

Poetry Series

**Don Pearson**  
**- poems -**

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# Don Pearson(12/01/1950)

No chronology, but here are facets:

Loving father and grandfather.

Moderately intelligent, extremely stupid, former systems analyst and former heroin addict.

I play squash, bridge, tennis and chess.

Depression and cluster headache.

I live overlooking the sea and beautiful Devon country.

Practical skills in cooking and with software but in nothing else.

Atheist and anarchist

I love trees.

I have a taste in music that ranges from Carter family, Woody Guthrie and Bessie Smith to Gillian Welch and Arcade Fire with stops at Mahler, Grateful Dead, John Martyn, Kathleen Ferrier, Massive Attack, Doors, Mozart, Van Morrison and Kosheen.

I love poetry by TS Eliot, Kipling, Thomas Hardy and a very long list of poets who make me wonder why I even bother to try to write.

# Age

I remember a past of confident movements  
Of rhythmic sounds and a time that escaped  
And young girls and bright lights and excited voices  
And ...

Stay beside me now,  
As the light fades  
And the voices outside  
Are quietened by night.

Do I hear the hooves of the carthorse  
Clattering cobbles as he heaves for home?  
Are there yet huntsmen  
On Boxing Day morning?  
Does the breath of the men  
And the hounds and the horses  
Flow through the air  
in the pale Winter sun?  
Is there snow lying  
Outside my window  
And is a fox sleeping  
Curled up in the woodland,  
Warm and lethargic  
While death searches for him,  
Waking and fleeing  
As death's chill moves closer?

Listen! Oh, listen!  
I can hear the horns blowing,  
A "View Halloo" shouted  
Out in the distance,  
Now nearer, approaching ....

Stay beside me now,  
As the darkness falls  
And the voices in here  
Are stilled by the night.

1st October 2009, rewritten 8th February 2011.



## Age2

Age forgets its reckless acts  
Remembers only what it wants,  
"The young today show no respect.  
It was not like that in our day."

"Back then, we did as we were told."  
(Lost in mist the dance-hall years,  
The drunken fights, the groping hands.  
The beaten wives were never heard.)

Proud Augustus, no doubt feared,  
The coming generation's fall.  
"The young are weak, no discipline.  
The empire's lost. You mark my words."

As youth must disrespect the old,  
And treat as nothing age's cares,  
So age will often scorn the young,  
As time pursues its fleeing years.

1st October 2009

Don Pearson

# Alone

Once we lay together,  
Making love or sleeping  
Wrapped around one another,  
Close-huddled like kittens,  
Blind to the raging of  
the storms outside.

Drink kicked down our door,  
Let in the wind and rain  
To batter us, tear down  
Our love, our home,  
Stone by stone,  
Wall by wall.

Only the hearth remains.  
I have built a fire  
With all that I have left,  
Lit with all that I have lost,  
Blown for the many blows,  
Stoked with years of hurt.

Tonight, alone,  
I am warming myself  
With the wreckage  
Of my life with you  
Spread before me  
Flickering, aglow.

How fierce the blaze,  
The white-hot iron,  
When you return.

12th. November 2010

Don Pearson

# Ants-Haiku

Flying ant day dawns:  
The glut is unheralded,  
Swifts still sleep aloft.

(For Harris/12th July 2011)

Don Pearson

# Auckland - Haiku

(for Natalie Toft)

Hawthorn berries glow,  
Acorns and walnuts drop.  
Ancient kauri sighs.

19th February 2010

Don Pearson



# Bank

Good morning, Sir. Come in and take a seat  
And how can I be doing you today? □  
A loan? All right? Let's hear what you've to say.  
There's only one criteria to meet.

Is there a business plan? Poetry? I see.  
Christmas cards and others in that style?  
That sort of verse could make you quite a pile.  
And you could almost churn it out for free. □

Another type of poem is all you do? □  
What costs are there? How many can you sell?  
Cost: "Pain and black despair" does not read well  
And income: "None". I hope that isn't true.□

You people make me sick! You've got some brass!  
A bank can't just hand out to everyone.  
A pound of flesh is our idea of fun.  
I'd like to throw you out upon your arse.

But, wait. A mortgage. So, that flat's your own.  
Security enough, I think we'll find.  
Well, Don. (I'll call you Don, if you don't mind.)  
The street may be your fate, but here's your loan.

Don Pearson

# Barneycat - For Children

(For Suzanna and Harris)

Barnaby is a purposeful cat  
He sleeps in the shade all day.  
He hides from the mynah birds that swoop  
To chase poor Barney away.

They skrark and shriek and steal his food  
And laugh at him from the figgy tree  
And the thrushes and blackbirds join the fun,  
As joyful as can be.

He lies on his back and glares at them,  
Waits for the sun to set  
Then Barney the hunter starts to prowl  
While sleeping birds forget

That a well-fed drowsy cat by day  
Turns wild and hungry by night  
There's many a rat could pull that tail,  
If they hadn't lost the fight.

The hungry cat will climb the tree  
And find the hidden nest  
He'll eat the birds and the babies too,  
Next day in the sun, he'll rest.

5th February 2013

Don Pearson

# Beauty

(For Annabel Jones)

I have walked with beauty, seen it set in stones,  
Run my hands across it, thrilled to hear its tones,  
Tickled it from rivers, swum with it at sea,  
Joined with it in passion, watched it run from me.

I've seen beauty on the plains, running in the grass,  
Soaring in the mountains, brought close through a glass,  
Glimpsed it in the forest, awful, striped and fell,  
Caught its flashing azure flight in a lakeside dell.

Now the Teign is swathed in mist, merging with the sea,  
There a fern is growing on a mossy tree.  
To the West, the looming moor births a wooded combe,  
Here some frills of lichen brighten up a tomb.

I found beauty round the world: Taj Mahal, Mount Cook,  
In the great cathedrals or fossilized in rock,  
Kathmandu and gay Paree, Niagara and Rome.  
Now I rest amidst it, in my Devon home.

8th March 2011

Don Pearson

# Bell

(For the deafened)

Summoned by bells,  
I was imprisoned  
to learn chapters  
from the Bible by heart.  
Questioning God's Word  
was not on the  
school curriculum,  
absence from chapel was  
noted and punished,  
atheism was anathema.

Otherwise powerless,  
I repaid despite and  
rejection in kind,  
ripping pages from my Bible  
after each Divinity lesson.  
Though ignorant then of its content,  
I began with Revelation  
as, through knowledge,  
I might today but  
the echo down the years  
of those bells  
has taught me  
tolerance of others' beliefs  
that I could not learn at school.

I am at one with the world,  
scarred as it is  
by people,  
certain that they, alone,  
know the truth.

12th September 2011

Don Pearson

# Bird

(For Julia)

He used to sit in the trees  
in Park Road,  
singing to the old gods  
close by the gate to Chiswick House.

He wore his albinism with panache,  
unconcerned that,  
whatever they allowed elsewhere,  
in this well-mannered part of London  
blackbirds were expected  
to make every effort to be black.

Don Pearson

# Birds

Birds lie scattered on the beach,  
an abundance of rotten fruit  
binged upon by crabs like  
drunken threshers staggering home  
under the moon.

Oil rainbows across the water,  
the sour juice of the harvest  
that it seeded.

18th October 2013

Don Pearson

# Books - Haiku

(for Suzanna)

I destroyed my books.  
As I made my own footpath,  
I kicked the dead leaves.

12th November 2010

Don Pearson

# Bridge Etiquette

(for Jean Whitlam, Exeter Bridge Club)

Welcome to our bridge club.  
We are Hetty and Kate.  
Would you like a cup of tea?  
There isn't long to wait.

A pair of sweet old ladies.  
A piece of cake, it seemed,  
But when he left their table  
He pulled his hair and screamed.

Each brain is just like Einstein's,  
Each soul a ravening beast,  
And if they leave you tearful  
They won't mind in the least.

Just hesitate a moment  
And then pull out a "Pass",  
You'll soon see the flash of steel  
And stab wounds in your (leg) .

Colonel Mitchell shot himself,  
He couldn't face their ire.  
They tossed a burning Ace of Trumps  
To light his funeral pyre.

But they are sweet old ladies,  
And they'll do as they please.  
They'll offer you a piece of cake,  
Then execute a squeeze.

May 2009

Don Pearson



# Butterfly - Haiku

A butterfly sips -  
After darkness has fallen  
I miss the shadows.

17th June 2009

Don Pearson

# Cage

I have crafted my own cage  
and locked myself within.  
Sometimes April's warmth  
breathes on me  
and I regret that my lack of trust  
denies the possibility  
of Summer.

I shall rise no more.

3rd November 2013

Don Pearson

# Candle

(For those in the cold darkness)

It was cold and  
I had been out there  
for a long time  
in that emptiness.

One last candle remained.  
After some searching,  
with numbed fingers,  
I found a single match  
in the depths of a pocket  
I struck it and  
sheltered it from the wind.

The candle dazzled me  
in the darkness but  
did not throw enough light  
to reveal anything  
in the vast space.

I warmed my hands  
one final time  
and stared into the flame.

When I awoke,  
there was left  
no more than  
a smoking wick.

26th March 2010

Don Pearson

# Casino

(For UK Legislators)

And I shall build a treasure dome  
On a great salty plain  
And from that spreading desert□  
Sweet water I shall drain.

And though the people thereabout  
Shall tribute pay to me,  
I'll aid them with their poverty.  
Gambling shall set them free.□

30 January 2007

Don Pearson

# Cat

I can see patterns in the waves  
and dancing particles  
as well as most people.  
I see the sun  
as you probably do,  
feel its warmth,  
observe its path across the hills.

When it rains, I get wet.  
I accept that,  
although, sometimes,  
with regret.  
I may be wrong but  
I believe that  
I would still be wet.  
even if I did not notice.  
But it is true that, in Devon,  
it can rain very heavily  
and I might be wetter,  
once I was aware of it,  
than I had been before.

Wednesday has nine letters  
and comes only when I remember  
and there is no sound  
that I cannot hear  
and people say  
that May is green.

I would like to peep  
out of the corner of my eye,  
to observe unobserved  
and without influence.  
Until the box is opened,  
Schrödinger, my cat, does not know  
any more than you do,  
whether he is dead and alive  
or only one of those.  
Stare at him and he seems

momentarily unsure,  
perhaps considering  
whether his fate  
has yet been determined.

He does not make waves,  
despite occasionally behaving  
as if I were intending  
to poison him myself.  
He leads his life  
as if he believes in free will,  
surprisingly attracted to boxes,  
seemingly unaware of his  
genetic predispositions  
or the patterns imposed  
on his behaviour  
by his life to date.

Schrödinger is  
better adjusted  
both to certainties  
and to uncertainty  
Than am I.

Einstein is easy  
in small amounts.  
Quantum physics is,  
relatively, not.

25th December 2008

Don Pearson

# Chains Of Freedom

Chains of freedom  
link the living to the dead,  
Lorca to Dylan,  
the road  
to the road  
to the track  
to the path  
to the morass,  
to the waltzers  
on the edge of the woods,  
to the bodies in their depths,  
sprouting overnight  
like mysterious mushrooms.

