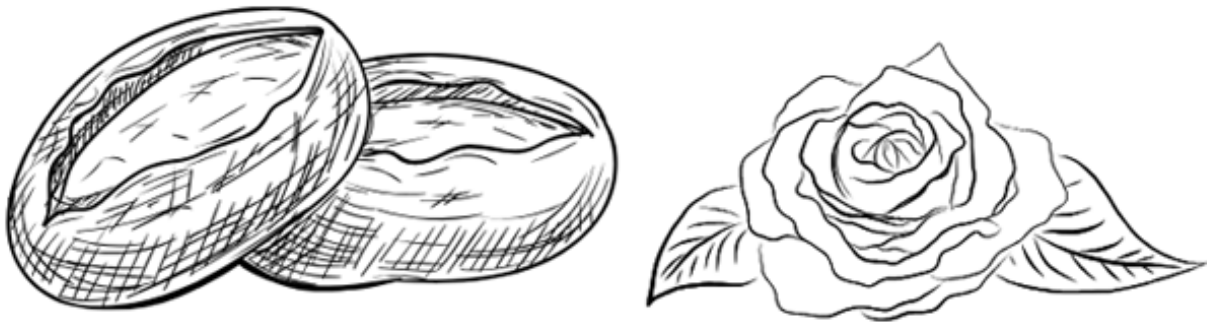


BREAD & ROSES

Part Three

Poetry and readings offering
company, comfort and connection.



0151 729 2200
www.thereader.org.uk
@thereaderorg
#SharedReading

The Reader Mansion House
Calderstones Park
Liverpool
L18 3JB

 The
Reader

About this anthology

The Reader is a charity which usually brings people together to listen to stories, extracts and poems in free, weekly Shared Reading groups.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, our aim as an organization continues to be to help humans survive and live well. To this end we are providing two services – from our HQ at Calderstones Mansion House, in Liverpool, food to keep the body alive, and by as many means as possible – phone, internet and paper – literature for the spirit of all.

In the words of the early female unionists of the US, who recognised that life was not only about basic breadline necessities but also about the ineffable beauty of the world, 'give us bread, but give us roses.'

We hope you can find within the pages of this anthology sustenance for the spirit and aid in glimpsing the roses.

In this current edition of Bread and Roses, pieces have been chosen to help us reflect not only on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives and communities, but also on the changes we need to make in light of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

We want to make sure that the literature we promote reflects the perspectives of diverse people with diverse experience. You may find some writers in these pages whose names are unfamiliar. Do look them up if you are interested; The Poetry Foundation's website offers a great starting point.

CONTENTS

- 3** *Mutability*
by Percy Bysshe Shelley
- 5** *Upon Westminster Bridge*
by William Wordsworth
- 6** *A Creole from Louisiana* (extract)
by George Marion McClellan
- 9** *Beauty*
by Edward Thomas
- 11** *The Wind Bloweth Where It Listeth*
by Countee Cullen
- 12** from *Meditation XVII*
by John Donne

Mutability

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed and gleam and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly! yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost for ever: –

Or like forgotten lyres whose dissonant strings
Give various response to each varying blast,
To whose frail frame no second motion brings
One mood or modulation like the last.

We rest—a dream has power to poison sleep;
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep,
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away: –

It is the same! – For, be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free;
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Nought may endure but Mutability.

Readers Say...

"It is both uncomfortable and reassuring – the 'single dream' that has the potency to 'poison sleep', like the 'wandering thought that pollutes the day' – these can too easily soil experience, yet the mutability of the poem's feeling emphasises that these unsettling moods quickly pass.

But each time I read the poem, something different catches my attention or its meaning slightly changes; 'Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow' at first sounds rather reassuring – that lingering unease that accompanies a worrying thought or a bad dream will pass – we only have to 'endure' negative experiences for a finite amount of time. However, on second reading, I find myself more aware of the transience of my own thoughts and feelings, with the certainty of Shelley's final line 'Nought may endure but Mutability' striking a much lonelier chord."

"The concept of change has been on my mind in an even bigger way during lockdown as many of us have spent an increasing amount of time in isolation; this paradoxical feeling of being rooted while the whole world seemingly shifts.

Spring is my favourite time of year and I had been excitedly anticipating change – the clocks going forward; having a greater window of time in the day to be able to get out and see things or meet people. Then of course of the severity of the pandemic dawned and we entered lockdown, and suddenly my concept of change 'changed'! This change can feel out of control, pressurized and uncertain as we await the outcome of decisions often made on our behalf.

However the world continues to turn and spring, in its own chaotic sense, has continued to prevail, just as summer will now do, amidst the uncertainty. And although the seasons change pretty much as predicted every year – the change feels transformative and new. There is power in change and may we be bold enough to peer into the future with hope for real mutability."

