

<p>Sujata Bhatt: from <i>Search for My Tongue</i></p> <p>“Tongue”: both organ used for speech, and language spoken with it. Poem is about personal and cultural identity. Familiar metaphor of tongue used in novel way to show that losing one’s language is like losing part of one’s body.</p> <p>Note image of two tongues. Poet argues that you cannot use both together. If you live where you must “speak a foreign tongue” you lose mother tongue.</p> <p>To show how this works, Ms. Bhatt rewrites part of the poem in Gujarati, with Anglicized phonetic transcript to indicate sounds. Final section of the poem is writer’s dream – in which mother tongue grows back and “pushes the other tongue aside”. Form is well suited to subject. The flower is a metaphor for the tongue, which itself has earlier been used as a (conventional) metaphor, for speech. The poet demonstrates her problem by showing both “mother tongue” (Gujarati) and “foreign tongue” (English) For most readers these will be the other way around, while some, like her, will understand both.</p>	<p>John Agard: <i>Half-Caste</i></p> <p>Poem develops a simple idea, found in a familiar, outdated phrase for mixed-race people. Agard pokes fun at idea of “caste” with ironic suggestion of things only being half present and by looking at work of artists who mix things. Poem is light-hearted in tone, but argument of the last six lines has universal application: we must give people our full attention, to hear their whole “story”.</p> <p>Form related to subject: non-standard English, Afro-Caribbean <i>patois</i>. No formal rhyme scheme or metre but has rhymes (“wha yu mean...mix red an green”) and repetition: “Explain yusef/ wha yu mean”. Poem is colloquial, written as if spoken to someone with imperatives (commands) like “Explain yusef” and questions like “wha yu mean”. Punctuation is non-standard using hyphen (-) and slash (/) but no comma nor full stop, not even at the end. Spelling uses both standard forms and non-standard (to show pronunciation). Note <i>patois</i> in grammar, where verbs are omitted (“I half-caste human being”). Best not to write <i>half-caste</i> (racist overtones) for <i>mixed race</i> except when quoting.</p>
<p>Tom Leonard: from <i>Unrelated Incidents</i></p> <p>Uses non-standard English to explore notions of class, education and nationality. Phonetic transcript shows how a Glaswegian Scot might speak. Poet imagines newsreader explaining why he does not talk “lik/wanna you/ scruff” – though in this version, of course, he is doing just this. Writer takes on persona of “ordinary” Glaswegian.</p> <p>The poem is set out in lines of two, three or four syllables, but these are not end-stopped. The effect is almost certainly meant to be of the Autocue used by newsreaders (where text scrolls down the screen a few words at a time).</p> <p>The poem seems puzzling on the page, but when read out aloud makes better sense. A Scot may find it easier to follow than a reader from further south.</p> <p>Most important idea is that of truth. We trust a speaker with an RP (Received Pronunciation) or “BBC” accent. But we are mistrustful of a newsreader with a regional accent, especially one like Glaswegian Scots, which has working-class associations in the minds of some people. Poem is humorous and challenges our prejudices.</p>	<p>Imtiaz Dharker: <i>Blessing</i></p> <p>About water: in hot country, where supply is inadequate, poet sees water as gift from a god. When pipe bursts, flood that follows like a miracle. Poet celebrates the way people come to life when there is more than “enough water”.</p> <p>Poem compares human skin to seedpod, drying out. Reader asked to imagine it dripping. When the “municipal pipe” bursts, it is seen as unexpected good luck. But the end of the poem reminds us of the sun, which causes skin to crack “like a pod” – today’s blessing is tomorrow’s drought.</p> <p>Poem has a single central metaphor: giving of water as a “blessing” from a “kindly god”. Water is source of other metaphors: fortune is like water rushing out of the burst pipe. Water likened to “silver” which “crashes to the ground”, and light from the sun is seen as “liquid”. Written in unrhymed lines, mostly brief, creating effect of natural speech. The poet writes lists for the people and the vessels they bring. Poem appeals to the reader’s senses, with references to dripping noise of water and flashing sunlight. In writer’s culture water is valued, as life depends upon the supply: in the west, we take it for granted.</p>
<p>Moniza Alvi: <i>Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan</i></p> <p>This poem is about someone “of no fixed nationality”, who lives in two worlds. Poet contrasts the exotic presents with what she saw in her school, and with the things her aunts wanted in return. Note paradox: poet admired presents, but felt they were too exquisite for her. Presents form a link to an alternative way of life in 1950s Lahore.</p> <p>Salwar kameez suggests familiar notion of exotic clothes worn by Asian women. But glass bangle, which draws blood, is symbol of how tradition harms the poet – not practical for the active life of a young woman in the west. The idea of living in two cultures is seen in the voyage, from Pakistan to England, which the poet made as a child and which she dimly recalls. This is often a symbol of moving from one kind of life to another (it appears in <i>Charlotte O’Neil’s Song</i>).</p>	<p>Edward Kamau Brathwaite: <i>Ogun</i></p> <p>About uncle, a skilled woodworker who could make anything, but was poor because “the world preferred” mass-produced furniture. On Sunday he worked out anger and explored West African roots, in carving image of a tribal god.</p> <p>Poem set out as couplets on the page. Many of the lines will run on. Note rich variety of nouns. Many of these are lists. Note sound FX, especially verbs (“hit, hurt”, “slapped”, “tapped”). Onomatopoeia: sound matches meaning (“clip-clop sandals”, “tapped rat tat tat”, “creak”). Often reinforced by alliteration, as in “bird bones...beds, stretched not on boards...”.</p> <p>Poem has clear sense of uncle’s world. In response to customers’ preference, he not only shows his craft, but also (like the poet) produces a work of art. His furniture is well made but designed for use, but people do not want it. Reader sees contrast between craftsmanship no-one values and popular taste for inferior goods.</p>

Fiona Farrell: from *Passengers* – Charlotte O’Neil’s *Song*

Fiona Farrell writes as if she is Charlotte O’Neil, speaking to her former employer and for all domestic servants. Poem is about social class and its relation to personal value. The poem in fact quotes Mrs. C.F. Alexander’s hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, in lines 13 and 14.

