

# LONDON

## Poems on the Underground



#LondonIsOpen [tfl.gov.uk/poems](http://tfl.gov.uk/poems)



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## FOREWORD

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For thirty years,  
Poems on the Underground has shown  
powerful, amusing and insightful poems  
on Tube trains, allowing small moments of  
reflection as we travel round the city.

Responding to the call that London Is  
Open, this collection of poems celebrates  
the diversity and creativity that makes  
London unique – not just today but  
throughout our history. I launched this  
important campaign to show that London  
is open to people, ideas and businesses  
following the EU referendum, and I am  
delighted to see this theme explored  
through poetry.

**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London

We hope readers who have met these  
poems on the Tube will enjoy them as they  
return to the printed page. We are grateful  
to Transport for London, Arts Council  
England and the British Council for  
enabling us to produce and distribute free  
copies of this booklet.

**The Editors**  
London, 2016

## COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE SEPTEMBER 3, 1802

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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!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

## LONDON FIELDS

---

Evening falls between the trees  
The drumming for Ghana fills the leaves

The wicket falls  
High fives all round  
Conkers shining in their nests  
Mr Softee pulls away  
She makes love to her mobile  
So happy he's called

Here a plane tree  
Higher than a warehouse  
Thicker than a rubbish bin  
Stronger than a promise  
Older than a Town hall

Evening falls between the trees  
The drumming for Ghana fills the leaves

MICHAEL ROSEN

## CHILLING OUT BESIDE THE THAMES

---

Summer come, mi chill-out beside the Thames.  
Spend a little time with weeping willow.  
Check if dem Trafalgar pigeon still salute  
old one-eyed one-armed Lord Horatio.

Mi treat mi gaze to Gothic cathedral  
Yet mi cyant forget how spider spiral  
Is ladder aspiring to eternal truth . . .  
Trickster Nansi spinning from Shakespeare sky.

Sudden so, mi decide to play tourist:  
Tower of London high-up on mi list.  
Who show up but Anne Boleyn with no head on  
And headless Raleigh gazing towards Devon.

Jesus lawd, history shadow so bloody.  
A-time fo summer break with strawberry.

JOHN AGARD

### NO. 3 from USES FOR THE THAMES

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The test was to dip  
the needles into the dark  
of the swallowing mirror

and by pulling to row  
the weight of your own small self  
through the silvery jam of its surface

trailing behind in your passing  
your very own tale, knitted  
*extempore* from light

and then to lift them,  
feathered, ready for flight.

JANE DRAYCOTT

### A TROJAN HORSE IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE

---

We stood in Trafalgar Square completely  
covered  
in pigeons but looking all too pleased to find  
such wholehearted acceptance. We were the  
boys  
of the awkward squad, growing at an angle.  
Occasionally perhaps one of us shivered  
in the sheer tide of her, in the vast mind  
of street-maps it took an alien to untangle,  
as if she were not one but several Troys.

GEORGE SZIRTES

## IN THE HEART OF HACKNEY

---

Behold, a swan. Ten houseboats on the Lee.  
A cyclist on the towpath. Gentle rain.  
A pigeon in a white apple-blossoming tree.  
And through the Marsh the rumble of a  
train.

Two courting geese waddle on the bank  
Croaking. A man unties his boat.  
Police cars howl and whoop. And vast and  
blank  
The rain cloud of the sky is trampled  
underfoot.

Behold, a dove. And in Bomb Crater Pond  
Fat frogs ignore the rain.  
Each trembling rush signals like a wand  
Earthing the magic of London once again.

In the heart of Hackney, five miles from  
Kentish Town,  
By Lammas Lands the reed beds are glowing  
rich and brown.

SEBASTIAN BARKER

## from AUTUMN JOURNAL

---

September has come, it is *hers*  
Whose vitality leaps in the autumn,  
Whose nature prefers  
Trees without leaves and a fire in the fire-  
place;  
So I give her this month and the next  
Though the whole of my year should be hers  
who has rendered already  
So many of its days intolerable or perplexed  
But so many more so happy;  
Who has left a scent on my life, and left my  
walls  
Dancing over and over with her shadow,  
Whose hair is twined in all my waterfalls  
And all of London littered with remembered  
kisses.

LOUIS MACNEICE

## OUR TOWN WITH THE WHOLE OF INDIA

---

Our town in England with the whole of India  
sundering  
out of its temples, mandirs and mosques for the  
customised  
streets. Our parade, clad in cloak-orange with  
banners  
and tridents, chanting from station to station  
for Vasaikhi  
over Easter. Our full moon madness for Eidh  
with free  
pavement tandooris and legless dancing to  
boostered  
cars. Our Guy Fawkes' Diwali – a kingdom of  
rockets  
for the Odysseus-trials of Rama who arrowed  
the jungle  
foe to re-palace the Penelope-faith of his Sita.

DALJIT NAGRA

## LONDONER

---

Scarcely two hours back in the country  
and I'm shopping in East Finchley High Road  
in a cotton skirt, a cardigan, jandals --  
or flipflops as people call them here,  
where February's winter. Aren't I cold?  
The neighbours in their overcoats are smiling  
at my smiles and not at my bare toes:  
they know me here.

I hardly know myself,  
yet. It takes me until Monday evening,  
walking from the office after dark  
to Westminster Bridge. It's cold, it's foggy,  
the traffic's as abominable as ever,  
and there across the Thames is County Hall,  
that uninspired stone body, floodlit.  
It makes me laugh. In fact, it makes me sing.

FLEUR ADCOCK

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