We are allowed to exhale  
our illusion of existence,  
permitted to mouthe  
parodies of ourselves,  
catch-phrased, clichéd: -  
some are born oblivious,  
some achieve oblivion,  
but for the greater part  
we thrust oblivion  
upon ourselves.

Carry yourself and other  
handfuls of anonymous dust  
to forlorn hilltops  
for dispersal on the winds  
(or to be dumped in deep forests.)  
Crawl on, crawl on  
your allocated years  
until compelled to surrender your keys  
at the open door  
to the desolate forest of stones,  
marked only by the chimes  
of the fractured bell.

8th June 2014

Don Pearson



# Chanté

(For Chanté Mathurin)

The day I met Chanté,  
The rain glistened in the road  
With oil-shining rainbows  
On the water.

Chanté's hair held a flower  
And ringlets against the light,  
Against the mirrored wall.  
She brightened the room,  
Reflecting her eyes on the world,  
Driving off the rain  
And opening the sun.

As the stars rose,  
She sang me the flower  
And set it in a crystal  
For my memory.

November 2001.

Don Pearson

# Charity Shop

(For Caz Steffens, in appreciation of her work for Snooky Trust, Dawlish.)

Upon this tablet let me  
Set down my burden  
To pass on to someone  
Who may put the items  
To better use.

Take these eyes.  
Since she has been gone,  
They see no beauty in this life.

Take these lips.  
How can they bring to me  
Such sweetness as they have known?

Take my ears  
Which hear only the stridency  
Of the silence left behind.

Take my voice.  
To whom may it now speak  
That will listen?

Take this love  
Hanging about my neck  
Like chains of gold.

Take this pain  
And all else  
I have about me  
You may also take,  
That I may depart  
And be granted peace.

Don Pearson

# Chasingdreams

Light the flame and tilt the foil,  
Run and chase, inhale.  
Forget pain and fear and doubt,  
hold the dreams inside your mouth,  
never let that smoke come out.

Isaac's been tortured for his stash,  
John steals anyone's goods,  
Giovanna strolls the ill-lit streets  
in derelict neighbourhoods.

We take the waste for granted  
and bury all our fear,  
always need another score,  
more often year on year.

\*\*\*\*

Light the flame and heat the spoon,  
filter, fill and fix.  
Feel that rush of powder power,  
put off life another hour.  
Let the strung-out punters glower.

Stuart jumped from a tower block  
when he could not escape from her arms  
Jamie died at her very first kiss  
on the night he discovered her charms.

We took the waste for granted  
and chased the tears away.  
Always made another score,  
diminished day by day.

3rd September 2013

Don Pearson

# Citizen

I am sitting on a blanket in the gardens of my head  
And my life seems just a story in a book that is unread,  
Adventure is a beacon and it's all that I can see.  
Oh. The city shows its light to me,  
The city shines its lights for me.

I am sleeping in the doorway of a boarded empty shop.,  
The high-rise winds have chilled me through and forced me to a stop.  
The police will come to move me on and kick me tenderly  
And the city's icescape freezes me,  
The desert city freezes me.

I could never find my way out to a place I could call home.  
The needle wins our battle and I'm free again to roam.  
I am lying in the gateway of a tumbled cemetery,  
Yes. The city quietly buries me,  
The city gently buried me.

Don Pearson

# Collier - Haiku

(For Alexanna)

I work far from home  
In pits where Spring brings no leaves.  
I miss sea mews' shrieks.

17th August 2012

Don Pearson

## Comet - Haiku

My Summer passes.  
Most comets endure Winter  
Throughout a man's life.

Don Pearson

# Consumers

Let us be divested of our identities,  
deprived of our voices,  
consigned to waiting rooms.

Let us be parcelled into boxes,  
tagged only with our labels:  
unemployed, immigrant, criminal, junkie.

Let us be stored in cupboards  
until politicians summon us forth  
to proclaim their charges.

Let fires be stoked with newsprint  
and television watch while  
we are consumed by the flames.

Don Pearson

# Cyberdawlsh

(A forum-based role-playing fantasy adventure.  
For those who have stimulated my imagination.)

Here, in this place of light and shadow,  
Darkness may illuminate and brightness hide.  
Who knows what lies beneath obscuring cloaks,  
Behind the names chosen to reveal  
Only an image, projected onto a screen  
At the discretion of the writer.  
Here is a phantasmagoria, a new world  
Both safe and dangerous.

Here, you can fire volleys of insults  
At the sweet old lady from the bridge club.  
Here, the coward points out the dragons  
For others to slay.  
Here emerge a death's-head hawk moth  
And a purple emperor.  
Here lurk chameleon and ghoul.  
Here, you can ally with the man  
Who was not thinking of net curtains  
When he warned you to "watch out".  
Here, amidst the flames,  
Deacon Truth preaches to Dullish Viaduct  
About who is dismantling the arches.

Here, the timid poet may pretend illiteracy,  
(Don't fink that your anonymous,  
I now just where yew liv)

Here, the politician will tell the truth  
As he believes it to be.  
(There was a time I thought I knew.  
But now, I am less sure)

Here, many voices invoke the name "Anon"  
And yet he heeds them not.  
(A band of namesakes playing in  
An endless civil war)



Here, the motleyed fool projects  
Other people's wisdom.  
(As many names and characters  
As colours on his coat)

Here, the schoolmistress can masquerade as dullard  
(That teenaged girl has fathered  
A myriad of men)

Here, the Teignmouth bachelor posts as Dawlish maid.  
(The childless raise their family  
of spectres yet to come)

Here, a prostitute is abroad as Mother Teresa  
While Sister Mary-Martha walks the streets.  
(The strumpet sounds out loud again  
But now my gold has gone)

Here, the atheist espouses religion.  
(I phrase belief in such a way  
That readers disbelieve)

Here, a man unsure of who he is  
eschews a pseudonym.  
(So many voices in my head,  
My name, at least, I own)

30th August 2008

Don Pearson

# Dawlish Christ - Sonnet

When Christ in Dawlish walked one rainy morn  
He offered to the seagulls broken bread.  
The waterfowl and rats alike he fed.  
Soon, people gathered to him on the Lawn.

The disaffected young about him pressed.  
With addicts and with drunks he shared his wine.  
He gently spoke to all, he made a sign  
And talked of love and each of them he blessed.

Council officials soon conferred nearby.  
They saw him as a threat to their small town  
With middle-Eastern looks, his beard, a gown.  
They invoked bye-laws, police took him away.

Oh, you who say that you revere his name,  
How would you act if to your home he came?

15th May 2009

Don Pearson

# Devonslope

(In memory of and acknowledgement to Pastor Martin Niemöller)

First they installed CCTV in Teignmouth,  
To deter vandals and to catch litter louts  
And people whose car tax was a day overdue.  
I applauded, scoffing at Tony Blair's dream  
Becoming Eric Blair's nightmare.  
What could the law-abiding have to fear?

When they dispersed groups of two or more  
Who might be about to cause trouble,  
I was enthusiastic,  
Being no longer young.

When they came for the addicts, alcoholics and "undesirables",  
I did not speak out,  
Because I had left that life behind.

When they came for the sick, the so-called incurables,  
I muttered something to myself  
But I was not mad enough to receive that treatment.

When they came for the Rotarians and Round-tablers,  
I held my peace;  
Perhaps uncharitably.

When they came for the Councillors,  
I remained silent;  
I despised local politics.

Niemöller's final stanza continues to apply.

31st August 2008

Don Pearson

# Dreaming

My dream had beauty.  
Black pooled light  
on rainswept streets,  
blood on the walls  
of the houses  
that are no longer homes,  
disgorged, broken lives  
crying at the sun,  
hidden somewhere  
behind the storm clouds.  
There is a smell of death  
in this town,  
a knife discarded  
on the roadside,  
vomit on the beach,  
empty premises  
left inside  
those who once  
also dreamed  
of redemption.

I had a nightmare.  
There was a light  
in my eyes  
of hope,  
a future of flowers  
and fruiting vines.  
Love conquers all,  
the brave Shiva,  
green shoots,  
waving in the warm breeze  
amidst the burnt grasses.  
When I awoke  
the fire still thrilled me.  
Then reality  
streamed in  
with the morning and  
spat out its teeth.

I cannot dream now.  
My sleep is dark,  
dark as my wake.  
Any light I see  
is through frayed edges  
in a black curtain,  
hiding other shades,  
that are blinded by  
the falling ash,  
dessicate, torn,  
betrayed by faith,  
by hope, by love,  
beyond all trust.

(30th Sep 2001)

Don Pearson

# Driving

It was a good day to drive  
home from Chertsey,  
the sun shining, a dry road  
and perfect for spotting wildlife.  
In three hours  
I counted eighteen badgers,  
three foxes and two pheasants.  
No deer today,  
but a number of small lives  
were so obliterated  
that I was unable to identify  
what they had been.

Perhaps this is why I prefer  
driving in the lanes  
around my home,  
where I am still thrilled  
by seeing these creatures alive  
in the woods and fields.

23rd April 2013

Don Pearson

# Eclipse

"It's life, Jim, but not as we know it."

(For moon-watchers from three worlds, none of which supports life as most people know it.)

So, now, the eye is sharp,  
no complex views,  
all those decisions,  
left behind.

The lies, the truths,  
the loss and the loves  
have no more meaning.

That elastic future,  
decades, years,  
sometimes yet unclear,  
imagined,  
worked for, dreamed of,  
in faith and of joy,  
is beyond your reach.

Even on those bad days,  
you stayed the hands,  
the hours, minutes, long  
to survive,  
when life was stretched,  
infinite, you thought.  
The sands are ebbing.

This pain consumes your soul,  
wastes all your strength.  
You are wracked by night,  
sleep stolen,  
demon's torment.  
What belies inside  
that brave face you show?

The tears that you once lost  
for those you loved  
are cast in the dark,

no comfort.  
Where is that love  
you gave to others?  
It has no power left.

There are no futures here,  
no time ahead,  
no paths unexplored.  
There is pain,  
beyond endurance,  
death's time, time's death.  
What fear your hopes now?

This is the midnight walk.  
The darkest hour,  
clear cut, needle  
scream-sharp knife.  
Will time resume,  
given time to breathe,  
be reborn at last?

Sep 18th 2001

Don Pearson



# Eddies

(For Mel and all at the Whistle Stop, Teignmouth)

"Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair."

He was sitting at the Whistle Stop café.  
The whistle blew, the train curved to a halt.  
He raised his coffee  
And sipped.

\*

A kingfisher burns a blue flash  
Across my mind.  
The after-image glides into life.  
Water boatmen skull effortlessly.  
Dragonflies are on patrol,  
A heron waits for the silvering fish.

The water laughs gently.  
Beneath, pebbles gaily dance  
For joy of sunshine.  
I swirl figures of eight  
In the water.  
I cup my hands  
Below the surface,  
Raise them, as if in offering,  
And sip.  
Jewelled droplets sparkle  
Back into the pond.

