

In Mrs Tilscher's Class by Carol Ann Duffy

You could travel up the Blue Nile
with your finger, tracing the route
while Mrs Tilscher chanted the scenery
"Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswan".
That for an hour, then a skittle of milk
and the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust.
A window opened with a long pole.
The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.

This was better than home. Enthralling books.
The classroom glowed like a sweetshop.
Sugar paper. Coloured shapes. Brady and Hindley
faded, like a faint uneasy smudge of a mistake.
Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found
she'd left a good gold star by your name.
The scent of a pencil, slowly, carefully, shaved.
A xylophone's nonsense heard from another form.

Over the Easter term, the inky tadpoles changed
from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs
hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce,
followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking
away from the lunch queue. A rough boy
told you how you were born. You kicked him, but
stared at your parents, appalled, when you got
back home.

That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.
A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot,
fractious under the heavy sexy sky. You asked her
how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled,
then turned away. Reports were handed out.
You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown,
As the sky split open into a thunderstorm.

Remains by Simon Armitage

On another occasion, we got sent out
to tackle looters raiding a bank.
And one of them legs it up the road,
probably armed, possibly not.
Well myself and somebody else and somebody else
are all of the same mind,
so all three of us open fire.
Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear
I see every round as it rips through his life –
I see broad daylight on the other side.
So we've hit this looter a dozen times
and he's there on the ground, sort of inside out,
pain itself, the image of agony.
One of my mates goes by
and tosses his guts back into his body.
Then he's carted off in the back of a lorry.
End of story, except not really.
His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on
patrol I walk right over it week after week.
Then I'm home on leave. But I blink
and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.
Sleep, and he's probably armed, and possibly not.
Dream, and he's torn apart by a dozen rounds.
And the drink and the drugs won't flush him out –
he's here in my head when I close my eyes,
dug in behind enemy lines,
not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned,
sand-smothered land
or six-feet-under in desert sand,
but near to the knuckle, here and now,
his bloody life in my bloody hands.

The Destruction of Sennacherib by Lord Byron

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the
sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is
green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath
blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the
blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever
grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there roll'd not the breath of his
pride:
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the
sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

The Pig - Poem by Roald Dahl

In England once there lived a big
 And wonderfully clever pig.
 To everybody it was plain
 That Piggy had a massive brain.
 He worked out sums inside his head,
 There was no book he hadn't read.
 He knew what made an airplane fly,
 He knew how engines worked and why.
 He knew all this, but in the end
 One question drove him round the bend:
 He simply couldn't puzzle out
 What LIFE was really all about.
 What was the reason for his birth?
 Why was he placed upon this earth?
 His giant brain went round and round.
 Alas, no answer could be found.
 Till suddenly one wondrous night.
 All in a flash he saw the light.
 He jumped up like a ballet dancer
 And yelled, 'By gum, I've got the answer! '
 'They want my bacon slice by slice
 'To sell at a tremendous price!
 'They want my tender juicy chops
 'To put in all the butcher's shops!
 'They want my pork to make a roast
 'And that's the part'll cost the most!
 'They want my sausages in strings!
 'They even want my chitterlings!
 'The butcher's shop! The carving knife!
 'That is the reason for my life! '
 Such thoughts as these are not designed
 To give a pig great peace of mind.
 Next morning, in comes Farmer Bland,
 A pail of pigswill in his hand,

And piggy with a mighty roar,
 Bashes the farmer to the floor...
 Now comes the rather grisly bit
 So let's not make too much of it,
 Except that you must understand
 That Piggy did eat Farmer Bland,
 He ate him up from head to toe,
 Chewing the pieces nice and slow.
 It took an hour to reach the feet,
 Because there was so much to eat,
 And when he finished, Pig, of course,
 Felt absolutely no remorse.
 Slowly he scratched his brainy head
 And with a little smile he said,
 'I had a fairly powerful hunch
 'That he might have me for his lunch.
 'And so, because I feared the worst,
 'I thought I'd better eat him first.'