

**Classic Poetry Series**

**John Fuller**

**- 16 poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2012

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## **John Fuller (1 January 1937)**

John Fuller is an English poet and author, and Fellow Emeritus at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Fuller was born in Ashford, Kent, England, the son of poet and Oxford Professor Roy Fuller, and educated at St Paul's School and New College, Oxford. He began teaching in 1962 at the State University of New York, then continued at the University of Manchester. From 1966-2002 he was a Fellow and tutor of Magdalen College, Oxford; he is now Fellow Emeritus.

He has published 15 collections of poetry, including *Stones and Fires* (1996), *Now and for a Time* (2002) and the recent *Song and Dance* (2008). Chatto and Windus published a *Collected Poems* in 1996. His novel *Flying to Nowhere* (1983), a historical fantasy, won the Whitbread First Novel Award, and was nominated for the Booker Prize. In 1996 he won the Forward Prize for *Stones and Fires* and in 2006 the Michael Braude Award for *Light Verse*. He has also written collections of short stories and several books for children. His poem *Ship of Sounds*, illustrated with a wood engraving by the artist Garrick Palmer, was published in 1981 in an edition of 130 by Gruffyground Press.

In 1968, John Fuller established the Sycamore Press, which he ran from his garage. The Sycamore Press published some of the most influential and critically acclaimed poets of the latter half of the twentieth century, such as [W. H. Auden](http://www.poemhunter.com/wystan-hugh-auden/), [Philip Larkin](http://www.poemhunter.com/philip-larkin/) and Peter Porter. In addition to these established authors, the Press sought to promote younger poets, many of whom have gone on to achieve great success. The Sycamore Press ceased operations in 1992, and is an excellent example of a British small press, publishing for motives other than profit. *John Fuller and the Sycamore Press* (Bodleian Library, 2010) includes an interview with John Fuller and personal reflections by Sycamore Press authors about Fuller, the press and the works it produced. The book also includes a bibliography of the pamphlets and broadsides Fuller produced.

John Fuller is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Works:

Poetry

*Fairground Music* (1961)  
*The Tree that Walked* (1967)

Cannibals and Missionaries  
Epistles to Several Persons  
The Mountain and the Sea  
Lies and Secrets  
The Illusionists(1980)  
Waiting for the Music  
The Beautiful Inventions  
Selected Poems 1954 to 1982  
Partingtime Hall (with James Fenton)  
The Grey Among the Green  
The Mechanical Body  
Stones and Fires (1996)  
Now and for a Time (2002)  
Collected Poems  
The Solitary Life (Clutag Press, 2005)  
The Space of Joy (2006)  
Song and Dance (2008)

#### Fiction

Flying to Nowhere  
The Adventures of Speedfall  
Tell It Me Again  
The Burning Boys  
Look Twice  
The Worm and the Star  
A Skin Diary  
The Memoirs of Laetitia Horsepole

#### Criticism

A Reader's Guide to W.H. Auden (1970)  
The Sonnet  
Who is Ozymandias? and other puzzles in poetry (2011)

#### For children

Herod Do Your Worst (1968)  
Squeaking Crust (1970)  
The Spider Monkey Uncle King  
The Last Bid  
The Extraordinary Wool Mill and other stories  
Come Aboard and Sail Away

#### As editor

The Chatto Book of Love Poetry  
The Dramatic Works of John Gay  
The Oxford Book of Sonnets  
W.H. Auden

## A Dialogue between Caliban and Ariel

Ar. Now you have been taught words and I am free,  
My pine struck open, your thick tongue untied,  
And bells call out the music of the sea.

From this advantage I can clearly see  
You will abuse me in your grovelling pride  
Now you have been taught words: and I am free

To pinch and bully you eternally,  
Swish round the island while the mermaids hide  
And bells call out the music of the sea.

I watched you closely from within my tree:  
Explicit fish, implicit homicide,  
Now you have been taught words, and I am free

To hear, who has the real victory?  
For you may drown as I draw in the tide  
And bells call out the music of the sea.

You lust for Her and bare your teeth at me.  
Your roarings only mock the ache inside  
Now you have been taught words. And I am free  
While bells call out the music of the sea.

Cal. Have you no feelings that you cannot tame?

Ar. My target's everything, and in my aim,  
Achievement, while another,  
Lesser lusts may drive:  
Legs hate their lazy brother  
Who saps your precious Five  
To keep alive.

Cal. Have you no visions that you cannot name?

Ar. A picture should extend beyond its frame,  
There being no limitation  
To bright reality:  
For all their declaration  
And complexity,  
Words cannot see.

Cal. Are not the object and the word the same?

Ar. Words are but counters in a childish game;  
Each move you make is token  
Only of the rules:  
Any rule may be broken  
By the boy from a clever school  
Or a bored fool.

Cal. How is it, then, that words can hurt and maim?

Ar. If words do that, you are already lame,  
Bowed down by words like firewood,  
Clenched with words like ice:  
Language is for the coward  
Who thinks a rule is nice  
At any price.

Cal. O then unteach me language, let the cool  
Sea sidle up and draw me to its deep  
Silence. Teach me how to break the rule.

Ar. Once in the game you cannot make that leap.  
The sea will cast you up again if you  
Pretend to break the rule you really keep.

Cal. But tell me, then, if what you say is true,  
What was your knowledge when you could not move?  
What instinct told what function what to do?

Ar. Words would not help the channelled sea to prove  
It was not ocean-free, nor pine no fuel:  
I just existed, wordless, in my groove.