Here, only, and now, only,  
Is my world,  
A canvas on which  
To paint my existence,  
To make my mark,  
My bequest.  
This is the eye  
Of my storm.

I reach out, precisely  
But, through the water,

Not quite where I expect to be.  
I find my answer,  
But, through the water,  
Not precisely where it might have been.  
I tickle it from repose,  
Nestling it in my hand.

Briefly,  
I endow it with energy.

Briefly,  
Time holds my breath.

Briefly,  
The stone hangs in space.

The disc skims  
Across the calm,  
Leaves its footprints,  
Sinks from sight.

From each skip,  
With fearless symmetry,  
Ripples spread.  
Then they converge,  
Reflecting and diffracting,  
To form sunlit patterns  
Of chaotic splendour  
Amongst the water lilies.  
A grebe shrills in joy.

\*

He was sitting at the Whistle Stop café.  
The whistle blew, the train pulled away.  
He raised his coffee,  
As if in thanks,  
And sipped.

30th May 2008

Don Pearson

# Election

The season now upon us  
Breathes out darkness, sucks in light  
And the words that swathe the policies  
Encompass us in night.

For Truth is held in prison  
And is grieving for her soul,  
Awaiting execution  
While liars drum a roll.

The snappy phrase, evasion  
And the blaring trumpet's sound  
Distract us while she's buried  
Truth's bones will not be found.

"Progress", "change", "a bright new day,"  
And the empty race was run  
The seasons run their courses -  
The Earth spins round the sun.

The dying stars are riven  
Their dust will scatter and burn  
A golden dawn was promised  
But night will soon return.

28th May 2012

Don Pearson

# Eruption - Haiku

Tambora erupts.  
Embryos wake from dark dreams  
of unborn Summer.

11th October 2012

Don Pearson

# Evening

Even while I lay in the sun  
I remembered Winter's threat  
and frozen tears.

Even so, that first evening  
I was detached from the  
desolation.

Even when I turned from leaving  
I dismissed the echoes  
As too distant.

Even holes torn in my old coat  
Which had let in the cold blasts  
Were forgotten.

Even the cries in the night-time,  
A warning of futures past,  
I left unheard.

Even as the storms broke on us  
And floods swept us away  
Should I have run?

Even though I lost you out there  
And friends called off the search  
I sought you still.

Even then, as I gave up hope  
You found me, gave us strength,  
Saw our path home.

Even lying here exhausted,  
Are we on the mainland  
Or an island?

Apr 2001



# Fathers

My fathers lived on savannah  
And sheltered in a tree  
But all their wisdom, handed down  
Still applies to me.

My fathers lived in Israel  
Our God showed them the light  
But all that they wrote in His name  
Applies on the tube at night.

My fathers lived in desert sands  
When Europe was all dark  
Shariah law is what we need  
For muggings in the park.

My fathers lived when men were men  
And women were their wives  
But all the precedents they set  
Help with our city lives.

My fathers scratched a living  
Under the rule of tsars  
The tsars' enlightened doctrines  
Still help us win our wars.

The constitution, it was framed  
By wiser men than we  
They knew that we could never trust  
A true democracy.

My fathers were all royalty  
They thought their subjects brutes  
Although one knows it's not PC  
One can't forget one's roots.

My fathers' attitude to those  
Under the Empire's sway  
Still form the basis for my views  
On immigrants today.

My father was a communist  
I'd often hear him say:  
"Line them up against a wall  
Kill them, make them pay".

I'm a very simple man  
And all I'd like to say  
Is, "Reassess your fathers' words  
for what makes sense today".

Dec 2000

Don Pearson



# Festival-Haiku

Fairground laughter rings.  
A man squats on the dry grass  
Weeping for his youth.

(For Harris/12th July 2011)

Don Pearson

# Fetish

I present, for sale at auction and  
For my benefit:

Keith Moon's broken drumsticks

Winston Churchill's trousers

Queen Elizabeth's virginity

A quill pen, reputedly used by Dickens

The bottled fragrance of Lady Hamilton  
Fresh from making love to Nelson

A little duck that John Lennon  
Played with in his bath  
When he was one year old.

\*

Once we revered the bones of a saint  
Or ate our enemies to gain their strength.  
Still we wish to touch  
The hem of our lord's robe.

Let me now bury my hands  
In the earth,  
Rub the dirt over my body,  
Look at the sun  
And bask in its glorious light.

Don Pearson

# Flood - Tanka

(For Anne Gwynn)

The door forced open,  
Flood waters swirl inside  
Bearing life and death.  
In retreat, they leave presents,  
Drowned hens, a boot, mud-caked dreams.

19th August 2012

Don Pearson

# Flynn

Wendy,  
It was disconcerting,  
on my first meeting  
the stranger who became  
your new lover,  
to hear him say,  
as he swigged from his can  
of Tennant's Super,  
"I'm sorry, but I have to drink  
because it stops the voices."  
Learning about the Largactyl  
he wasn't taking  
did not allay my concerns.  
After the violence had begun,  
he carefully explained to me how  
keeping your husband's ashes at home  
had enabled your husband  
to speak to him  
and make him hit you.

All this was long before  
he threw the chair at you  
while I went to the shops  
and left the pair of you  
in my flat  
for a few minutes.

Was it after he kicked you,  
or was it another time,  
that he shaved half of  
the hair of his head  
in the cemetery,  
in expiation of his sins,  
as a good Catholic should?

After the wedding,  
it became more difficult  
because he had nowhere else to go.  
You'd throw him out for good but

each time he was out on bail,  
you let him back in  
and dropped the charges.

I read about his release  
From Exeter prison  
and Noreen phoned to say  
she saw him with your dog.

I may not be round  
for a while,  
Love,  
Don

1st October 2009

Don Pearson

# Force

I am fool to the mighty,  
the conscience of kings.  
I am there on the board  
While the cognac is poured  
And make sure the warning bell rings.

I've the ears of the powerful,  
The chain on their throat.  
They dare not ignore me  
Or seek to destroy me,  
I'm feral, I'm wolf, I am stoat.

10th October 2013

Don Pearson

# Friend

As we evolve, again,  
become supportive friends,  
neither dismiss  
nor bring unsummoned  
to your mind  
the warmth of loving  
through those chilling days  
when we found refuge  
in each other's arms.

As new lovers arise  
across our moonlit paths,  
do not remember,  
nor wash entirely  
from your thoughts,  
whence came the candour  
we have between us,  
the dark hours when grew  
the love we share today.

Sep.2001/Jan 2008

Don Pearson

# Future

The future is not bleak at all,  
the explosion has been a triumph,  
the political murder of a princess  
with filed teeth.

A dark horse has been  
sentenced to death by  
fellow prisoners.

His crimes? A dark secret?  
No, food for a week.

The trend is downwards,  
an uncontrollable state,  
Wild and violent  
a wealth of poverty.

18th October 2013

Don Pearson



# Futurepassed

(To Elvina, my companion along the roads we did take, and to Eldon and Alexanna, whom I love so dearly that they must find their own way, without a map.)

(ii)

The path we might have taken,  
so many years ago,  
could dazzle with beguilement.

Do you remember,  
that thundery morning,  
that August day,  
the path we did not find,  
towards my orchard, to my haven,  
towards your dance of empowerment,  
towards our freedom?

Had we but been together,  
had we but shared then  
each other's thoughts,  
had we both known  
that each had sought  
the hidden way,  
had we but talked  
and climbed the stile,  
had we but not been given a map,  
had we but drawn it ourselves,  
had the lightning  
not struck us dumb  
and riven us in ways  
we only now can heal,  
had we but been  
what we are now,  
oh, what then?

At that distance, still less at this,  
We could not see the twists, the turns,  
the hidden forks on that missed trail,

the thorns or blooms,  
the apples, wormy or not, ripe or sour,  
never feel the tango's thrill,  
the broken ankle's pain.  
Those unmade choices  
never send reports of pain or joy,  
of love or death, of birth,  
of hidden years unfolding.  
Can we regret the holiday,  
we never knew we missed?  
Can we take joy from  
the car that did not knock us down  
on the road we didn't cross  
because we were in another city,  
doing different jobs?

The people we have known,  
loved, befriended, borne, hated,  
travelled alongside,  
those glorious children,  
they were not down that long-lost path,  
or may have been,  
or maybe were different,  
somehow out of step with us  
or out of time.

What we are now,  
what we know now,  
for good, for bad, for all,  
has been gleaned on our paths,  
chosen moment by moment,  
time upon time again.  
We have made choices  
as best we could,  
for the best motives,  
that have led to hurt,  
for ourselves, for others.  
Some wrong or selfish paths  
may have led to good.  
Each decision has made waves,  
ripples on our pond,  
causing or preventing

tsunami elsewhere, or not.  
Each link we have made  
has broken or made  
links in other chains, or not.  
Out and beyond,  
we affect lives we don't know,  
in ways we can't suspect,  
by means we can't control.

(i)

I have followed route maps,  
walked with others  
or wandered by myself,  
taken turns that have pained  
those I least want to hurt,  
sometimes helped those  
I should least want to help.  
Through wrong turns more than right,  
I have learned enough,  
or am still too foolish,  
to take or ignore  
the good advice I give to others,  
as they adopt or disdain  
the common sense  
they would pass to me.  
I now take the paths I choose,  
the paths I think are right,  
with a map that is mine,  
that only shows direction,  
scrawled by me in my own code,  
not drawn for me  
or for someone else.  
I try to find courage  
to show my fear,  
strength to show my weakness.

I pick my way through bushes,  
breaking branches,  
tearing my hands,  
feeling love,  
wounding my soul,

seeing wonders.

I try to clear spaces  
for others to join me,  
hoping they will,  
if they choose.

The branches I must discard  
for others to trip over  
tomorrow or in thirty years,  
or not at all.

We are our past.  
I cannot see clear futures  
but I see less, those we passed.

29th Aug 2001

Don Pearson

# Gate - Haiku

(for Eleanor)

Outside and within,  
I check for prints in the snow.  
We unlock the gate.

26th June 2009

Don Pearson

# Glass - Haiku

(For Eleanor)

I, too, am fragile –  
If you throw me to the ground  
The leaves will scatter.

18th July 2009

Don Pearson

# Grandad's Cats - For Children

(For Eleanor and Suzanna)

Chalkie was as black as night,  
Ginger bright as sun,  
But Sophie reigned as monarch  
Until her life was done.

When Bracken dog came herding  
All the cats she could,  
Sophie sat and watched her.  
(And streaked her nose with blood.)

The stone-deaf pure-white killer  
One golden eye, one blue,  
Stalked around the garden  
And chased each bird that flew.

Oscar cat turns somersaults  
And dives in any box  
Grabs whatever food he can  
And studies picking locks.

Jessica licks Tessie cat  
Tessie licks her back  
They snuggle up together  
Then Tess gives Jess a smack.

