

Redbrick Writers

National Poetry Day 2024

**Poems inspired by the Victoria
Gallery and Museum**

**Poems suggested by the theme of
'Counting'**

The Yellow Wallpaper

voyeurs breathe life into old paintings
their shared presence in artificially air-vented spaces
low-lit and cooled down to slow the decay
the mind kept moving by art's raised questions
discourse doesn't undo but slows down the ticking

foot traffic aids preservation
encourages conservation
keeping paintings alive is mutually beneficial

though dust settles into yellow crevices anyway
cracks that were once gold dulling the shine of something once precious
but how does dust settle on the living

is it just me or are the frames getting bigger
more ornate
show-stoppingly beautiful
yet never drawing attention from its centre

the closer to the intertwining patterns I get
the more legs they grow
long bulging bodies winding into themselves
moving slowly
nothing more than a quiver

the bug-like creatures
more wood than gold lift their gild
but the dust is never disturbed
they do not seek to glisten or glitter
never moving up nor down
but in and out

no

just in

Georgina Tyson

Hippo

Put some respects upon the name of the hippopotamus
Okay, so it means water horse which makes
No sense, but even so
We see bulbous faces
Water spouting noses
Twitching ears and we
Underestimate
Fifteen hundred Ks
Of muscle and tusk
And an attitude
That makes Sun readers
Seem easy going
We have more respect
For the crocodile
And his doubtful grin
But to a hippo
A croc is little more
Than an aggressive
Piece of celery
So respect upon
Hippopotamus
A testament to
Nature's might and poor
Greek naming convention

Matt Scully

Creatures of the Nile

Entering another world,

It takes courage to step through this darkened doorway.

A straight-backed feline guards this entrance.

A foreboding look from blind eyes, sparkling with the ghosts of jewels.

Travelling back centuries in time and space, where Gods ruled.

Awakened here in the blue of lapis lazuli and the sparkling gold of desert sands, luminous beyond compare, when Ra rises.

I feel at home here, in the heat, a lion strolling through centuries of daily paraphernalia, all is decorated with the flora and fauna of their time.

Fish, crocodiles, birds, antelope, hippos. I spy bandages inscribed with ancient scriptures to ease this mummy's passing on to the final weigh in where their gods sit in judgement. Magic spells, scarabs, scriptures, all to counteract any evil, or misdeeds done over a lifetime, guaranteeing a smooth entrance into the afterlife and ultimately the field of wheat, where life does not end but begins anew.

Julia Price

Ra rises

As tendrils of white mist
Weave their way through
The reeds and grasses of the Nile
Golden desert sands
Glow and twinkle
Shades of gold
The distant horizon
Shimmers with heat waves
Fooling the eye
Ra burns and punishes
The Nile sparkles like diamonds
Bringer of life
And death
To all who choose to abide here.

Julia Price

Luxury or Limitation?

I am adored in Egypt, worth my weight in gold,
Like cat goddess Bastet – or so I am told.
I'm pampered and spoilt and fed like a Queen,
Dressed in a necklace of sparkling green.
They've named me Cleo, I'm long and sleek,
I have a bed of linen and beautiful silk,
Where I can lie in luxury and sleep for hours,
Dreaming of my supposed magical powers!
To own a cat brings good luck to the house –
Not even under pressure to catch a mouse!
But I'd have a go if it was desired,
Then my hunting prowess would be admired.
However – after years of Queen *this* and Goddess *that* -
I really wish I could just be a *cat*.
Have some adventures far and wide –
Before I end up mummified!.

Brenda Roberts

Sacred ratio

(Based on an ivory and slate necklace in the Creatures of the Nile exhibition at the Victoria Gallery & Museum)

I tried to pierce your secret,
immortal and transcendental;

Three, the first hint;
Sixteen, after much toil.

In a bracelet I hid you,
ivory and slate.

Three, to-start my count,
Sixteen, hard and dark.