Nor do I use words now, though you  
In innocence may think I do:  
We've left the island and engage  
In conversation on a page  
Sand-white and, like it, bounded by  
A vast of dull eternity.  
And I (since I can understand)  
Am master of this paper land.  
Think I am quick? I am so too,  
But when I'm bored with biffing you,  
Eve's monkey, still that is not all,  
Nor Milan's ghost, his beck and call  
To all the fancies that I can.  
You are too human, Caliban.  
You lunge and ape the human dance.  
Music and love are sustenance  
Withheld from you like tinkling charms  
Beyond your crying outstretched arms.  
You think I did not want my tree?  
Or tire of showing off? Being 'free'  
All of the time is like your choice  
Of endless fireworks of the voice:  
You splutter, gasp and madly shout,  
But dampness seeps up: you go out,  
The silly words trail off your tongue.  
So wings get tired, flapping among  
The fussy spirits of the air.

You curse. I sulk. Always He's there.  
The bullet's speed is not a feat.  
Of time, but photograph of wheat,  
A summer fly caught in a flash  
Of speckled stillness. Hear a splash?  
You think a glacier does not move?  
Brilliance of struggling wings can prove  
Treacle of amber, and a spark  
The universe, my world my bark  
I long for, longing for the dark.

Cal. A language learnt but nothing understood:  
Now you at large, and all I owned before  
Lost like my name within the magic wood.

No word for saying 'no' to fetching wood.  
The marvellous Glove splits on the hairy claw:  
A language learnt but nothing understood.

At first I framed what syllables I could:  
She laughed at me and left me on the shore,  
Lost, like my name within the magic wood.

Think of my rage then, Ariel, as I stood,  
(A picture in my head I could not draw,  
A language learnt but nothing understood),

Weeping into the sea, hoping She would  
Turn back to lead me through that little door,  
Lost like my name within the magic wood.

Our Master calls: I think it is not good  
To be unhappy with your freedom or  
My language (learnt, but nothing understood),  
Lost like my name within the magic wood.

John Fuller, "A Dialogue between Caliban and Ariel" from Collected Poems, published  
by Chatto & Windus

John Fuller

## **All the Members of My Tribe Are Liars**

Think of a self-effacing missionary  
Tending the vices of a problem tribe.  
He knows the quickest cure for beri-beri  
And how to take a bribe.

And so the mind will never say it's beaten  
By primitive disturbance of the liver;  
Its logic will prevent its being eaten,  
Get it across the river.

But faced with this assured inconsequence  
That damns the very method that is used,  
It leaves the heart unproselytised and hence  
Admits that it's confused.

I know I'm acting, but I still must act.  
I melt to foolishness, and want it ended.  
Why it continues is this simple fact:  
I'd hate to end it.

For now the jungle moods assert their terms  
And there's no way to check them if they lie:  
The mind attempts to solve the thing, but squirms  
And knows exactly why.

The world is everything that is the case.  
You cannot see it if you are inside it.  
That's why the tortoise always wins the race:  
the very terms decide it.

I cannot help it if I am contented  
With being discontented that I falter:  
That's why psychology was first invented  
So that we needn't alter.

It is a strange position to be in.  
It would be different if I didn't know  
Why the unlikely animal should win,  
Which cannibal should row.

You'd think there'd be a way of cutting out  
Those self-destructive layers of introspection.  
To reach the truth at last without a doubt  
Of making the connection.

That's why the missionary, on his guard,  
Is wondering why the cannibal's so merry,  
And why it is so very very hard  
To be a missionary.

"All the Members of My Tribe Are Liars" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto &

Windus.

John Fuller

## **An Exchange between the Fingers and the Toes**

Fingers:

Cramped, you are hardly anything but fidgets.  
We, active, differentiate the digits:  
Whilst you are merely little toe and big  
(Or, in the nursery, some futile pig)  
Through vital use as pincers there has come  
Distinction of the finger and the thumb;  
Lacking a knuckle you have sadly missed  
Our meaningful translation to a fist;  
And only by the curling of that joint  
Could the firm index come to have a point.  
You cannot punch or demonstrate or hold  
And therefore cannot write or pluck or mould:  
Indeed, it seems deficiency in art  
Alone would prove you the inferior part.

Toes:

Not so, my friends. Our clumsy innocence  
And your deft sin is the main difference  
Between the body's near extremities.  
Please do not think that we intend to please:  
Shut in the dark, we once were free like you.  
Though you enslaved us, are you not slaves, too?  
Our early balance caused your later guilt,  
Erect, of finding out how we were built.  
Your murders and discoveries compile  
A history of the crime of being agile,  
And we it is who save you when you fight  
Against the odds: you cannot take to flight.  
Despite your fabrications and your cunning,  
The deepest instinct is expressed in running.

"An Exchange between the Fingers and the Toes" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus.

John Fuller

## Canicule Macaronique

Heureux ceux qui ont la clim—Corse-Matin (6.8.94)

Heureux ceux qui ont la clim  
Pendant la grande canicule.  
Heureux those whose culs are cool.  
Heureuse her and heureux him.

C'est la canicule qui hurle,  
Ready to tear you limb from limb.  
Heureux ceux qui ont la clim,  
Cri-criant: 'O turlútuturle!'

La situation est grim,  
The mise-en-scène a trifle burle.  
A chaleur disons donc: 'Ta gueule!'  
And keep ourselves amused and slim.

Heureux qui par terre se roule:  
Lucky Luke and Lucky Jim,  
Edith Piaf, Tiger Tim,  
Et le plus divin Poupoule.