27th March 2010

Don Pearson

# Grief - Limerick

(for Mary Elms and Chris Brooks)

She lies, arms enfolding her head,  
Bewildered, half-dressed on the bed.  
In a void that feels vast,  
Eclipsed by the past,  
All dreams of a future seem dead.

5th February 2011

Don Pearson



# Gull

I lived for years in a deep dark cave  
Where the flowers never grew.  
Then I moved here to the world's end  
Where the screaming seagulls flew.

I found myself by the swirling sea  
With crumbling cliffs of sand.  
Surf that is neither sea nor air  
Lies between water and land.

I walked one night by the dappling moon  
and found an injured bird,  
Oil-streaked, half-dead, a broken wing  
and a cry I hardly heard.

The gull lay right at the water's edge  
Adrift from all she knew.  
She feebly mewled. I lifted her  
And cleaned her feathers through.

We sheltered from the Winter's rage.  
Two castaways we were.  
Although I thought she needed me,  
As much, I needed her.

As she returned to health again,  
I feared with each new day  
That she would fly away from me  
Yet hoped that she would stay.

My gull now rides the seas once more  
And soars at the river's mouth,  
I wait, and long for her return,  
And stare towards the South.

No man can tame a wild free bird  
And no true friend would try,  
But I am lost without my mew.  
I wish we both could fly.

I am caught in the tidal zone  
The waters toss me high  
Then I plunge to the depths again  
But can neither swim nor fly.

The storms throw landslides to the beach.  
Huge waves wash up the drowned,  
Smash their bones on the tumbled rocks  
With an endless roaring sound.

May/Aug 2001

Don Pearson

# Gulled - Haiku

(For Anaïs)

Fallen from its nest,  
A gull chick pleads to be fed.  
The knowing fox waits.

17th August 2012

Don Pearson

# Haiku

Somehow, that Spring day,  
I had forseen my own death.  
Ah! Foolhardy youth.

11th October 2012

Don Pearson

# Innocence

I have caught tears in my mouth,  
washed in the dust of the dead,  
burned the grass in the meadows,  
watched the fires spread.

I was told by my leaders  
to kill in my country's fight.  
Crimes are defined by victors,  
We say what's right.

I flew into a building  
to tear apart people's lives.  
I exult in destruction.  
No hope survives.

My end is a beginning  
to death on a massive scale,  
more "collateral damage",  
more children wail.

I just followed my orders,  
with no judgement as to wrongs,  
dropped bombs where I was told to,  
missed the death songs.

I can't be held to be guilty,  
my duty is to obey.  
Others will face reprisals,  
I'll walk away.

My faith's pursuit of money,  
Towns round the world are aflame,  
Profits require hard decisions,  
No one's to blame.

I don't care that they're starving.  
I have got targets to meet.  
What's it to me you're homeless?  
Live on the street!

No one on earth can stop me.  
I am beyond all their power.  
My beliefs have gone global.  
This is my hour!

I will raise the old gods here,  
worship at altars of gold,  
Rip flesh from my opponents,  
ravish the old.

Now I can see my future,  
I drink the blood of a child,  
served in a famous restaurant,  
where bones are piled.

(Dedicated to those who are not personally responsible. Without you, this would not be possible./2nd. Sep.2001  
verses 3 and 4,18th Sep, following the attack on the World Trade Centre.)

Don Pearson

# Island - Haiku

(for Elvina)

Abandoned stone heads  
Survey wasted treeless land –  
No redemption here.

18th March 2010

Don Pearson

# Leaf Art

(For Mary Elms)

We prepare your exhibition  
In the Blue Walnut  
Under the bemused gaze  
Of Debbie and Gary.  
Cascades of laminated Autumn leaves  
Flutter from the walls  
And shower around us  
As if we were under trees  
On this glorious October day.

Tables and chairs dive for cover  
While customers flee in panic and  
A stepladder waltzes in pursuit  
Of the snakes of leaves  
With me unsteadily atop  
Bellowing for calm.

A traffic warden peers  
Through the windows,  
Laughs maniacally  
And tickets our unresisting cars.

The more cooperative exhibits  
Go about their normal business,  
Philosophical about such chaos,  
Having seen it before.  
The "Water Lady" looks down serenely,  
"Poppies" induce their own slumber  
As "Time" ticks away  
And the spun "Spider",  
In its woollen web,  
Sucks the life  
From our day.

Don Pearson



# Learning

(For my mentors, in memory of Mr. S. N. Hancock)

They have known one another  
for thirty years.

The younger man knows little  
Of the older's life, his service,  
Not much at all, in truth.

The older man is unaware  
Of the younger's renown.  
He has wondered, idly,  
Whether he might be  
A musician or an artist.

In this abstracted world,  
Overlooking the kingdoms  
Of the plain,  
They share a friendship  
born through their enmity.  
In their real lives  
Each could ask of the other.  
It would not be rebuffed,  
Even welcomed,  
But it has never arisen.  
They know enough.  
Each respects  
The other's strengths,  
Constantly probes to  
Exploit any weakness.

Once a week,  
For hours at a time,  
They have faced one another  
Seldom speaking, hardly looking.  
Their communication is sufficient.  
It is actuated by their hands,  
Mediated through the movement of  
Simply-carved wooden pieces,  
Regulated by time-honoured rules,  
Restricted by a time-stealing clock.

These silent conversations are recorded,  
By one, neatly, almost elaborately,  
On a piece of paper  
And by the other, in his book,  
In a hasty scrawl.

Nothing has been taught directly.  
Only through defeat,  
Over several years,  
Did the younger absorb  
technique, strategy, tactics,  
patience, gentleness, spirit,  
And the desire  
To pass them on.  
He sits opposite  
His now-elderly friend,  
Still admiring but equal,  
Over the board.

A king is overthrown.  
Looks are exchanged.  
The slightest of nods  
Acknowledges prowess.  
There is a handshake,  
A farewell.

Jan 2008

Don Pearson

# Man1

He saw the flash in storm clouds,  
measured the time to the sound,  
the number of falling raindrops  
on an area of ground.

He was very observant  
and catalogued all he could,  
numbered the trees around him,  
but could not leave the wood.

He counted the waves breaking,  
the stars in a patch of sky,  
the weight of earth in a landslip,  
but he never knew the why?

May 2001

Don Pearson

# Man2

He sat beside me  
drawn into futility:  
conversation,  
gestures,  
thought.

I knew who he was,  
well-known, a scientist,  
iconoclast,  
catholic,  
priest.

He cried beside me,  
shown to have frailty,  
human weakness,  
denounced,  
old.

A man of sorrows,  
despised by the world,  
wrongly condemned,  
finished,  
free.

He looked toward me,  
willed me his compassion,  
smiled a broad smile,  
stood up,  
fell.

May 2001

Don Pearson

# Man3

His back is to the wall  
and he sits where he can see the door.  
He was never thought of as important,  
but was always there,  
in the background  
towards the edge of the photographs,  
looking confident and assured,  
had you but observed  
as closely as he did.

Now, under the new dispensation,  
it has been revealed  
that he may know  
where the bodies are buried.  
He seems diminished, wary,  
unsure whether he has  
more to fear from those who  
would suppress his knowledge  
or those who would extract it.

We are all killers,  
all relatives of the dead.

13th November 2012

Don Pearson

# Man4

He blocked our way  
across that threshold.  
His eyes showed,  
not the light of the fanatic,  
but the intention, though fearful,  
to do what he believed to be right.

Looking back, I think  
that he wished to save us  
from condemnation  
of our actions  
by our future selves.

13th November 2012

Don Pearson

# Maturity

When I'm mature and old and fat  
I'll wear a suit and bowler hat,  
I'll shave my beard and cut my hair,  
Respectable (if full of care.)  
Until that day, I want some fun,  
For I am only Sixty-One.

I'll find a lass of Fifty-Three  
And we'll make love beside the sea.  
We'll scandalize the neighbourhood  
(And that can only do them good.)  
We'll snort good coke, play Arcade Fire,  
Do all we can to rouse their ire.

Then, when I'm Sixty-Two and grey,  
My toy-girl will go on her way.  
I'll iron my socks and give up booze  
And growl each morning at the news.  
I'll moan about the young and free  
And watch "Come Dancing" on TV.

Don Pearson

# May Day

My father died today.  
Not as a pigeon,  
Snatched by a falcon  
to feed its chick,  
Nor as an ailing priest king  
Killed and supplanted,  
Nor as a myxie rabbit  
Whose suffering lingered.

More as a hibernating bear,  
Exhausted by life,  
Slipping peacefully  
Into a darker sleep,  
Or as an aged oak  
Surrounded at the end  
by his saplings  
And finally lacking the energy  
To produce green leaves  
this May.

For today is May Day  
Renewal of life is visible all around,  
Tadpoles in the ponds,  
Gulls nesting outside my kitchen window.  
Hawthorns in blossom  
Proclaiming my parents' love -  
White for the Yorkshire lass  
Red for the Lancashire lad,  
Missed but not lost to the earth.

Beltane fires are alight,  
The May Queen is crowned,  
Life past and life future  
Both contained in life present,  
Lilacs bloom in my mother's garden  
And the cruelest month has passed.

Don Pearson



# Meeting

## Meeting

We are friends, I think,  
Meeting every so often, or less.  
We have both had, perhaps,  
Fewer friends than lovers.  
We follow a pattern:  
We have dinner, go back  
To your place or mine,  
Chill out, talk energetically  
And laugh as if  
A world was ending.

And now I wonder  
Whether we are friends  
Or ever have been.  
I find myself observing  
The curve of your breasts,  
Patches of thigh  
Through the tears in your jeans.  
I notice the sparkle  
In your eyes  
As you look into mine  
And sip your wine,  
Brushing a finger  
Over the bowl of the glass,  
Smiling at tales  
Of our decades past.

It was easy for us  
In those days,  
Restricted by convention,  
By wife and husband, children.  
We are tested more nowadays.  
Music, carefully chosen with  
Apparent disregard to the lyrics,  
One gentle kiss on the neck,  
Lingering longer than necessary,  
The lightest stroke

Of the inside of an elbow -  
Any of these  
And we might pass  
Through the turnstile  
Into the darkness beyond.

The evening passes and  
We write our own ending.

17th June 2009

Don Pearson

# Mementovitae

The cottages down the hill  
Are lit already as dusk approaches  
And the white shrouds of snow offer  
The only redemption  
From the gloom.  
The silhouette of the village  
Seems unchanged by the years,  
Against the lesser darkness of the moor.  
The church is also familiar,  
Presiding still,  
As it has for centuries  
Over fleeting lives,  
Waiting patiently  
For their arrival  
Here in the cemetery.  
We stand muffled against the wind,  
Stamping our feet on the ground,  
Imagining that this offers  
Some resistance to the cold.

Why have I come?  
After all these decades  
There was no obligation  
Except to myself.  
Not to her,  
For she is dead,  
Not to her memory  
For it is no more,  
Only to my memory of her  
And to a memory of myself as I was  
That I would not disappoint.

Informed only by the letter  
From another exile,  
One who had kept in touch,  
I would not be expected,  
Not missed, not welcomed  
Would be all but unremembered,

In my former home.