Poem is loosely a **ballad** with strong rhymes at ends of lines. Poet uses only familiar everyday words, which the **real** Charlotte could have said, so poem is authentic.

Poem uses **contrast** (*antithesis*), between the life of servant and employer: “**You** dined at eight/and slept till late./**I** emptied your chamber pot.” Farrell also uses **rhetorical** (persuasive) device of lists (usually of three): “I’ve cleaned your plate/and I’ve cleaned your house/and I’ve cleaned the clothes you wore”. She makes this pattern clearer by repeating the verb “cleaned”.

Poem attacks English class-system. Farrell ridicules those who cannot do simple things like open their own doors. Lines 13 and 14 refer to *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (“The rich man in his castle/The poor man at his gate/God made them high or lowly/And ordered their estate”). The hymn claims that God fixes our status and we should accept it. Argument that the poor deserve to have little breaks down, when they find a way to earn more – by going abroad, where hard work can lead to prosperity.

Arun Kolatkar: *An Old Woman*

Meeting of different cultures: tourist comes from modern world, and thinks he can dispose of this irritating beggar. But when she speaks she casts a spell, and shows him who is really in control. Woman **rooted** in where she lives – identified with sky and hills, and draws power from them. Things not what they seem: woman has more power than the poet suspects.

Poem has a formal structure in triplets (three-line stanzas). Occasional half rhymes (“coin”/ “shrine”, “on”/ “skin”) and full rhyme to mark a pause: (“crone”/ “alone”). Lines are short but always with pattern of two stressed syllables, apart from in the final line, where the single stress brings the poem to a full stop. Most words monosyllables.

Poem refers to old woman with third-person pronoun “she” and tourist with second-person pronoun, “you”. This makes poem like an account of real experience, putting reader in tourist’s place.

Coin which woman begs at the start of the poem, gives the ending its enduring image. Tourist’s weakness is suggested in metaphor of “small change”, while “in her hand” indicates that woman has power over him. Her power also suggested by appearance – her eyes are “bullet holes”, dark spaces with nothing behind. “Cracks” (lines) in her face turn into cracks in sky, hills and temples, while the old woman remains invulnerable (“shatter-proof”). “Crone” suggests the magical power of the old woman.

Grace Nichols: *Hurricane Hits England*

Central image in this poem not poet’s invention but drawn from experience. Hurricanes really **do** bring Caribbean to Britain – retrace poet’s own journey from the west, and recall her origins.

Poem begins in the third person (note the pronouns “her” and “she”) but changes to a first-person view as poet speaks of herself, and to the tropical winds. Speaker could be anyone who has made this journey, but Nichols probably speaks as herself. Mostly free verse: no rhyme scheme, stanzas vary in length.

Note vocabulary: *patois* “Huracan”; gods (“Oya”, “Shango”) of Yoruba tribe; connection to modern world, through Hurricane Hattie; four elements earth, air (wind), fire (lightning) and water.

Note images and symbols from nature, which explain poet’s relationship to the Caribbean and to England. Wind is like a ship in having travelled across the ocean. Felled trees like “whales”. The “ancestral spectre” suggests worship of spirits of ancestors.

Contrasts power of lightning with electricity generated by man. Fallen trees like poet, uprooted from home. Conclusion: England and Caribbean are part of the same planet.

Tatamkhulu Afrika: *Nothing’s Changed*

Depicts society where rich and poor are divided. Poet looks at attempts to change the *apartheid* system, and shows how they make no real difference.

The “up-market” inn is meant for white customers only. No sign shows this but black people, being poor, not allowed past guard. “Whites only inn” contrasted with “working man’s café”: no tablecloth and nowhere to wash hands. Contrast: smart inn “squats” amid “grass and weeds”.

Most important image is “glass”. It is symbol of divisions of colour and class. Afrika sees himself as a “boy again”, who has left imprint on glass. He wants to break glass. Symbolic: he wants to break down system, which divides people in South Africa.

Title of the poem: not just that things haven’t changed, but disappointment that **expected** change has not happened. Poet assumes reader knows South Africa, referring to places, plants and local food. Poem is obviously about unfairness of country where “Nothing’s changed”, but could also apply to other countries where the common people want social justice.

Comparing the poems – 1

Subjects and themes: Expect tasks that invite you to write about two (or more) poems with the same theme or subject. In this collection there are many poems about **identity**, **who** people are and **what** they are like. Some poems are about **language**, how people talk. Others are about **where** they live and where they (or their ancestors) have come from. In some poems, the idea of **travel**, often a sea journey, is present.

The poems also look at **social class** and **poverty**, contrasting the developed western world with developing countries. Make sure you know which poems have particular themes and subjects.

Comparing the poems – 2

You may be asked simply to choose two or more poems that tell you something about **other cultures and traditions** or which you **enjoy**. Choose poems where what you have to say relates to people’s way of life spiritually, personally and materially, or in other ways you can think of. Whatever the task you are set, make **some** comment about the **cultures** or **traditions** shown in poems. Compare poems **to each other**. You may also make comparisons **within** a particular poem. Comment on the **forms** of poems and writers’ **techniques**. Make a judgement: say what you enjoy about poems. Don’t go over the top: give your honest opinion.