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
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
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
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
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
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
September has come, it is hers
Whose vitality leaps in the autumn,
Whose nature prefers
Trees without leaves and a fire in the fireplace;
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

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
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
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
We thank poets and publishers for permission to reprint the following poems in copyright:


**John Agard**: ‘Chilling Out Beside the Thames’ from *Alternative Anthem: Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe 2009)

**Sebastian Barker**: ‘In the Heart of Hackney’ from *Damnatio Memoriae: Erased from Memory* (Enitharmon 2004)

**Jane Draycott**: ‘No. 3 from Uses for the Thames’ from *The Night Tree* (Carcanet 2004)

**Louis MacNeice**: ‘from Autumn Journal’ from *Collected Poems of Louis MacNiece* (Faber 2007)

**Daljit Nagra**: ‘Our Town with the Whole of India’ from *Look We Have Coming to Dover!* (Faber 2007)

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