I am apart from the others,  
Freed from interaction  
By time, displacement  
And lack of recognition,  
Subject only to glances  
And whispering enquiry.

Those responsible are long interred,  
Except for one,  
Here as I had known  
That he must be,  
Central to this mourning  
As to mine.  
He looks briefly once or twice,  
Then stares as I fix upon him,  
Sees for the first time  
No casual visitor  
But a shade to the wakeful night.

He turns away,  
Speaks to those near him,  
Anxious to depart  
Now that all is finished.  
He hesitates as he passes,  
As if he believes  
That he might speak to me,  
Then climbs into the waiting car.

I remain motionless, undecided,  
Until my eyes begin to water  
In the chill air and the darkness.

31st July 2012

Don Pearson

## Mice - Haiku

Mice nest amidst wheat.  
Harvest machines reap and thresh  
until daylight fades.

2nd October 2012

Don Pearson

# Millennia

(To Peter and Ann. I was partly motivated to write this poem by their involvement in the controversy surrounding the erection and destruction of a Millennium Cross on The Humpy in Dawlish, Devon.)

Each of us has been to this place before  
But with others; in pursuit or flight.  
The bracken is springing under our shoes,  
The gorse no longer blooms.

There are few traces now of other feet.  
We must find our own paths up the hill.  
Through the clouds, the sun strikes the broken stones.  
A blasted tree stands by.

The scream that starts us is a crying gull  
But the stones are sentient and watch.  
More rituals than ours are memorized.  
Leaves sprout through the dead wood.

Painfully, we erect our monument,  
Sprinkle it with blood and bow our heads.  
The disdainful moon rises as we part.  
Astarte, salve me.

In due season the wind shall back North-East,  
Spindrift cover up the kings of kings.  
These lambs shall frolic no more acts of faith,  
Can we but free ourselves.

Dec 2000

Don Pearson

# Mulberry

(For Sylvette, who can see through the leaves)

This year, I longed for August and its crops.  
As Spring approached, I watched the other trees,  
Their leaves were greening all about the hill.  
Through April's lengthening days, my joy stood bare  
Until the first long breath of Summer's warmth.

The flowers passed unnoticed but the fruit,  
Reddened by ancient lovers' fateful tryst,  
Grew large and ripe, wine dark, replete with juice,  
An esoteric bounty from the gods,  
Like their divine ambrosia found on earth.

This time last year I walked around the lawn,  
Examined each rich berry, took the best,  
(Stained blood-red my clothes, my mouth and hands)  
Confected them into a rich ice-cream,  
And like St. Paul, converted all my friends.

Now I ignore the glut beneath the tree,  
Wasting on the ground, food for birds and wasps.  
I have no taste for fruit, however sweet,  
The plums and apples, glowing on the branch,  
I scorn like Christmas lights, still hung in March.

The memory of lusciously ripe fruit  
Is somehow worse than any bitter gall.  
The berry that most stimulates my mouth,  
Can not be found in Teignmouth's harbour now.  
The one that I love most, I taste no more.

Like Pyramus, I fear my Thisbe's fate,  
I heard the lion and found the cast-off veil.  
My life and hers had become intertwined,  
Like ivy round the mulberry's knotty trunk.  
She may not sit under its shade again.

The sea, the cliffs, still fill my window panes.

Still the tide comes in, retreats, returns.  
I feel no thrill in this, once bright, prospect.  
No pleasure comes to fill each hour's dull march.  
My outlook seems a desert wasteland now.

Sep 2001/Jan 2008

Don Pearson



# Night

The forbidden moon,  
the endless patter of the drums,  
the restive sea, your dress,  
these memories perturb my surface,  
insinuations by a malicious tenant.

Further along corkscrewed paths  
and deeper into the night,  
I hear shouted posturing anger  
outside my window,  
not quite cascading into  
the threatened hurly-burly,  
finally subsiding into fraternal song.

Encouraged, I pause from neglect  
to fetch a last forlorn bottle  
and cast the redundant glass  
to smithereened fate.  
As prospects of dawn diminish,  
a rising wind shakes the sashes,  
lightning blazes and consequences  
reverberate through the room.

12th May 2014

Don Pearson

## Note

Only the weak, he thought,  
Would live to see the end.  
He found the courage  
To change for the better  
What could not be endured.

Before he died, he took  
A blank sheet of paper,  
Sealed it in an envelope,  
And left it displayed  
in a prominent place.

Don Pearson

# Olympians

(i)

As we lined up,  
The others looked past me.  
I was no threat,  
Not worthy of consideration,  
In those days.  
Only one smiled at me,  
Despite his own nervousness.  
He knew what I was feeling,  
My pride at being the first from my nation  
To run at the Olympics  
In front of more people  
Than in my whole country,  
Against men known around the world,  
Of whom I had read in the magazines  
And seen on television.  
I was there,  
Running against them.  
He also came from a place  
Where living, not athletics, was the priority.

He won the Gold Medal and I finished last.  
Yet, as I came down the home straight  
The crowd stood and applauded.  
As I crossed the line,  
He had waited for me  
And he shook my hand.  
We both had the race of our lives.

(ii)

The muscle tore  
As I approached the line.  
I fell and lay on the track,  
My dreams of glory shattered.  
Another athlete ran over to me.  
She wore the vest of our enemy.  
She helped me to my feet  
And hugged me.

(iii)

In those first days afterwards,  
All I could feel was the disappointment.  
Only silver. Only a silver  
After all those years of work,  
The fights back from injury  
And all the expectations.  
Looking back now,  
I know that I did  
The best that I could,  
Performed at my peak  
And lost to a world record.  
Yes, I can say  
To my children.  
Here is the Silver Medal  
That I won  
In the Olympic Games.

(iv)

It was necessary,  
Just to compete with them,  
Let alone to win.  
I had to win  
And I did win.  
Or so I thought  
At the time.  
But now, I lie here in pain  
As I hear the tone  
In which they say  
That my record is  
Beyond reach.

20th August 2008

Don Pearson

## Olympians2

The ribbon and the  
Silver medal  
Could not obscure  
The heavy gold chain round his neck.

"Sure, man, there's pressure,  
Like, every time we go on court  
In the NBA.  
But, hey, you get used to it  
But, the Olympics,  
Now, that's real hard."

Next to him on the couch,  
The man with the medal  
For shooting  
Recalled his fear  
And a head in his sights  
That first time  
And how hard it had been  
To pull the trigger.

"It is not difficult  
To shoot at a target, " he thought.  
"Experience is a big help, " he replied.

The girl did not fully understand  
The interviewer's question  
About pressure at the Olympics.  
Tiny beside the two men,  
She clutched her medal tightly,  
Remembering all those days  
Collecting wood and  
Carrying water  
From the river.  
In her mind,  
She could see  
The smoke in the hut  
As her sister cooked for them all  
After their parents died.

Her eyes sparkled  
And she could think  
Of nothing  
To say.

21st August 2008

Don Pearson

# Ontop

(i)

The problem is, you never know  
when it might all come on top.

That knock has a way of  
establishing authority,  
brooking no denial,  
heavy-handed, insistent,  
solid, firm, repeated.  
"We think you're in, my son.  
You're going nowhere,  
we can wait and even,  
if, by some chance,  
you're out somewhere,  
at this time in the morning,  
we'll be back.  
So, let us in. Now."

These arousing calls  
quicken the breath,  
cause glances round,  
tidyings, hidings,  
coverings up,  
some trepidation,  
final checks round  
before responding  
to the demand  
and opening the door.  
But, broadly, all is well  
in the camps  
of the wicked.

This is, for the Bill,  
low-key, routine.  
There are two of them,  
young, fresh-faced,  
local nick,  
enquiring about  
a disturbance upstairs,

last night.  
"Were you in?  
Did you hear? "  
They always knock  
like that,  
they always look around,  
watch your reactions,  
check things out.  
It is their way.  
They are The Law,  
have power, love it.  
Play it cool, let them in,  
offer tea or coffee,  
better impression than  
keeping them on the step.  
Some kind of façade,  
"What have I got to hide? "  
is what is needed.  
They leave and go next door.

Now you can sigh,  
laugh about it,  
with relief,  
have a hit.  
You live to tell the tale.

(ii)  
The problem is, you never know  
when it might all come on top.

You're on the road,  
carrying an ounce.  
You see them,  
marked car, on patrol,  
in a side road.  
They clock you  
and turn, following,  
matching your pace.  
You drive on your mirror,  
all the time, anyway,  
always aware  
of cars behind,



your speed, the limit,  
saw it coming,  
took a few deep breaths,  
waited for the flashing light,  
warned the passenger,  
whose can of lager  
(you've told him it  
draws attention,  
but he won't listen)  
had caught their eye.

You pull over,  
turn off the engine,  
wind down the window  
stay in the car.  
You know the drill.  
One sits in the car,  
radio to hand  
in case of trouble,  
runs vehicle checks.  
The other comes forward,  
leans towards you,  
smells your breath,  
watches, looks.  
Only the excuse varies,  
made-up, of course,  
but not to worry:  
went through red,  
broken tail-light,  
erratic driving,  
over speed limit.

"Is this your car, Sir? "  
The tone and emphasis on "Sir"  
can give some clues.  
These pillars of the law  
don't want comebacks.  
In Chiswick, you may have  
wealth and influence,  
may be at some fault,  
but need respect  
at this stage.

In Ladbroke Grove  
You merit just a sneer.  
You're a piece of shit,  
a villain until proved otherwise.  
"Could you open up  
the boot, please? "  
The "please" and "Sir"  
are optional, now,  
may be dispensed with.  
Again you look for clues.  
This is a litany.  
You need to know  
the questions,  
the responses,  
play the game.

Don't panic!  
Stay calm, be polite,  
say little, at most.  
A cover story helps,  
preferably true,  
consistent if  
they separate you  
from your friend  
(but that's already  
looking bad.  
It suggests that they  
have sussed you  
have something hidden,  
may run a C.R.O.,  
may call for back up,  
thorough search.  
A van is even worse,  
clothes off,  
bend over and  
you are buggered,  
metaphorically, but  
for all real purposes,  
that is the last  
of your concerns) .

But all ends well.

They check the boot for bombs,  
but you're not Irish.  
Find some trivial fault  
under the bonnet,  
to put you in your place  
hand out a Producer,  
"Your licence,  
M.O.T., insurance,  
Police station of your choice,  
within a week.  
Goodnight, Sir,  
drive carefully."  
The "Sir" has reappeared.

Now you can sigh,  
laugh about it,  
with relief,  
go home,  
with caution,  
have a hit.  
You live to tell the tale.

(iii)

The problem is, you never know  
when it might all come on top.

You go to bed each night,  
knowing that the door  
coming in, flattened,  
may wake you.  
You know each afternoon  
that it could happen.  
But when it does come,  
the timing is still wrong for you.  
It's still unexpected,  
always a shock and  
not one to get used to.