Composed upon Westminster Bridge

(Sept 3, 1802)

by William Wordsworth

Earth has not anything to show more fair:

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by

A sight so touching in its majesty:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear

The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie

Open unto the fields, and to the sky;

All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep

In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

The river glideth at his own sweet will:

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;

And all that mighty heart is lying still!

from *A Creole* from Louisiana*

by George Marion McClellan

*An African American poet, minister and educator, McClellan also self-published a novella and four short stories in a collection entitled *Old Greenbottom Inn and Other Stories* (1906). By writing in such fictions about the people and places familiar to him, McClellan showed how African American lives were rich with material deserving of serious literature.*

The story 'A Creole from Louisiana' runs to over fifty pages, and concerns the lives of two different women. At the point at which we join the story, the woman of the title has not yet been introduced. Instead, we have begun with Lizzie Story, whom we learn was 'free born', her parents having previously escaped from slavery. Having lost both her parents by the age of twenty, she is now a teacher at the 'colored free school', and early on in her teaching career, she takes on the care of a local boy following the death of his own mother. Bertie Stein had a Jewish father and a mother of 'mixed Negro and Anglo-Saxon' descent, so at the time he is considered to belong to 'that large class' of people in the American South 'who belong wholly to no race'. After six years at Lizzie's school, during which time Bertie and Lizzie have been close companions, Lizzie decides to send him away to university. The two keep in close contact and in his fourth year, Bertie returns home for a short break.

On Thursday night before the day Bertie was to leave, he said at bed time, "Miss Lizzie, I want to see the sun rise over the hills and mountains once more towards Mercury, and I am going to climb the Northwest hill at daylight. Come with me, won't you?" "With pleasure, Bertie," she replied, and they both laid down to their sleep and the pleasant dreams that belong to young lives, where sorrow has not been. But sweet sleep and pleasant dreams come to an end in time. The night sped on and on and at last ushered in a new day, whose light brightened more and more upon Bertie and Lizzie as they climbed the hill northwest of the old Huntly farm in the early morning. The glory of May was everywhere. Already the hot weather had come, but at that early hour the air was blissfully cool, and every blade of grass and every leaf on bush and tree sparkled with the morning dew. In an adjoining pasture there was the tuneful jumble of the bell cow cropping the grass sweet and fine and all wet with dew, as she led the herd out for their long and blissful day in their pasture land. The sheep were moving off also in that formal procession which they always maintain and with a thousand tender bleats from the lambs and mothers. The crowing of the cocks and the songs of the birds came up the

* *creole*: in this context, a person of mixed French or Spanish and black descent

hillside sweet with all the joyous sounds of life. Lizzie and Bertie climbed slowly, speaking a word only now and then. It was life all too fresh and glorious to be talked about, life only to be breathed in with deep draughts and to be seen by the eye as heavenly visions. Directly east of the hill below in the valley old Greenbottom Inn nestled close to the earth in the midst of its orchard full of the promise of luscious fruit. The old slave road wound its way by it towards the East as a yellow thread, going on and on till it stopped by the Atlantic Ocean, perhaps. On the top of the hill at the brow of the woods, Lizzie and Bertie sat down to rest and to look backwards over the valley below them. Far to the east the low mountains still made for Bertie a green wall all round the sky and in that glorious morning sunlight there was still the play of illusions that belonged to the happy mornings when he and Lizzie went that way towards Mercury to school. And all the valley south to the "Three Mountains" and southeast to Monte Sano was beautiful beyond words. Buena Vista, peerless Buena Vista, with its fig trees, its pomegranates, rich with promises of dapple fruit, and its voluptuous roses blooming in profusion, sat peacefully in the midst of the valley like some great motherbird on her summer nest. The sun came slanting down the crest of Monte Sano, down the cliffs of gray rocks covered with moss and green ferns, creeping from the niches of the rocks. The Tennessee, with its yellow loop, went crawling into Northern Alabama, and then back into the State whose name it bears. Lizzie Story's heart was full to the brim of happiness. "O! it is so beautiful, almost like a beautiful dream," she said with suppressed emotions. "It is indeed," Bertie replied. "And yet, over beyond those green mountain walls there lies the world." "But why get over those green walls to find the world, Bertie? Why not find the world inside of this lovely valley?"