Heureux Toccate, heureux Hymne,  
Heureux Mouvements Perpetuels,  
Heureuses Les Biches immortelles,  
De tristesse sexuelle synonyme.

Je ne regrette rien. I'm full  
Of love as are the seraphim,  
And plein de bonheur to the brim,  
Pendant cette grande canicule.

La vie has satisfying sym:  
For every lui there lives an elle.  
Finding its level in her well,  
La source sauvage is in the swim.

Ni ouragan ni canicule,  
Ni pretexte prompte ou assez flim,  
Can keep le coeur from feeling imm,  
Allègre in the planet's pull.

Let's fly together in a bim,  
Au-dessus de la fou-foule  
Qui mange ses menus et ses moules,  
Impregné de sueur, et prim!

For always I'll have you, and you'll  
Have me, and though desire grows dim,  
Heureux ceux qui ont la quim,  
Heureuses celles qui ont le tool.

Forever through the sky will skim  
Le pé-pédalo de Dédale,  
Escaladant sans escale  
The blue horizon's endless rim.

En pénitence, le tournesol  
Beguiné, poudreuz, anonyme,  
Turns and turns, and at a whim  
Sonne, en sol, son son du sol.

From Chatellerault to Arles and Nîmes  
Le visage bronze du tournesol  
S'incline comme un pa-parasol  
Trouve une épaule coquette, intime.

Devisé dans le banderole:  
'Heureux ceux qui ont la clim.'  
Across the fields the notes are dim:  
Son sol, son sol, son sol, son sol.

"Canicule Macaronique" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus.

John Fuller

## **Concerto for Double Bass**

He is a drunk leaning companionably  
Around a lamp post or doing up  
With intermittent concentration  
Another drunk's coat.

He is a polite but devoted Valentino,  
Cheek to cheek, forgetting the next step.  
He is feeling the pulse of the fat lady  
Or cutting her in half.

But close your eyes and it is sunset  
At the edge of the world. It is the language  
Of dolphins, the growth of tree-roots,  
The heart-beat slowing down.

John Fuller

## **Creatures**

The butterfly, alive inside a box,  
Beats with its powdered wings in soundless knocks  
And wishes polythene were hollyhocks.

The beetle clambering across the road  
Appears to find his body quite a load:  
My fingers meddle with his highway code.

And slugs are rescued from the fatal hiss  
Of tyres that kiss like zigzagged liquorice  
On zigzagged liquorice, but sometimes miss.

Two snails are raced across a glistening stone,  
Each eye thrust forward like a microphone,  
So slowly that the winner is unknown.

To all these little creatures I collect,  
I mean no cruelty or disrespect,  
Although their day-by-day routine is wrecked.

They may remember their experience,  
Though at the time it made no sort of sense,  
And treat it with a kind of reverence.

It may be something that they never mention,  
An episode outside their apprehension,  
Like some predestined intervention.

John Fuller

## Edwardian Christmas

Father's opinion of savages  
And dogs, a gay Bloomsbury epigram:  
'The brutes may possibly have souls,' he says,  
'But reason, no. Nevertheless, I am  
Prepared not to extend this to my spouse  
And children.' This demands a careful pity:  
Poor Father! Whooping and romping in their house,  
A holiday from ruin in the City.  
His wit falls flat, his tie just will not tie.  
The dog's in chains, the reasonable books  
Grazed by his children as they learn to fly.  
He takes his dear wife's arm (his hands grow hooks).  
Pirates and pudding! Come, such cruelty!

His beard is branching like a burning tree.

"Edwardian Christmas" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus

John Fuller

## God Bless America

When they confess that they have lost the penial bone and outer space is  
Once again a numinous void, when they're kept out of Other Places,  
And Dr Fieser falls asleep at last and dreams of unburnt faces,  
When gold medals are won by the ton for forgetting about the different races,  
God Bless America.

When in the Latin shanties the scented priesthood suffers metempsychosis  
And with an organ entry tutti copula the dollar uncrosses  
Itself and abdicates, when the Pax Americana cuts its losses  
And a Pinkville memorial's built in furious shame by Saigon's puppet bosses,  
God Bless America.

When they can be happy without noise, without knowing where on earth they've been,  
When they cease to be intellectual tourists and stop wanting to be clean,  
When they send their children to bed at the proper time and say just what they mean,  
And no longer trust the Quarterly Symposium and the Vicarious Screen,  
God Bless America.

When they feel thoroughly desolated by the short-haired Christ they pray to,  
When they weep over their plunder of Europe stone by stone, releasing Plato  
And other Freshman Great Books, when they switch off their Hoover and unplug Nato,  
Pulling the chain on the CIA and awarding Time a rotten potato,  
God Bless America.

When qua-birds, quickhatches and quinnets agree at last to admit the quail,  
When Captain Queeg is seen descending from the bridge as small and pale  
As everyone else, and is helped with sympathetic murmurs to the rail,  
When the few true defenders of love and justice survive to tell the tale,  
Then, perhaps then, God Bless America.

"God Bless America" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus.

John Fuller

## Song

You don't listen to what I say.  
When I lean towards you in the car  
You simply smile and turn away.  
It's been like this most of the day,  
sitting and sipping, bar after bar:  
You don't listen to what I say.

You squeeze a lemon from a tray,  
And if you guess how dear you are  
You simply smile and turn away.  
Beyond the hairline of the bay  
the steamers call that shore is far.  
You don't listen to what I say:

Surely there's another way?  
The waiter brings a small guitar.  
You simply smile and turn away.  
Sometimes I think you are too gay,  
smiling and smiling, hour after hour.  
You don't listen to what I say.  
You simply smile and turn away.