There is no time,  
none for action,  
none to draw breath,

none to prepare,  
none to disappear  
(for you or anything) .  
One moment,  
you are sitting,  
talking, watching TV,  
or gouching, the next,  
the hammer strikes,  
that door is down.  
The flat is full  
of rushing, grabbing  
shouting police.

Your friend is sat upon,  
with some enthusiasm,  
having raised a kukri,  
in case it was a burn.  
That misunderstanding  
seems to be  
amicably resolved,  
without hard feelings  
on either side.  
Of course,  
all respectable people  
keep a kukri  
in their home,  
close at hand,  
day and night,  
just in case.  
But, something tells you  
this may not have  
been the best start  
to your first bust.

A warrant is flashed,  
the search begins,  
while you sit,  
carefully watched,  
frightened,  
helpless.  
Local plod are  
enthusiastic

in a clueless way,  
find things you'd lost,  
miss things you're  
glad they didn't see,  
think they know the score,  
don't really, but are  
well up for it,  
a drugs raid,  
a bit of excitement,  
anything they find  
will cheer them up,  
make their day  
and ruin yours.  
They go straight to  
the books and  
flick through every one  
and throw it on the floor.  
It's so obvious,  
that you have been  
grassed up,  
and who it was.  
(You kept a low profile  
all that time,  
kept everybody sweet,  
just got a bit careless  
and desperate  
during the drought,  
trying to make a score,  
had someone to your flat  
your friend  
had known for years,  
"Sound as a pound",  
Jamaican, solid guy.  
But he'd done one  
stretch too many,  
firearms last time,  
clocked the stash  
and justified his presence  
on the street by  
giving you up  
for a few quid.)  
Easier than detection,

every time.

They think its Christmas.  
First come the cautions,  
then the quiet words  
in the police car,  
"off the record", sure!  
"Stitch your friend up.  
He'll do the same for you."  
"Don't play innocent,  
we don't randomly  
knock down doors".  
They always have a lever,  
"If you don't help us,  
we'll hold you 'til you're sick."

You have no record  
but have been well taught,  
by an expert witness  
of police, of their tricks,  
of fittings-up, of plants,  
of contemporaneous notes  
compiled after the event,  
word for word agreement  
on things never said.  
Most people forget  
they have been cautioned,  
if they ever were,  
chat a bit, relax,  
say too much,  
put their hands up to it,  
talk themselves inside,  
and their mates.  
"Between you and me,  
it's a fair cop, guv.? "  
None of that crap.  
One word too many  
and, for half an oz.,  
you are banged up,  
good and proper,  
custody not bail.

You get a brief.  
(If it delays interrogation,  
if you get sick,  
tough it out but  
always get a brief.)  
"What day is it? "  
"No comment! "  
"Do you support Arsenal?  
"No comment! "  
Don't answer anything or  
it's hard to stop  
with the real questions:  
"It's just a bit of pers.,  
What you worried about? "  
"No comment! "  
"Look, we both know  
it's smack, don't we? "  
"No comment! "  
Where did you buy the gear? "  
"No comment! "  
They can't make you out,  
a junkie, yes,  
never been nicked,  
clearly scared,  
should be off-balance,  
unfailingly polite,  
no aggression  
but uncooperative.  
They soon get bored.  
You both say nothing,  
let them do the work,  
evidence of supply  
(not a chance) ,  
do the analysis  
(which takes months) .

So you stay stumm,  
you're bailed, you walk,  
much to their disgust.  
They can't believe it.  
Junkies who don't  
incriminate

each other  
and themselves.  
Of course, they charge you,  
for Possession with  
Intent to Supply.  
They hit you hard, the Bill,  
as hard as they can,  
except that they ignored  
Conspiracy to Supply  
(heavier than it sounds) ,  
Terrorism and  
Genocide.  
The C.P.S. will  
knock it down  
to straight possession,  
still Crown Court,  
the quantity, you see.  
Probation. Good result!

Now you can sigh,  
laugh about it,  
with relief,  
go home,  
find the dosh they missed,  
phone up, travel.  
Check the p.,  
within your means,  
Test the q.  
on the foil,  
runs clean,  
no glucose,  
tastes good,  
does the business.  
Check the weight  
(eight pennies  
weigh one ounce) ,  
score, go home,  
with caution,  
have a hit.  
It's been a very long day.  
You live to tell the tale.



(iv)

The problem is, you never know  
when it might all come on top.

You've learned a lot,  
keep bulk, keep cash  
with a friend, off-site,  
a different, safer stash,  
a wire on the door,  
better than a chain,  
strong, always on,  
day or night,  
buys you a minute  
while the door  
is smashed to bits,  
one piece left,  
proudly hanging  
from the wire.

This time the first two in  
have body armour.

(A kukri makes  
a deep impression.)

Your cat is not impressed;  
this time they have a dog,  
drug squad, the heavy mob,  
but you could not care less.  
That well-spent minute,  
waking, coming round,  
swallowing the bag,  
made this very thorough search,  
the next six hours  
a total waste of time,  
for them: no time for you,  
not this time.  
You are polite,  
make conversation,  
(subtly take the piss) .  
Your son is well chilled,  
imagining the kudos  
with his friends.  
They even leave him his puff,

disdaining it for Class A  
expectations.

After all, they won't be short  
of a bit of blow  
or cash, if they find it  
and can "lose" some.

Who'll believe you?

See how it sounds:

"What do you mean,  
how do I explain this grand?  
There should be two grand,  
I can't explain."

They find used foil,  
works lost years before,  
torn magazines  
but no bag cut-outs,  
a water pipe.

Close but no coconut.

A few questions from them,  
in desperation  
more than hope,  
a few "No comment"s from you  
and they leave,  
nothing they can do,  
frustrated, thinking,  
because they had you watched,  
they'd have you bang to rights.

Now you can sigh,  
laugh about it,  
with relief,  
go somewhere else,  
with caution,  
meet your friend,  
have a hit.

You live to tell the tale.

(v)

The problem is, you never know  
when it might all come on top.

You're much more careful now.

It would seem paranoid  
if they weren't out to get you.  
Avoid too-obvious routine,  
vary your meets and times,  
twice round each roundabout,  
you change your routes,  
check parked cars  
for watchers,  
scan the houses,  
look-out for rip-offs,  
trust nobody,  
keep clear of crack-heads,  
(paranoid, like you, but  
too out of it  
to be careful) ,  
watch the backs  
of other users who  
have no idea  
or less to lose.

Year in, year out,  
week in, week out,  
every f\*\*king day,  
have another hit,  
no real pleasure,  
have another hit,  
just to keep straight,  
have another hit  
and not be sick,  
the thing that you fear most.

Sooner or later,  
but inevitably,  
it would come on top,  
really come on top!  
Then the doors  
would slam behind you,  
at almost fifty or  
a little older,  
the sickness grab  
you by the gut,  
the cramps, the sneezing,

the almost frozen time,  
sleepless weeks,  
the knowledge that  
a single hit  
would end the pain.  
The years fearing sickness  
wasted after all  
and further years to ponder  
the cost of it.  
Sighs, yes,  
but no laughter,  
no relief.  
Was there a way  
to miss that future?

(vi)  
I moved away  
to live by the sea,  
threw caution to the winds,  
made my choice,  
left heroin behind,  
did it myself,  
did it for myself,  
found lost idealism,  
found some lost emotions,  
found a new life,  
found a new love,  
found a new voice  
to tell this story.  
Now I can sigh,  
laugh about it,  
with relief.  
I live to tell the tale.

4th Sep 2001/July 2007

Don Pearson

# Oracle

Everyone has mirrored walls.  
Visitors see images,  
Guess at depth and distance,  
Form their own reality  
Obscured even from itself.

Most expressions I filter  
To the spectrum of my choice.  
Some escape me; you may feel  
some warmth which bathes you,  
some chill that drains me.

But you don't want to see my face  
I am to give you answers,  
You draw at my well,  
And leave me thirsty,  
Too tired to drink.

In my words you see yourselves  
They all have many meanings,  
To you, to me, to watchers in the dark.  
Have I led your life?  
Have you led mine?

I am the darkness in the heart.  
To raise this gorgon's hood  
And care to see inside  
Will leave you turned to stone  
And not help me.

Feb/Aug 2001

Don Pearson

# Pebble

It is said that, on this shore,  
Lies the ideal pebble.  
I spend my life, with aching back,  
Looking, weighing, examining  
The texture, the colour while dry,  
The sensuous colour when wet,  
The contouring and curves,  
The size, the polish, the shape.  
Beyond all else,  
I seek to know  
The mystery inside.

I have held many pebbles,  
Some time after time.  
Some have been close  
To my perfection,  
All have been discarded.

Should I find it,  
If I recognise it, finally,  
I shall heft it,  
Toss it once in my hand,  
Draw back my arm  
And cast it  
(a perfect, effortless flick)  
into the sea.

(For Nicola/27th October 2006)

Don Pearson

# Personal Ad

I offer neither jewels nor bars of gold  
Wrested with men's blood  
From the earth's heart.

You shall with me gain no great tracts of land  
Seized or forfeited  
By the long dead.

I will etch words into the sand for you  
So you may forget  
When the tide turns.

I'll paint a life onto the frosty grass  
You can blow on it  
To drive it thence.

But should you choose to wind a spell with me  
A dandelion clock  
Might start to tick.

Then we could sit where pasts and futures merge  
Hold our candles high  
While darkness waits.

For we may love enough to slow down time  
While lichens hug stone  
And waters flow.

Don Pearson

## Phoenix - Haiku

Snow's blood freshens soil.  
Golden egg cracks through ashes,  
Daffodils sun-burst.

Don Pearson



# Piper Of Teignmouth

Once upon a time, a family went to the seaside for their holidays ...  
Teignmouth town's in Devon  
Near famous Exeter city,  
The river Teign, so deep and wide  
Flows to the sea on the southern side...  
... ditty... vermin... pity...  
... Whatever, but  
You get the picture.

Quick as a flash the tourist points his mobile at  
a seagull and...

(snap)

Seagulls soar and cry and swoop  
Nest on rooftops, shriek all night,  
Heavy footed, sleep-disturbing,  
Opening bin bags, scattering, throwing,  
Plundering, fighting, scaring cats,  
Dropping shellfish, stabbing crabs,  
Treading for worms or stopping traffic,  
Falling down chimneys, waking babies,  
Mating, carousing, holding parties,  
Turning white the hats of ladies,  
But never, ever catching fishes.

(snap)

dagger-mouthed,  
dealer-wheeling,  
searching for vulnerability,  
susceptibility to kindness  
or hope of Karma from giving alms,  
the thronged beggars  
line the path to the ghat.  
The pilgrims  
drop coins into their  
outstretched hands,  
without contact  
and loss of caste,  
then pass onwards to bathe,  
and finally, drift homewards

clutching  
the bottle  
of Ganga water  
or fish and chips.

(snap)  
Seagulls hang around cafes,  
Smoking fags and looking cool,  
Chatting up the local ladies  
(Just as we did years ago.)

Tourists come and give them titbits,  
Encourage them to pounce on chips,  
Eviscerate a quarter-pounder  
Finish off with bacon bits.

