all the same!)
Within the hive they buzzed about;
Then, one by one, they all flew out.
Said Four: 'Those bees are silly things,
But how I wish I had their wings!'

Spike Milligan

Unto Us...

Somewhere at some time
They committed themselves to me
And so, I was!
Small, but I WAS!
Tiny, in shape
Lusting to live
I hung in my pulsing cave.
Soon they knew of me
My mother --my father.
I had no say in my being
I lived on trust
And love
Tho' I couldn't think
Each part of me was saying
A silent 'Wait for me
I will bring you love!'
I was taken
Blind, naked, defenseless
By the hand of one
Whose good name
Was graven on a brass plate
in Wimpole Street,
and dropped on the sterile floor
of a foot operated plastic waste
bucket.
There was no Queens Counsel
To take my brief.
The cot I might have warmed
Stood in Harrod's shop window.
When my passing was told
My father smiled.
No grief filled my empty space.
My death was celebrated
With tickets to see Danny la Rue
Who was pretending to be a woman
Like my mother was.

Spike Milligan

Values '67

Pass by citizen
don't look left or right
Keep those drip dry eyes straight ahead
A tree? Chop it down- it's a danger
to lightning!
Pansies calling for water,
Let 'em die- queer bastards-
Seek comfort in the scarlet, labour
saving plastic rose
Fresh with the fragrance of Daz!
Sunday! Pray citizen;
Pray no rain will fall
On your newly polished
Four wheeled
God

Envoi

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder
Get it out with Optrex

Spike Milligan

Welcome Home

Unaware of my crime
they stood me in the dock.

I was sentenced to life....
without her.

Strange trial.
No judge.
No jury.

I wonder who my visitors will be.

Spike Milligan

When I Suspected

There will be a time when it will end.

Be it parting

Be it death

So each passing minute with you

Pendulummed with sadness.

So many times

I looked long into your face.

I could hear the clock ticking.

Spike Milligan

Why?

American Detectives
Never remove their hats
When investigating murders
In other people's flats.

P.S. Chinese Tecs
Are far more dreaded!
And they always appear
Bare-headed!

Spike Milligan