John Fuller

## Synopsis for a German Novella

The Doctor is glimpsed among his mulberry trees.  
The dark fruits disfigure the sward like contusions.  
He is at once aloof, timid, intolerant  
Of all banalities of village life,  
And yet is stupefied by loneliness.

Continually he dreams of the company he craves for,  
But he challenges it and bores it to tears whenever  
It swims uncertainly into his narrow orbit.  
Meetings, however relished in their prospect,  
Seem only to be arrangements for departures.

Exemplum: the spruce Captain and his vampire wife  
With her token fur hat and veil, like a bandage  
Extemporised by a bat. It seems that exercise  
Keeps the Captain's horse in a permanent lather.  
The wife suffers from a disabling ennui.

What more likely than a harmless liaison?  
At their first meeting the scenario is as obvious  
As a cheese. Her eyes, half-lidded, turn away,  
The cup lifted to her lips. The Captain has questions  
About the flooding of the water-meadow.

A furious but undirected energy governs her soul,  
Listless as she seems on the surface. It is  
A libido on auto-destruct. Opportunities  
Occur, but the Doctor, in complacent rectitude,  
Bows himself off the stage of further meetings.

He devotes himself to his patients. They, however,  
Begin to avoid him as if he has some dreadful disease.  
When the Captain is lost on the glacier, his horse  
Riderless, returning to graze on the bowling-green,  
The Doctor is suspected. It is most unfair.

Meanwhile, his orphaned cousins go ahead  
With their threatened law-suit. At first he is amused.  
He meets their legal representative over  
A schnapps in the Bahnhof Buffet, and is compromised  
By the leather luggage of the absconding wife.

He claims to have found a cure for the epidemic of goitres  
But only succeeds in killing two maids and a barley farmer.  
The Captain's wife is staying at Interlaken  
With the Schoolmaster's wastrel son. Her insane letters  
Are read out in court, evidence of the Doctor's malpractice.

Only his good old Nurse refuses to disbelieve him.  
On her death-bed she grips his fingers tightly  
And mutters inaudibly about the lost diaries.  
There is nothing now to prevent the red-haired cousins

From taking complete control of his estate.

The Doctor has lost everything and gained nothing.  
At the back of his mind there is still the slight hope  
That time will explain to him his crucial role.  
He becomes a cutter of peat, and realises  
That it is never quite easy enough to disappear.

"Synopsis for a German Novella" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus.

John Fuller

## The Pit

From the beginning, the egg cradled in pebbles,  
The drive thick with fledglings, to the known last  
Riot of the senses, is only a short pass.  
Earth to be forked over is more patient,  
Bird hungers more, flower dies sooner.

But if not grasped grows quickly, silently.  
We are restless, not remembering much.  
The pain is slow, original as laughter,  
Reaching for all of it, hardly aware,  
Beginning again and feeling for its terrain.

We were often told and still we would not listen,  
And closing fingers, those accomplices,  
Took comfort from a lie. From lap to grass  
Whining, motionless on the lowest branch  
Above the pine needles, climbing the heather:

We did not listen. It hid there still to find.  
Much since was hard to get, later displeased,  
Nursing an ordinary complaint or waiting  
For a reiterated brilliance,  
Growing in ignorance, too near to see.

Now in the suburbs windows are on fire,  
Pale globes quiver on their dusty strings  
And afternoons disperse with mirth of gnome,  
The rigid stabbed flamingo pink in the trees,  
Split to the touch and walking by the pool.

Now life jerking in its sustained coda  
Constricts its furniture and its events.  
The frowning bus disappears down the hill  
Or slides before the window with its bored  
Passengers staring unashamedly in.

Now above the trees the ice-cream's bare  
Electric tongue stammers its recitation.  
Children run out in the dumb-bell cul-de-sac  
To their cold delight, skipping between the turds  
Of long-dead dogs, coiled thickly on the stone.

The children learn so quickly. The house stirs.  
Swallows leave earlier, apples to be pressed.  
Half the sky burns: the other half is dark.  
Hair pushing slowly out, generations  
Surrounding us with wonder, theirs and ours.

Nothing to give, nothing has been learnt.  
The past simply denies the urge for a truce,  
Creeping into the egg. When it is time  
We can appoint a committee for the feasts,

And for next year's feasts, and the year after.

Locks stick, glass metamorphosed  
In leafy caryatids of summer where  
Heat packs the panes and fingers tremble in  
Tobacco pockets, a tomato sniffed,  
Its greenish acid bloom and tiny hairs.

The pain stirs again like a new life  
To be unravelled. It had to come to this.  
The body is nothing, the body thinks nothing,  
The short senses grubbing on their sticks  
Feel nothing, the forgotten carioca.

A line moves to the finger end, and curls,  
Head fallen in helplessness. The wails  
Of children break behind the woven fences,  
Those minted faces far beyond our sight.  
The gates shut: a parade of Japanese flags.

And alive on the porch the councillor lowers his pipe,  
Comes down from the dunes a bathroom Arab  
Firing off caps, or crouched over shells  
Gathered in sodden pumps, the soprano waitress  
Bringing hot tea across the evening sand.

The nights come in slowly. Behind a half-curtain  
The impossible is completed. A single lamp  
Weighs down its ornaments in pools of light.  
Shadows crawl over the crater, roped  
To the terrain's recoil, roped to the pit.