"It would be a world too small for me," he said with a low voice and a deep emotion new for him. He had not said truly what was in his heart. He had not said over those green walls love was drawing him with cords stronger than life. And she could not know it was so. She said no more, but dreamed on, and all her dreams were of Bertie Stein. He was the center of all the beauty, the glory and lovely life around her. And Bertie sat there dreaming also, but of another than Lizzie Story. He dreamed of one in the world beyond the green walls of the mountain, where the Cumberland winds around and washes with a horseshoe bend the Athens of the South. So love wrapped them both about in that sweet morning air, and for the hour at least created the world anew and made all things in it divine. And love is life, for on it the propagation of the race depends; still that same love is pain and is merciless. Nevertheless, one full, joyful day of it, perhaps, even one hour of it, such as Lizzie Story had on that hillside that early morning was worth a lifetime without it, worth all the sorrow that may have come afterwards because of that one hour of love unmodified in the momentary sweetness it gave to her existence.

Lizzie Story's life had been a simple one. She lived her first nineteen years of life in Rhode Island. It was what every negro girl's life is in that land. She

mixed freely in church and school with the white boys and girls. There was never an act of unkindness in all her life from them to her on account of race distinction. They were friendly and kind and every right was granted to her, but for all that she grew up among them an alien. The things of life touched her only on the outside. She was the only negro in the high school the four years she was there. She attended the class ball at the time of her graduation, and the boys of the class danced with her, just as they did with the other girls of the class, but that was essentially all the social life Lizzie Story ever knew. She came to Northern Alabama soon after her graduation from the High School at Westerly, Rhode Island. She taught the district school at Mercury, and that with the truck farming, which she most successfully carried on at the same time, consumed all her time and energy. Bertie Stein came to her when he was eleven years old, and had filled all her life and soul. She loved him and lived for him. At first she loved him because he was a winning and loving little boy in her school. Then she loved him more because she adopted him into her home, sympathized with him and became a part of all that made up his life with its abundant promise. She had never stopped to analyze her love for him to see what kind it was. Indeed, there was no necessity for that. Hers was that good love, which has no cause for concealment or shame. It was the love she would have given the man she married, the child she might have borne, and the love she gave to Christ, her Lord and Redeemer. And if there is any one shocked at such a moralization, let him tell to the world of a good love for a human being, in which any one of the three I mention may be left out, or put his hand on the exact spot where these three unite and make separate and distinct links. All good loves of the human heart lie inside of these three, which are a trinity. It was only in September, during those blissful and last days of vacation, before he returned to college for his senior year, that Lizzie Story ever began to think of Bertie Stein in a new sense. He was so manly then, so gallant and lover-like in all their walks and life together. He was then so much taller than she was. The six years' difference in their birthdays did not seem so great as formerly.

I Am Reminded of These Lines...

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me ...

from *Sonnets from the Portugese*, 7
by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Beauty

by Edward Thomas

What does it mean? Tired, angry, and ill at ease,
No man, woman, or child alive could please
Me now. And yet I almost dare to laugh
Because I sit and frame an epitaph –
'Here lies all that no one loved of him
And that loved no one.' Then in a trice that whim
Has wearied. But, though I am like a river
At fall of evening when it seems that never
Has the sun lighted it or warmed it, while
Cross breezes cut the surface to a file,
This heart, some fraction of me, happily
Floats through the window even now to a tree
Down in the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale,
Not like a pewit that returns to wail
For something it has lost, but like a dove
That slants unswerving to its home and love.
There I find my rest, as through the dusk air
Flies what yet lives in me: Beauty is there.

Readers Say...

Perhaps you can imagine you're joining the group yourself as you read the comments highlighted below from readers who took part remotely in an on-line Shared Reading session:

'What does it mean?' (line 1)

Is that – what does life mean?

Yes – is it like he's saying: what's it all about?

'No man, woman, or child alive could please / Me now.' (lines 2-3)

Has he lost faith in humanity?

I'm imagining an 'old' person who has had enough of life.

'a tree / Down in the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale' (lines 12-13)

It's like humans can't help him, but nature can.

'This heart ... Floats' (lines 11-12)

He's not particularly trying to find peace. It finds him.

Talking about the poem as a whole:

How very changeable and unreliable are our emotions. He goes from being inconsolable to finding consolation.

Yes – those changes, up and down. So many people I've spoken to have mentioned how lockdown has played on their mood, how it's kept changing from day to day.

'Then in a trice that whim / Has wearied.' (lines 6-7)

'Whim' feels like a fleeting idea.

*Fleeting whims go with his feeling of being like a river. **'though I am like a river /***

At fall of evening ...' (lines 7-8)

'I sit and frame an epitaph – / Here lies all that no one loved of him / And that loved no one.' (lines 4-6)

Is it only a part of him that has these thoughts?

'yet I almost dare to laugh' (line 3)

I think that moment of self-realization where he is tempted to laugh is a breakthrough moment.

I think the fact that he allows himself to write/coin the epitaph is important too. Is it because he can put it into words that he can then also let it go?

'This heart, some fraction of me, happily / Floats through the window even now to a tree' (lines 11-12)

That word 'fraction' makes me think that perhaps he's not wholly leaving behind the feelings in the earlier part of the poem?