Seagulls go and teach their babies  
How to bow and beg and scream,  
If that fails, to dive on children  
Frighten them and steal ice-cream.

(snap)  
Booted, suited, swaggering, brash,  
protected by law from the ungrateful public,  
(altogether, just like the seagulls)  
The town council met to consider the problem.  
Elections were looming, the trough nearly empty  
for those unlucky enough to be dropped.  
An all-night sitting, increased desperation,  
The crowd outside was baying for blood.  
The mayor tapped the ash from his Cuban cigar  
(The last Latour had long since been emptied)  
And he cried out loud to all who would listen,

'Can no one rid us of these meddlesome gulls? '

(snap)  
Gates of dawn opened and a sound of pipes  
arose and swelled, mystic and clear.  
Leaves swayed in the branches of aspens  
and a dream-song floated on quivering air.  
The piper approached and the town fell silent

and the mole and the rat bowed low to the earth.

(snap)

Sorry - wrong piper. This is what really happened:

A knock on the door, the room falls still,  
From the passage outside there sounds a trill  
And into the room there steps a fellow,  
Strangely attired in red and yellow...  
And he doffs his cap and he speaks strite aht  
"Lor' lumme, yer Worship,  
I'll see orf the gulls,  
Strike me dead if I don't,  
But it'll cost yer 'alf a dollar.  
By the way, they call me 'The piper'  
Dahn the Smoke,  
Cos' I'm good wiv me flute."

(snap)

Cutting a long story short, they struck a bargain and  
Onto the Den "the piper stept  
Smiling first a little smile  
As if he knew what magic slept  
In his quiet pipe the while;  
Then, like a musical adept  
To blow his pipe his lips he wrinkled, "

But

A gull named Silver,  
Bearded, lame,  
Had learned his trade  
On the Spanish Main,  
Parrot on shoulder,  
Patch over eye,  
Bold as a tiger,  
Pirate, spy.

He swooped on the piper  
And snatched up his flute  
Then over the river  
He flew with his loot  
He paused on The Ness  
And shrieked out with glee

And soon the pipe lay  
In the depths of the sea.

The piper turned with a look of despair  
As Silver's crew appeared in the air,  
Screaming and pecking, they dived for his head  
Within a few minutes the piper was  
Disillusioned with the entire affair  
(and dead.)

(snap)  
There's a motleyed yellow scarecrow  
To the West of Teignmouth town  
There's a skeleton inside that's never still  
And the seagulls scratch and pillage  
As they scavenge all around  
And people here believe they always will.

(snap)  
The tourist pocketed his mobile phone, dragged the rest of the family back into  
the car and returned to the city where they spent their time complaining about  
the nuisance caused by pigeons and looking at the photographs of their holiday  
by the seaside, particularly admiring the beautiful seagulls. As far as I know,  
they lived happily ever after.

6th July 2011

Don Pearson

#### Notes

Begged, scavenged or stolen from sources that all children should read:  
The Pied Piper of Hamelin by Robert Browning  
The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame  
Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson  
The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God by J. Milton Hayes

And from a lifetime's worth of other stories.

Don Pearson

# Poems

(For everyone involved in Poetry Teignmouth)

They wait in ambush,  
poems by writers  
unfamiliar to you,  
hiding with apparent innocence  
behind their cardboard fans,  
simply words on a page, asleep,  
dreaming in monochrome.

Tempted, you scan, unsure,  
ready to remain detached,  
prepared to be disappointed,  
but expectant, hopeful.

Suddenly you are transfixed.  
The emotion behind the words  
holds you, squeezes your throat,  
prickles your eyes  
and bonds with you  
like a symbiont.

Simply words on a page?  
Poetry books are grimoires  
containing secrets and spells,  
truths whose power, once read,  
may never be undone.

10th October 2013

Don Pearson

# Poet

(For Annabel Jones)

"She lies, arms enfolding her head,  
Bewildered, half-dressed on the bed.  
In a void that feels vast,  
Eclipsed by the past,  
All dreams of a future seem dead."

You see the problem?  
What sort of person  
would even think about  
writing a serious limerick?  
All that emotion, the hopelessness,  
the suffering, the pain.  
I find writing poetry problematic.

It was Erato's idea.  
She is my Media Image Consultant,  
just out of university,  
very good at what she does,  
hot as a Habanero chilli  
and able to move in straight away.

Now I keep a writer  
locked away at the extremity  
of one of the corridors less travelled.  
He is well looked after:  
suitably half-starved,  
without heat,  
provided with candles.  
I even introduced him to Erato  
so that he could fall in love  
and then be heartbroken  
when I took her away.

It is win-win.  
He is as happy as a dead seagull  
and very productive.  
I don't need to write at all,

so I can concentrate on  
BEING A POET.

Erato also introduced me to the poets' toolkit, the 6 Ds: -  
deranged, distracted, dishevelled, drunk, drugged and dead.  
In various combinations,  
they have been adopted with success,  
by many poets.

I decided to concentrate on the first five.  
I find it easy to appear  
to be deranged,  
happily muttering to myself  
in a voice carefully modulated  
to allow others to hear me.  
I am told that my distracted look  
is first class,  
just right to convey the impression  
that my mind is on higher things.  
Erato buys my clothes  
exclusively from charity shops  
and my hair is expensively cut to look unkempt.  
She supervises my intake of whisky  
and opium before my appearances  
so that each audience  
can experience that frisson  
that I will go ungentle on that good night  
and BE OUTRAGEOUS (or die.)  
They love it.

Being a poet is straightforward.  
It was only the writing that was difficult.

6th April 2013

Don Pearson

# Poetry

I had been introduced  
to some poets at the gallery.  
We talked while Robin and Adrian  
played guitars.  
Words like 'serendipity', 'synergy', and 'synchronicity'  
were bouncing around  
like excited children.

Suddenly, 'Poetry saved my life.'

Intense. Simple.  
I looked at her.  
There was no doubt  
that she meant it literally.

I said nothing in reply.  
I was not ready  
for that conversation  
with someone  
whom I had just met.  
Had I said that I understood,  
it might have been thought  
just a throwaway remark.

But a memory surfaced: -  
being unable to buy food  
for the next day  
because I could not see  
any future beyond  
the impending night.

28th January 2013

Don Pearson



# Pohutukawa - Haiku

(for Suzanna)

Christmas blossom fades:  
A newborn daughter cries out  
As it falls to earth.

17th June 2009

Don Pearson

# Poppies

(For Liam O'Neill and in memory of my grandparents)

The poppy's capsule oozes juice  
That brings us sleep, helps ease our pain.  
On one more continent the seeds  
Are mixed with dust and blood as we  
Forget that we must not forget.

The poppies bloom, their beauty fades,  
Their petals scatter on the ground  
In Flanders or in Afghan fields.  
While poppies weep their latex tears,  
We plant our flowers once again.

6th July 2010

Don Pearson

# Poppies2

(For all at Brook House and Overbrook, Dawlish.)

In Flanders fields that May,  
watered with chlorine tears,  
frail red blooms  
appeared as usual,  
anticipating nothing  
but their own brevity.

Now they weep themselves  
for a time when they can  
parade again  
simply as flowers,  
beautiful, unadorned.

They pray to the sun  
that we remember well enough  
to release them  
for eternity.

3rd November 2013

Don Pearson

# Prayer

When I watch a football match  
In you I do exult.  
I'll pray more often if you could  
Just get us a result.

When I compete on Sundays  
It's for Thy Glory, Lord.  
With a gold medal round my neck  
It's you that I applaud.

I'll dedicate this tenner  
and place it in thy name.  
I'm sure you'll see me right, Jesu  
and help us win the game.

Please don't think me frivolous  
For asking this of thee  
But I could use some help today  
To win the lottery.

Oh, God, our help in ages past  
Our hope for years to come  
My wife is always nagging me  
Could you please strike her dumb?

I dropped some acid just last week  
I'm sure you see it's true  
It helps me to believe that I  
Am closer, God, to you.

I love my children dearly  
I've just put them to bed  
Perhaps you could watch over them  
While I get off my head.

I've got some crumbs and fish bones  
I hope that's all you'll need  
Could I beseech you, Jesus  
My family to feed.

I like cocaine and heroin  
I also love a drink  
But when I'm in a stupour  
It's you of whom I think.

I met a Sally Army man  
Who said he fought for you  
I left him bleeding on the ground  
My faith had seen me through.

I killed a stranger yesterday  
He thought my rituals odd  
The priest told me it was all right  
I did it for my God.

I met a virgin at the church  
I took her to my bed  
But thoughts of Mary, mother of God  
Were going through my head.

I've worshipped all my life, Oh, Lord  
All that I have is thine  
The smallest gesture on your part?  
Fill this flask with wine.

And when I meet St. Peter  
With his bunch of heaven's keys  
I can say, with hand on heart  
I've served you all my days.

But if my prayers aren't answered  
And you don't bring me luck  
I'll turn to Shiva or to Ra  
You ingrate divine ....

(Dedicated to religious hypocrites, should any exist/Dec 2000)

Don Pearson

# Prometheus

(In memoriam, aged 4862 years.)

We search for knowledge.

In the Eighteen Hundreds  
Eminent Victorians  
Discovering  
A new species,  
Would kill it  
And take it home  
To study.

In a desolate place  
Stood an ancient tree,  
Bristlecone pine.  
Fascinated,  
In 1964, we cut it down.  
and killed it,  
The oldest living thing  
On earth.

And now, we know.

21st September 2008

Don Pearson

# Rain

(For Wendy)

There was a day,  
A Thursday,  
When we, as we, were young,  
And the rain fell.  
We were drenched in seconds.  
I wore my overcoat,  
You had your dad's cap  
And a leather jacket.  
No coat could keep out this downpour,  
Proper-job Devon rain.

We had known each other  
A few nights and fewer days.  
We were keeping a low profile  
But no other fools were about.

That night Dawlish Warren flooded,  
Landslips stopped the trains.  
Eldon was stranded there,  
Reduced to drinking beer  
In a warm pub.  
I drove to rescue him but  
The roads to the Warren were awash  
With swimming cars.  
I turned back  
And came to rescue you.

Water sluiced in rivers down the roads,  
Welled up from manholes.  
Caravans were swept away  
As sea and land joined,  
As we were joined,  
As we were swept away.

December 2001/November 2006.





# Redarrows

The Red Arrows  
spear over Torquay.  
They soar, dive,  
skim the hills and the sea  
and streak smoke trails onto the vault  
over the helpless town.

There are upturned faces,  
cheers and screams of delight  
from the crowds of people  
who have never  
felt the need to escape  
from military planes.

That Sunday in 1979,  
we sat, waiting,  
on one of the wooden fences  
that punctuate the flat and endless  
blanks of Cambridgeshire.

Suddenly, without warning,  
the jets screamed over us,  
so loud, so low,  
that we thought  
they would annihilate us.  
We rocketed down,  
Clasping the ground in panic.  
Our embryonic daughter struggled,  
frantic at the disruption of her dreams,  
desperate for somewhere  
deeper to hide.