John Fuller

## The Shires

### Bedfordshire

A blue bird showing off its undercarriage  
En route between our oldest universities  
Was observed slightly off-course above Woburn  
In the leafy heart of our sleepest county:  
Two cyclists in tandem looked up at the same moment,  
Like a busy footnote to its asterisk.

### Berkshire

Once on the causeway outside Steventon  
I had a vision of living in willing exile,  
Of living the knowingly imperfect life  
But with a boundless and joyous energy  
Like Borodin played by the North Berkshire  
Youth Orchestra in its early days.

### Buckinghamshire

A goose in the garden of the second-best pub  
In Marsh Gibbon was busy doing its dirty toothpaste  
And noisy, too, when a woman staggered out  
Of the lounge bar into the deserted car-park  
Saying: 'I could never think of the child at my breast  
As anything other than a penis with a mouth.'

### Cambridgeshire

The bird arrived. Nothing so stately-exciting  
As Handel's dusky queen that was unspooling  
Perhaps too loudly from a scribbling student cell,  
But looped between the trees, a flash of green:  
And only the having chanced to look just there  
Could tell you it had ever been away.

### Cheshire

There was a young woman of Cheadle, who wore her heart  
Upon her sleeve, bright chevron! Oh, the keen-eyed  
Men of Cheadle, as in the jealous month  
When the registration numbers of new estate cars  
Change all over wealthy suburban Cheshire,  
And they picked out her heart with a needle.

### Cornwall

The very last cat to speak Cornish had a glass eye  
And kept a corner shop, selling shoe-laces and bullseyes,  
Brasso and Reckitt's Blue. My great-aunt remembers  
Buying postcards from him as a girl,  
When George's profile sped them for a penny.  
Aching to talk, he died of pure loneliness.

### Cumberland

They play bezique in Threlkeld and they play  
For keeps in Shap. And all the shapely clouds  
Roll through the streets like weeping chemistry

Or cows escaped. And tea is served in the lounge  
Over a jig-saw puzzle of the Princess Elizabeth  
Beneath wet panes, wet mountains and wet sky.

#### Derbyshire

Once upon a time, in Derbyshire's leaking basement  
Where you lie back in boats and quant by walking the ceiling,  
A strange girl in the dripping darkness attached  
Her damp lips to mine fast, like a snail's adherence  
To cold stone in dusty nettles, and all unseen  
The bluejohn slid by me: yellows, greys and purples.

#### Devon

You will never forget the fish market at Barnstaple:  
Wet gills, double bellies, gleaming scales,  
Shells like spilt treasure. And the cream there thicker  
Than a virgin's dream, and Devon's greatest poet  
Born Gay, on Joy Street, taught by Robert Luck:  
It is the paradise of all fat poets.

#### Dorset

When the old woman entered the sea at Charmouth  
And the great waves hung over her head like theatre curtains,  
I thought of the sibyl who charmed the rocks to yield  
Their grainy secrets till history bore down  
Upon her and the liquid world was fixed  
For ever in the era of the fossils.

#### Durham

At the end of your battered philosophical quest,  
The purity of Durham rises like an exhalation,  
Like the stench of sulphur in a barrel. Birds  
Build in the walls of the cloisters, disappearing into holes  
Like black-robed devotees. Inside it is quiet,  
The oatmeal crimping distant in grey air.

#### Essex

I had a vision in the dead of night  
Of all the kitchens of commuters' Essex  
Aight like the heads of snakes; and down them slid  
The bored wives and daughters of the managers  
Who were at the identical time arriving  
On the ladders of their power and fatigue.

#### Gloucestershire

Armorial memorials reduced  
To leper stone, forests to hedges, hedges  
To sickled stumps where perch the songless birds  
Of Gloucestershire, and vans require the roads  
Before them in their headlights. No one speaks  
In the time it takes to cross the greenest county.

### Hampshire

Driving at evening down the A 34  
Like a ski-run, the sun a deiphany,  
The car-radio a percussive Russian insistence:  
Pure pleasure, pure escape! Past Winchester,  
Unseen its stalking scholars, past everything,  
Driving through Hampshire, driving for the boats!

### Herefordshire

Alone between the Arrow and the Wye,  
Wales to the west, keeping its rain and secrets,  
I wandered in cider country, where the shade  
Beneath the trees is golden red and noisy  
With the jealous spite of wasps: Ariconium,  
The poet Philips, his long hair combed out!

### Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire is full of schoolmasters,  
And archaeologists who are part-time poets.  
Together they apportion past, present  
And future among their imaginary admirers  
In the form of examination papers, foul  
Drafts, and labels of dubious information.

### Huntingdonshire

Herds of deer are moving through the trees  
Of Huntingdonshire noisily and rather  
Slowly. An idle hand sweeping the lyre  
Brings tears to the eyes of the moderately rich.  
They will dip their hands in their pockets, gently dip  
But not too deep. You've got to keep money moving.

### Kent

Old men coming up to bowl remember  
Other old men who in their turn remembered  
Things that were hardly worth remembering  
Through long still nights in Ashford, Faversham,  
Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells and Westerham  
Where even now the fields still smell of beer.

### Lancashire

All the oven doors of Lancashire  
Swing open on the hour, revealing vast  
Puddings. After tea, the lovers stroll,  
Their hands in each other's back trouser pockets,  
Feeling the strange swell of the flexing buttock.  
The sun sinks, and the Ribble runs to the sea.

### Leicestershire

Cheeks of angels, lips compressed, donate  
To brass invisible impulses of  
Purely material breath: a county's children

Gather to create an overture,  
While brothers and fathers leaping over hedges  
Wind horns to their alternative conclusion.