But in plain sight you stood,

Ra, golden God;
Iris, rounded beauty;
Khonsu, white-light God.

And then I saw:

Three when staring at the void;
Fourteen, under the shining white light;
Sixteen, the night's darkest hour.

Pi, your sacred ratio.

Pi, Ra among us.

Manuel F. Ramirez

How often do we think of the Roman Empire?

*(Based on a standing clock with Roman numerals at the Victoria Gallery
& Museum)*

Numbers marching forward and backward;

Columns to sustain such splendour;

Law to keep-us from fighting.

An emperor to rule-us all;

Aqueducts to channel our might;

Strategy to subject the other.

There, blood spilt for riches;

Here, blood spilt for fun.

This is the Roman Empire.

But not Macedonian or Egyptian?

Nor Babylonian or Akkadian?

Is this the darkest side of humanity?

The symbiosis of wonder and bestiality?

Maybe time will tell?

Manuel F. Ramirez

I am Herne

Yesterday – crow squatted
on my left shoulder, spoke
to me with feathers, beak and claws
as I strolled through fields and meadows.
Grass; pearled with dew, wet the edge of my cloak
Where people. (Crow named them ‘serfs’)
backs bent, faces to the soil as they
tilled and sowed the clod.
They knew me then, crumbled me in their hands,
gathered me in their arms and took me
into their simple dwellings,
and I loved them.

Today - crow hopped
to the antlered crown
on my head, his black wings shade
my gaze as I stride into the present.
People till the land with machines,
backs un-crooked.
Mockery fills their hearts, they hurt me
with disrespect, discard me as
su-per-sti-tion. They have books,
art, and educated converse.
I do not love them.

Tomorrow – crow will fly
to my right shoulder.
A black stone shall fall from his eye.
And he will feel lighter
as I soar through the last canopy
of treetops to the mountains.
Machines will till people's minds,
absorb them into fake realities.
And their limbs will atrophy,
distant from the land.
I will be forgotten,
unloved, and
I will leave them.

Paula Frew

Nine Point Eight

Sunrise: A tepid pink
The first twinge
I murmur
a second twinge
I whimper
then another and another
I move this way, that way
like Rilke's Panther.

It's time
you squeeze my hand
I strap on my seatbelt

Fluorescent lights, starched words
how many centimetres
how long between...
between!
between pains
It's one long gush
there is no between

Braxton Hicks
my pupils dilate
you squeeze my hand
I strap on my seatbelt
the midnight moon carries us home.

Sunrise: A watery pink
I inch my way forward
clutching
the doorframe, the banister, the table
I babble
to the kitchen sink
then do it all again.
It might be raining, when the moon returns.

Sunrise: A washed out pink
I howl like a baby wolf
you squeeze my hand
I strap on my seatbelt.

Fluorescent lights, soft shoes
I puff and pant
you strap on the gas
I sock you in the face – but miss
your patience insists
I breathe – momentary relief
I push – don't push
you squeeze my hand
It's a boy.

Annette Mackinnon

Lost Count

I hear Spanish words that have no meaning:
the song in their arrangement; the simple beat of nothing but sound
I would never be so glad as to not understand.
words I have heard, on my street, in my town
Words that are rocky with their lack of love
No pause between thoughts and speaking and hearing; intentions
Are fireworks without celebration

I do not want the sad, cheap rush of slogans
and flags,
Take them away so I can see who you are

I have lost count of all the different words
there are for hate,
so, I stay here instead,
And listen to foreign words that have no meaning.

Channy Das

Counting

Battered by the beat of mentally counting, counting.
Sullen seconds,
Minute minutes.
Indistinct days followed by worrying weeks,
Months meshed together.
The terrifying tic toc of the clock.
Losing count of the ways to please and placate.
Waiting, counting.
Counting, waiting.
Time seems to have slowly flown by
While miss counting on you.