'like a dove / That slants unswerving to its home and love. / There I find my rest' (lines 15-16)

The dove knows where it is going. Maybe so does he?

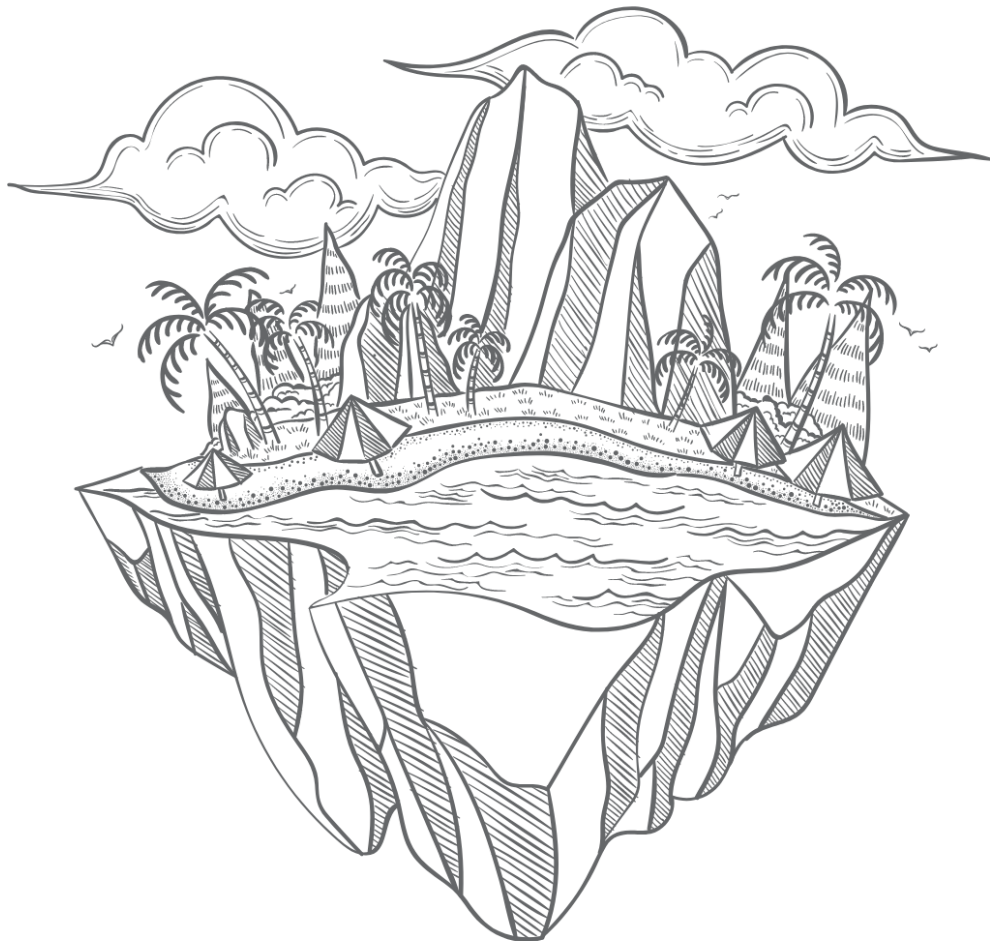
The Wind Bloweth Where It Listeth **by Countee Cullen**

“Live like the wind,” he said, “unfettered,
And love me while you can;
And when you will, and can be bettered,
Go to the better man.
For you’ll grow weary, maybe, sleeping
So long a time with me:
Like this there’ll be no cause for weeping –
The wind is always free.”
“Go when you please,” he would be saying,
His mouth hard on her own:
That’s why she stayed and loved the staying,
Contented to the bone.
And now he’s dust, and him but twenty,
Frost that was like a flame.
Her kisses on the head death bent, he
Gave answer to his name.
And now he’s dust and with dust lying
In sullen arrogance:
Death found it hard, for all his trying,
To shatter such a lance.
She laid him out as fine as any
That had a priest and ring;
She never spared a silver penny
For cost of anything.

from Meditation XVII ***(Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions)*** **by John Donne**

all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated ...

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.



Keep reading, stay connected with The Reader at Home.

If you enjoyed this anthology, visit www.thereader.org.uk or call 0151 729 2250 for more reading materials, activities, videos and online events. There are four parts to Bread and Roses, which will be released monthly.

You may also be interested in The Reader's magazine, relaunched this spring with Issue 71. Along with personal, passionate recommendations and discussion of great literature, the magazine showcases more of the stories and poems that have been read in Shared Reading groups. It also includes essays and articles which show how reading together builds meaning and connection, and helps with inner life, mental health and soul troubles. Issue 72 will be due out in September 2020.



The Reader is supported by



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