#### Lincolnshire

M1, M18, M180: the roads  
With their bright and bowline intersections sweep  
North to Scunthorpe. Go further if you will  
To where the Trent meets the Humber and Lincolnshire ends.  
There, at Alkborough, you may draw breath  
And if Nicky's at home she will give you a cup of something.

#### Middlesex

Middlesex is mostly roundabouts, the bright  
Voice of five p.m., insistent infotainment:  
Fingers gallop irritably on the steering-wheel;  
The nails make little clicks. Down the line  
Of fuming stationary Volvos boys bully with headlines  
That tell the drivers all about the place they have come from.

#### Norfolk

Norfolk is somehow inverted: it's all sky  
With clouds as bulky as castrati or lines of Dryden  
Sailing out above you, tinged with sunset.  
Get as far as you can, but not too far,  
Say to the Tuesday Market Place at King's Lynn  
Where all the conveyancing is done in verse.

#### Northamptonshire

Once half-lost here, when only a map of sounds  
Or smells could lead us from a wood, we came  
At evening to horse-brass and low-timbered beams  
Where the world had evolved to its great public state  
And the men and women of Northampton, being counted  
And with amber drinks, found themselves to be happy.

#### Northumberland

Traitors' county: from one end to the other  
You can walk bright-eyed with never a second glance  
From a stocky frowning people who move slowly  
And mind their own business. For they have seen it all:  
When the mist clears over Northumberland  
It leaves squat towers, valleys scarred with lead.

#### Nottinghamshire

There is one red door in one slightly curved  
Street in one nameless market town  
That contains behind it for a moment an image  
Of the planet's destiny: a girl stooping  
To a hallway mirror, making her lips move  
Into a theatrical kiss, a self kiss.

### Oxfordshire

The kingfisher has long flown. Along the Cherwell  
The biscuit of bridge and college wall is blank  
Of its image, but with a passing presence  
Like a photograph taken with an open shutter.  
This, we reflect, is just the sense of our life,  
Aware of something the very moment that we miss it.

### Rutland

Rutland is large enough for you and me  
To stumble into as into a wood without being seen,  
To tread its moss-starred carpet, enchanted  
By the chipped china of the russulas,  
Pink, grey, grey and green-grey, and red,  
Peeping beneath the oaks, not far from Oakham.

### Shropshire

Shropshire Blue, still made, the Lord be praised,  
Tart veins that kept the Romans here and Housman  
From the rope. The iron bridges lead you to it,  
Farms knee-deep in cow. And if you stop off  
In red-earthed Bridgnorth, that vigilant town,  
Be sure your pint is not ungraced with cheese.

### Somerset

A thousand airy harps! We hardly dare  
To let out breath, for our imagination  
Responds to these full-throated sounds as though  
To the ranks of the ever-delighting dead, our wise  
Visionaries, and this is the county of dreams  
And of the moon's occult praesidium.

### Staffordshire

Staffordshire is where you almost came from,  
Darkened beneath burnt clay, perpetual dusk.  
It is the housewife's dream, twinkling hearths  
Bright with Zebo, scrubbed pumice steps  
And, in the bathroom, a finger on the nozzle  
And little lavender farts to begin the day.

### Suffolk

I've had Leigh and buried St Edmunds,  
Stowed Felix and Market and Upland,  
I've been shut up in Boxton, found it painful in Akenham  
And felt totally stupid in Assingham:  
Carrying around one's valuable despair like a fleece,  
To live in Suffolk is to suffocate.

### Surrey

Flying in perfect formation above the sleeping  
Cul-de-sacs of Surrey, you observe  
The blocked pairing of houses, each with a garage,

Like epaulettes. What whisperings behind  
The party walls! What eavesdropping, and what  
Bad timing! Well done! Sorry, partner! Boom!

#### Sussex

Chalk pie, a quality of sun like laughter,  
Distance predicted in hoof-beats: everywhere here  
Is vigilance as well as cruel amusement,  
That tempered island quality called sardonic.  
From Rye to Selsey Bill, something is on offer,  
A glittering spread, the bottom drawer pulled out.

#### Warwickshire

Driving to Wales I crossed a corner of Warwickshire  
That seemed to be hardly space at all, the home  
Of Dr Hall and his famous father-in-law  
Or of magic woods where lovers were lost and found,  
But simply the minutes that it took to tell  
An unimportant story, now forgotten.

#### Westmorland

Once again the skies are open over the whole county:  
From Clifton to Burton, from Grasmere to Brough,  
The pubtalk steaming with anoraks and orange parkas.  
But I can remember one solitary eye  
Raging in silence in the dripping marsh,  
Its dewy lashes spooning aphids from the air.

#### Wiltshire

In Wiltshire they are sending extra-terrestrial  
Signals: what will the Venusians think of us?  
Four-footed creatures who like to move in circles?  
Let's hope they never noisily discover  
That we are only half the men they thought us,  
Stumbling at tangents from our glimpsed perfection.

#### Worcestershire

Oh darling, come to Broadway: there we'll take  
Tea and scones and jam made from the plums  
Of Pershore, perfect, pitless, palate-pleasing.  
A stroll in the model street, a browse at Gavina's.  
Then it's right foot down in the Volvo, plenty of Scotch  
And the largest bed we can find at the Bull in Worcester.

#### Yorkshire

The brown teapot is always warming here  
For there will be a time when you must come home  
Though you be unknown except to the flowered dead.  
On the moors the diagonal smoke rises  
Like a bitter smile, tight but welcoming:  
Cousin country, extra places for tea.