Catherine Jewell-Davies

Acrostic

Could it get any more frustrating?
Only be waiting four minutes but due to
Unusual demand
None of our advisers can
Take your call.
It really cracks me up
Not going to bother
Going to stop counting my time wasted and hang up!

Carol Hurrell

10 Things that ...

1. T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Yes! I'm still on that.
2. Bring back bike bells, for scooters too; at least we'd know they're coming so can avoid being knocked over.
3. Pavement and zig zag parking by drivers who feel entitled to do it.
4. Drivers not indicating on back streets, pedestrians do also need to know which way you're turning.
5. Walking whilst on your mobile phone not paying attention to where you're walking.
6. Shop assistants not assisting because they're on their mobiles- whilst WORKING?! BAN THEM!
7. Our non-existent Springs should now be called Sprung because we won't be seeing another one now with global warming.
8. My upstairs neighbour's child running around for 3 hours a day. I admit, I cheered gleefully when I heard him run into a cupboard and fall. I laughed out loud then.
9. Any government that's been in power for the last 42 years. And finally...
10. Not being able to think of a poem about counting!

Julia Price

Discounting

We as a culture or obsessed with counting
Count your money
Count your woes
Count your blessings

You may claim, like Patrick McGoohan, that you are not a number
But there are plenty of numbers linked to who you are
Your height, your weight, how much is in your account
how much your house is worth

We're always measuring ourselves against others, always counting.

Of course there are those who don't count.
Whose opinions don't count
Who's vote doesn't count
Whose experience doesn't count
Whose pain doesn't count

Because this is how we count -
By discounting
I belong, you don't
I count, you don't

There are those whose numbers, whose counts, make them count more.

Four migrants die crossing the Channel
In July
One billionaire dies in the Mediterranean -
count how many headlines their way for each.

Status, same root word as statistics, another form of counting

The government didn't process any asylum applications so they had no
legal status
Britain - more discounts than a furniture outlet on a bank holiday.

And I really should have counted the syllables in these lines
But they couldn't be bothered
Thank God and T. S. Eliot for free verse.

Matt Scully

Triumph and disaster

(Based on the "Play of light" exhibition at the Victoria Gallery & Museum)

Light. My head spins.

Dark. Body feels heavy.

Light. Centrifugal forces. Dark.

Extend arm. Fail. Light.

Training kicks-in. Dark. Breath.

Count. Focus. One. Light.

Extend arm. Dark. Can't-reach-button!

Two. Light. Will I

fail the mission? Dark.

Three. I Can't! Humanity!

Light. Four. Try again.

Dark. Only an inch!

Light. Five. Spinning so-fast!

Light. Six. My wife.

Dark. My son. Light. Aaaargghh!

Cabin stabilised. Systems back

to normal... Target locked:

Alpha Centauri.

Manuel F. Ramirez

Measure

I used to set the oven to the hottest it would go
Faith in my own intuition
I'd know when it's done
Around the third time I've opened the door
By then colour communicates, cooked
It's not an exact science

Dried pasta is deceiving.
I know it swells in the pan
Immaculate, it doubles
Leftovers lay unstained in the fridge
Outstaying their welcome

Baking cakes taught me true grit.
I pretend to favour weights over cups
Though the numbers overwhelm me
But approximations wreak havoc

Georgina Tyson

The Signs

Her eyes wrestled in an aging face
alive with power from that inner place.
Her limbs bent, stiff, oh they did rage
as she fought against nature's wicked cage.

For she had a day maybe two
To do the things she had to do.

Turning her cards with specific hand:
tower, judgement, devil, death were found
in several readings of varying pattern.
The woman knew the inevitable would happen.

She sat on a stool and licked a black thread
Four knots she wrought, head to head.
Un, dau, tri, pedwar
Un, dau, tri, pedwar
The thread crackled on the open fire
She sought the time
She sought the space
She read the skies
where she would take her place.
The fourth quarter which brings the snow
And the sleep of gaef, gaef
is when she'd go.

Paula Frew