Don Pearson

# Remembrance

(For Sylvette)

On the far side of the square,  
Facing the American Embassy,  
Is a memorial to those who died  
On 11th September.

In between stand  
Majestic plane trees,  
Their globular fruit  
Like tiny cluster bombs,  
Hanging from the branches  
Or exploded on the ground.

Beneath the planes  
Are strewn the dead leaves  
Scattered, blown, sodden.  
This being Grosvenor Square,  
They are collected and bagged,  
Driven away in vans and  
Removed from the public view,  
Remembered only by the trees  
That bore and lost them.

November 19th 2010

Don Pearson

# Sea

The sea is always dangerous.  
Its currents stir my depths.  
Its eddies write runes in my sands.

Close to it, I resonate.  
Closer still, I think.  
Drawn out from equanimity,  
Beneath its waves, I sink.

I walked down to the sea today,  
Answering a summoning, to meet a past,  
A piece of herstory.  
She was late, perhaps  
delayed by entrancement.

I watched the wavelets lap the sea-wall  
In the sunshine.  
As I awaited my ghost,  
Her ghost appeared,  
Her silent incantations  
Raised a storm, the waves  
Flooded my defences.

Salt water stranded me  
Left me surrounded,  
On the sea-wall, by the sea,  
Whose wavelets lapped the beach  
And one piece of driftwood,  
In the sunshine.

Close to it, I resonate.  
Closer still, I think.  
And after creativity,  
Beneath its waves, I sink.

The sea is always dangerous.

Don Pearson

# Sermon

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for they shall be beloved by their exploiters.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit nothing and yet be satisfied.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be renowned after they have been killed.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the wretched of the earth: for fine words shall be spoken on their behalf.

Blessed are they which cannot trust: for they shall not be betrayed.

Blessed are the followers: for they shall have the leaders they deserve.

Blessed are the paranoid: for they shall not be taken by surprise.

Blessed are ye which do not believe: for ye shall not live in hope.

For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

Don Pearson

# Shift

(For Lesley-Jane)

Do you remember a poem by Christina?  
Your hair could still be from the other Rossetti.  
Those times speed away so fast  
That, in my remembrance,  
Your hair should be even redder,  
Your voice deeper.

But I recall a jay undone  
Beside the road,  
Its feathers azure in my mind now  
As when I posted one to you.

The future should be blue-tinged,  
Shrilling as it approaches.  
After all, the years pass  
So much more quickly now,  
As we get older.

Jan 2008

Don Pearson

# Shop

I saw fragments of unrealised dreams  
in the starred window  
where an old poster for the National Lottery proclaimed,  
"It could be you."

Free newspapers were heaped inside the door,  
still being delivered despite the dereliction.  
Bootfranked post lay scattered  
and trampled on the floor amidst dead flies  
and a broken ladder had been thrown in a corner  
beside an upside-down till.

A damp-stained cardboard rainbow  
leaned against the wall.  
The crate of cobwebbed bottles  
would afford no refund on hope  
or investment in futures.

Notices on the door  
announced the name of the bank  
which had acquired the lease  
and a "Bingo Night" at a local church.

Nothing beside remained.  
Above the decay,  
dust glittered like tears,  
suspended in the sunlight.

25th January 2013

Don Pearson

# Silent Song

I know from your stance, from the look on your face,  
That I must atone for my sins.  
The sins of silence.

I feel I have tried, done all that I can  
To break free from pain in the past.  
The cost is silence.

The fires that I hide, the darkness within  
And feelings that I cannot trust  
Result in silence

I have written some words for you to read  
When I've left to travel new roads.  
The rest is silence.

29th March 2014

Don Pearson

# Sonnet

(For my mother, who taught me about sonnets)

He slept and in his dream a Word arose.  
That comforted the weak, the poor, the maimed.  
The dying and the hungry from it gained  
Some strength to bear their toil and daily woes.

The Word engendered hope and fostered love  
Made brothers out of foes and helped them shine,  
Brought certainty and truth and life sublime.  
The sun broke through the sullen clouds above.

He must release its power, reveal it all.  
He wakened full of hope and spoke the Word.  
A strange fire lit the eyes of some who heard.  
They fought for it; in shock, he saw men fall.

One Word subsides as man stares in its face.  
But wait, another comes to take its place.

8th September 2008

Don Pearson



# Supernova

(For Michelle Greenwood-Brown,  
in appreciation of her mosaics and her teaching.)

Two hundred million years ago,  
in a galaxy far from ours,  
A great star died in a fiery blast,  
While coelacanths and turtles swam.

By moony night, my lover and I  
Vow that our love will endure.  
We miss the glim of that death above,  
While coelacanths and turtles mate.

Present or past, time's arrows shall fly  
The longest-lived flames expire,  
Attraction of darkness swallow light  
And no living creatures will swim.

11th October 2011

Don Pearson

# Sylvette

Oh thou, my sister,  
Who art not my sister,  
Listen to the wise counsel  
Of thy brother  
Who is not thy brother,  
Which thou hast given unto me  
And which I heard not,  
Being that same wise counsel  
Which I spake unto thee  
In the first instance  
And to which thou also  
Hearkenedst not.

For each of us,  
Who are not sister and brother,  
Is wise to the foolhardiness  
Of the other,  
For, truly, we are  
Brother and sister.

21st August 2008

Don Pearson

# Sylvia

(For Julia Howe)

As I celebrated my own dissociation  
from Independence Day celebration,  
a voice spoke to me,  
across five decades,  
from her Winter in 1963.

She called my name,  
with the edgy clarity  
of a pheasant in a snowfield,  
bored herself into my brain  
like crackling  
shards of ice  
or broken marble.

When I asked why she wanted me,  
she replied that everyone needs  
a mirror.

Don Pearson

# Teignmouth News

(For all of us for whom such news has always been from somewhere else)

Reports are coming in from the UK that a large number of insurgents were killed today in an air strike. The strike took place on Teignmouth in a hitherto calm area of England, two hundred miles West of London.

An Allied spokesman dismissed claims that those who died were civilians, saying, "We had indisputable intelligence of a meeting of insurgents and carried out a precisely-targeted strike on their position."

Elsewhere in Britain, a suicide bomber, thought to be a Scot, killed more than sixty people at a shopping centre on Tyneside.

\*

When the curfew was lifted  
We gathered in "Ye Olde Jolly Sailor",  
the Jolly to locals.

Thirty-seven.  
Maybe more, still in the wreckage of St. Michael's.  
The "insurgents" had only been  
A couple of local boys  
Who brought in cheap tobacco  
In the age-old trade.  
Their rivals in the feud, equally long-lasting,  
Had expected them to get  
A bit of a kicking.

I watched the eyes of those around me.  
In the mirror, my own reflection  
Showed a face I hardly recognised,  
Telling the same story.  
This must be stopped.

\*

Earlier, when the fires had subsided  
And it had seemed that it might be safe,  
I walked down the hill towards the smoke  
That obscured the sea and the Ness.  
I cut through the lane from Ferndale  
Past the brambled hedge

Half-hiding the old mulberry tree,  
And entered Paradise Road  
With its mature gardens,  
The tulip tree, the tamarisks  
And the rubble where my friends had lived  
And which now muffled their dissent.  
On Lower Brimley, I avoided the chalk circles  
Around dog-muck on the pavement,  
Drawn by a thoughtful walker.

As I crossed the railway  
I could see that French Street  
Was burning again after more than  
Two hundred years.  
I glimpsed a tank driving  
The wrong way along Regent Street  
Towards the Triangle.

A group of soldiers huddled  
Around a brazier by the station,  
Sheltering from the rain and the scything wind,  
Wary, frightened even, but determined.  
To them, we were just "Brits".  
All of us were a risk.  
None of them spoke English  
And I did not understand the shouts  
But the pointed rifles told me  
To stand some way off in the car park,  
Take off my overcoat, turn around,  
Then lie spread-eagled in a puddle.  
Two of them came over slowly,  
One aiming a gun at my head  
While the other searched me.  
I could see young Mary Clayton's body  
Surrounded by the wreckage of her shopping  
That might have been a bomb.  
I had felt sorry for these lads  
So far from their home,  
These peacekeepers in a land  
Where war had been a distant memory.  
They had expected a welcome,  
Had received it in some of the cities,

Back in the early days.  
I was turned back  
But I could not have gone on.

On the end of Station Road  
The ex-servicemen's club and the hair stylist's had gone.  
Part of one wall remained of  
The Masonic Hall  
With a blasted doorway,  
Above it inscribed, "Audi Vide Tace",  
"Listen, see, be silent".  
The rest of the quotation from Latin,  
"if you wish to live in peace"  
Had not been written over the threshold  
In any language.  
I could see the charred ruins  
Of people whom I must have known.  
Scraps of bloodied fabric  
Lay in the road and  
A single severed finger  
Rolled in the wind,  
Its ends pointing  
To two places of worship  
On opposite sides of the street.  
\*

There are reports that three Allied soldiers were killed today by a roadside bomb  
near Teignmouth in South-West England.

28th August 2008

Don Pearson

# Tigers - For Children

(For Julia Howe and to our grandchildren)

I am a tiger, roaring,  
and you run, screaming, to hide  
in the place where you always hide.  
I hunt, heavy footed  
on hand and knee  
so that you can hear me coming,  
snarling, sniffing,  
cold, then warmer, then hot,  
breath-holdingly,  
heart-stoppingly hot.  
Finally, I find you and  
with roars and shrieks  
you are wrestled to the ground  
and eaten, laughing.

Now we are tiger and cub,  
together hunting mummy,  
who will not hide  
and refuses to be our dinner  
because she is tired.  
Mummy tells you,  
"It is well past your bedtime."

So I say that we  
have to be tigers now  
because tomorrow  
there may not be any tigers  
that we can be.

Mummy says, "Up those stairs. Grandad ought to grow up  
and stop talking nonsense, "  
and we are both sent, irrevocably, to bed,  
crying for the lost tigers  
and for tomorrow.

9th October 2013





# Trains

Privatisation  
Shortage of staff  
Emergency repairs  
Signal failures  
Trains in wrong place  
Flooding at Broadstairs.

Burning stubble  
Leaves on track  
The wrong sort of snow  
Death-watch beetle  
Swarms of bees  
This is the way to go.

Lunar eclipse  
Crocodiles  
I've only just begun  
Thinking up reasons  
for train delays  
Is really rather fun.

Nelly the elephant  
Lost her trunk  
Ambush by kangaroo  
Invaders from Mars  
Act of God  
Any excuse will do.

Dec 2000

Don Pearson

# Truth - Haiku

The snow is falling.  
'Call it sunshine, ' says the boss.  
'Image must come first.'

Don Pearson

# Walls

These walls may look forbidding  
You may think they are for you.  
But darkness fills this building.  
The wind is blowing through.

I can't leave the way I came.  
Others' visions are my light  
That show me no bright future.  
I can't dream in this night.

Mar 2001

Don Pearson