"The Shires" from Collected Poems, published by Chatto & Windus

John Fuller

## To James Fenton

The poet's duties: no need to stress  
The subject's dullness, nonetheless  
Here's an incestuous address  
    In Robert Burns' style  
To one whom all the Muses bless  
    At Great Turnstile.

I've no excuses for this theme.  
Prescription is less popular than dream  
And little rhymes, God knows, can seem  
    Much too laconic,  
Bollinger's visionary gleam  
    Turned gin-and-tonic.

But ssch! you know and understand  
The way these verses have been planned:  
Gritty like little bits of sand  
    Not shining quartz;  
No pulsing from a higher gland  
    Just random thoughts.

Let's start by thinking of objectives.  
Poets hate to have directives:  
They're on their own, not on collectives,  
    Share and share about,  
And what inspires their best invectives  
    Is what they care about.

You, James, collapsed upon our sofa  
As though being driven by a chauffeur,  
Won't fail to tell us what you go for:  
    Managerial boobs  
And answers that you won't take no for  
    From Fine Tubes.

Reporters never throw in towels.  
Their prose is written from the bowels.  
Ottava rima about owls  
    Printed by Sycamore  
Is worlds away from Enoch Powell's  
    Plans for the blackamoor.

But are you James Cameron or Flecker?  
Are you a maker or a trekker?  
What is the nature of your Mecca,  
    Your verum pulchrum?  
I'm glad, of course, that you're with Secker  
    And not with Fulcrum.

Poet and traveller have quarrelled  
And now you canter where you carolled.  
We're waiting still for your Childe Harold,

Though quests in Poland  
Find you fixated and apparelled  
More like Childe Roland.

It is impressive, I agree,  
Although I know it's not for me.  
I take the windfalls from the tree,  
I'm much too lazy,  
The prisons that I want to see  
By Piranesi.

You say that Oxford has no marrow,  
Sucked dry by Trevor-Roper, Sparrow,  
And others of reaction's farrow  
In their fat cloister,  
Though if my eye is just as narrow  
It may be moister.

We never see our feelings through,  
And weeping only makes us blue.  
It may be beautiful and true  
But it's not action,  
And nothing the bourgeoisie can do  
Gives satisfaction.

How can we alter our behaviour?  
Should we deny our gravy's gravier?  
Leave Cleopatra for Octavia?  
My life is inner,  
And someone I don't think a saviour  
Is B. F. Skinner.

Avoid that fashionable flock:  
To be refitted in their dock  
Your common-sense must take a knock  
As it took a course on  
The reflexes of frogs, and Locke,  
And P. F. Strawson.

Much of the Left we can ignore  
(Sheer anarchy I don't adore).  
The trendy educate the poor  
In greed and fear,  
While Labour's entered on the war  
Of Jenkins' ear.

No. Righteous more than He who Hath,  
More reasonable than New Math,  
Momier than the Mome Rath  
In their outgrabing,  
Glossing the Variorum Plath  
From Krafft-Ebing,

Apostles of determinism  
Whose hero's Mao or Virgil Grissom  
Won't interest your mind one rissom:  
    You're too empirical.  
What about Neo-Imagism?  
    Impossibly lyrical.

Such knowing brevity needs patience:  
As unfastidious Croatians  
Upon quite intimate occasions  
    Shun body-talc,  
So leave your interpersonal relations  
    To Colin Falck.

For poetry to have some merit he  
Requires it to display sincerity,  
Each pronoun to convince posterity  
    With deep emotion  
And an invigorating verity  
    Like hair-lotion.

Well, that's unfair. I'm glad he lives.  
Just think of the alternatives!  
Those whose verse resembles sieves  
    Or a diagram,  
And foul-mouthed transatlantic spivs  
    Wooing Trigram.

For they are all still with us, James,  
Fiddling among the flames,  
Brandishing the brittle fames  
    They soon arrive at.  
It's better not to mention names:  
    They'll wince in private.

Orating offspring of Urania  
(No fault of yours that they're not brainier)  
Have an immodest dogged mania  
    For autobiography  
Disguised in concrete or the zanier  
    Forms of typography.

The wide-eyed audience they're rooking  
Would secretly prefer a booking  
From a quartet like the backward-looking  
    Rank Ailanthus  
They'd jump to hear what's really cooking  
    With the Black Panthers.

Whatever props the poet uses,  
Whether he accepts, accuses

Or gives up, he must know his Muse is  
A sensible girl.  
Even some antics of Ted Hughes's  
Make her hair curl.

And so you need a form to play  
About in but which will convey  
Something of what you want to say  
Without evasion,  
Adjusting like the Vicar of Bray  
To each occasion.

The size you haven't found as yet.  
What Nabokov calls the 'triolet'  
Is much too trim a maisonette  
To dawdle in,  
Unlike your shabby Cloisters set  
In Magdalen,

Which made your poetry much dandier,  
Much like ottava rima, handier.  
You needed in its chilly grandeur  
To turn the fire on  
For times when you felt even randier  
Than Lord Byron.

Still, you found sonnets quite inspiring  
Although some rhymes like ancient wiring  
Showed the circuits could prove tiring  
(Though not unduly,  
And no one could be more admiring  
Than Yours Truly).

So carry on: your talents hum.  
No one will ever find you dumb  
While you avoid the slightly rum  
Like the White Goddess  
Or Black Mountain (and don't become  
Roger Woddis).

I'll send a sub to the IS  
(Please let me know the right address)  
I shan't turn up, but I confess  
I'm not a traitor.  
I just don't want to think the less  
Of Teresa Hayter.

Some day I'll join you in the street  
Where suffering and truth must meet:  
It isn't easy not to feel effete  
This side of anguish,  
When those who can't choose what to eat

Don't speak our language.

Meanwhile we have to try to bring  
Some order to that circus ring  
Where people think and feel and sing,  
    For at its centre  
There's no escape from anything,  
    And we must enter.

"To James Fenton" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus.

John Fuller

## Valentine

The things about you I appreciate may seem indelicate:  
I'd like to find you in the shower  
And chase the soap for half an hour.  
I'd like to have you in my power and see you eyes dilate.  
I'd like to have your back to scour  
And other parts to lubricate.  
Sometimes I feel it is my fate  
To chase you screaming up a tower or make you cower  
By asking you to differentiate Nietzsche from Schopenhauer.  
I'd like to successfully guess your weight and win you at a f&#61635;te.  
I'd like to offer you a flower.

I like the hair upon your shoulders,  
Falling like water over boulders.  
I like the shoulders, too: they are essential.  
Your collar-bones have great potential  
(I'd like all your particulars in folders marked Confidential).

I like your cheeks, I like your nose,  
I like the way your lips disclose  
The neat arrangement of your teeth  
(Half above and half beneath) in rows.

I like your eyes, I like their fringes.  
The way they focus on me gives me twinges.  
Your upper arms drive me berserk.  
I like the way your elbows work, on hinges.

I like your wrists, I like your glands,  
I like the fingers on your hands.  
I'd like to teach them how to count,  
And certain things we might exchange,  
Something familiar for something strange.  
I'd like to give you just the right amount and get some change.

I like it when you tilt your cheek up.  
I like the way you nod and hold a teacup. I like your legs when you unwind  
them.  
Even in trousers I don't mind them.  
I like each softly-moulded kneecap.  
I like the little crease behind them.  
I'd always know, without a recap, where to find them.

I like the sculpture of your ears.  
I like the way your profile disappears  
Whenever you decide to turn and face me.  
I'd like to cross two hemispheres and have you chase me.  
I'd like to smuggle you across frontiers  
Or sail with you at night into Tangiers.  
I'd like you to embrace me.

I'd like to see you ironing your skirt and cancelling other dates.

I'd like to button up your shirt.  
I like the way your chest inflates.  
I'd like to soothe you when you're hurt  
Or frightened senseless by invertebrates.

I'd like you even if you were malign  
And had a yen for sudden homicide.  
I'd let you put insecticide into my wine.  
I'd even like you if you were the Bride of Frankenstein  
Or something ghoulish out of Mamoulian's Jekyll and Hyde.  
I'd even like you as my Julian of Norwich or Cathleen ni Houlihan  
How melodramatic  
If you were something muttering in attics  
Like Mrs Rochester or a student of boolean mathematics.

You are the end of self-abuse.  
You are the eternal feminine.  
I'd like to find a good excuse  
To call on you and find you in.  
I'd like to put my hand beneath your chin. And see you grin.  
I'd like to taste your Charlotte Russe,  
I'd like to feel my lips upon your skin,  
I'd like to make you reproduce.

I'd like you in my confidence.  
I'd like to be your second look.  
I'd like to let you try the French Defence and mate you with my rook.  
I'd like to be your preference and hence  
I'd like to be around when you unhook.  
I'd like to be your only audience,  
The final name in your appointment book, your future tense.

John Fuller

## **Wasp Nest**

Be careful not to crush  
This scalloped tenement:  
Who knows what secrets  
Winter has failed to find  
Within its paper walls?

It is the universe  
Looking entirely inwards,  
A hanging lantern  
Whose black light wriggles  
Through innumerable chambers

Where hopes still sleep  
In her furry pews,  
The chewed dormitory  
Of a forgotten tribe  
That layered its wooden pearl.

It is a basket of memories,  
A museum of dead work,  
The spat Babel of summer  
With a marvellous language  
Of common endeavour.

Note: it is the fruit  
Returning to the tree,  
The world becoming a clock  
For sleep, a matrix of pure  
Energy, a book of many lives.

John Fuller

## Well Said, Davy

He went to the city and goosed all the girls  
With a stall on his finger for whittling the wills  
To a clause in his favour and Come to me Sally,  
One head in my chambers and one up your alley  
And I am as old as my master.

I followed him further and lost all my friends,  
The grease still thick on his fistful of pens.  
I laced up his mutton and paddled his lake  
In the game of Get-off-me and Just-for-my-sake  
And I am as old as my master.

I sang in his service a farewell to sorrow  
With rolled black stockings, the bone and the marrow.  
The Law was a devil to cheat as you pleased  
As we knelt on the backs of the city girls' knees  
And I am as old as my master.

So back to the country where birds are squawking,  
With possets for pensions and witless talking  
Of walloped starvelings and soldiers' fortunes  
From his nodding bench in the smothered orchards  
And I am as old as my master.

Age turns the cheek of a buried scandal  
In a nightmare of cheese and a quarter of candle.  
When the servant is privy he's good as a guest,  
The first to be carved to and last to be pressed  
And I am as old as my master.

Country or city, no pleasure can last:  
It's farewell to the future and beckon the past.  
Though he that we drink with is sometimes a fool,  
A single grey tooth may furnish a smile  
And I am as old as my master.

"Well Said, Davy" from *Collected Poems*, published by Chatto & Windus.

John Fuller