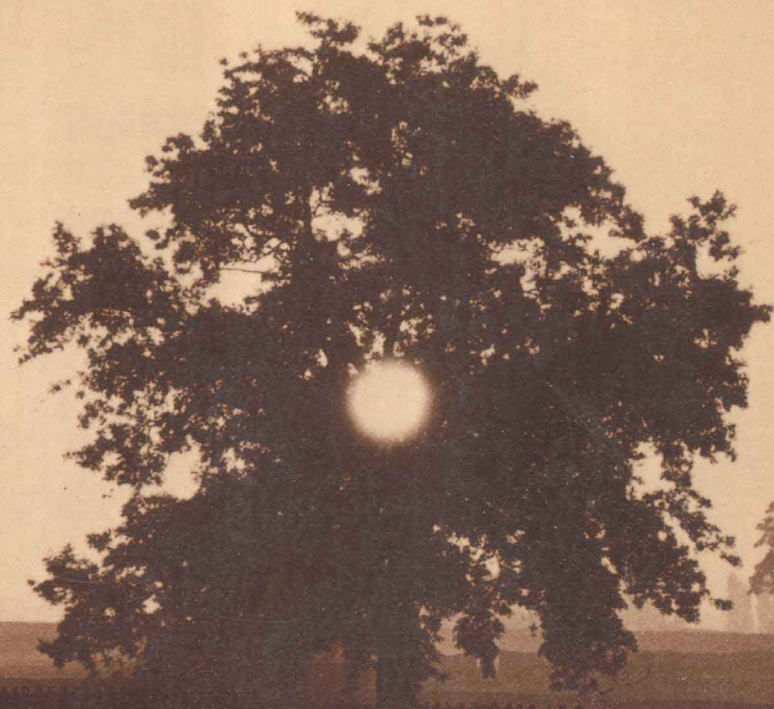


# Poem into Poem

Reading and writing poems with  
students of English

*Alan Maley and Sandra Moulding*

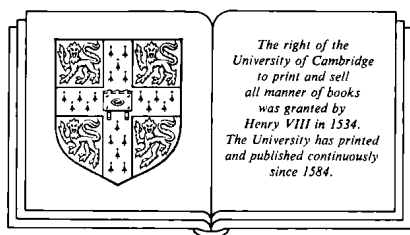


Cambridge University Press

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*Alan Maley and  
Sandra Moulding*



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*To*  
*Alan Duff*  
*poet and friend*

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# Thanks

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# To the student

This book will introduce you to some memorable poems in English and help you to understand them better. It will also suggest ways in which you can produce poems of your own.

Perhaps this kind of book raises some questions in your mind:

*Why use poetry to learn English?*

- The first answer is, ‘why not?’ Poetry is a special type of English, just as scientific or newspaper English are also special – in different ways. It deserves study as much as they do, perhaps more, since poetry is the type of English which touches our personal feelings most closely. And personal feelings are as important in a foreign language as they are in our own language.
- Poetry can also help us to assimilate the typical rhythms of a language. (That is why the poems in this book have been recorded.)
- What is more, poems are often very easy to remember. They stick in our minds without conscious effort. One reason for this is that they frequently repeat patterns of sound or words.
- The topics which poems talk about are in themselves interesting – and important. When we are learning a foreign language as an adult we need to have significant things to think and talk about. Poems offer this. They give us something worthwhile to discuss.

*All right, but why should we write, as well as read, poems?*

- The process of composing poems, especially if it is done in groups, leads to *real* discussion, about something that matters to you.
- It also allows you to try out different ways of saying the same thing. And to make different combinations of words and sentences. This process of ‘playing’ with language is important in developing your confidence in using it.
- It gives you a purpose in writing, and allows you to bring in your personal feelings and ideas. Many other types of writing in a foreign language do not encourage this.

*But won't it be too difficult for me?*

The objective of this book is to make it as easy for you as possible. This is done in the following ways:

- Before you even start to read the poems, there are activities which help you 'tune in' to or become familiar with the topic of the unit.
- Any 'difficult' vocabulary in the poems is either explained or given special attention. You are also encouraged to use a dictionary wherever necessary.
- The aim of the activities is to help you understand the overall meaning of the poems. You do not need to be a literature specialist.
- Much of the language you will need for writing the poems comes from recorded conversations or from earlier activities in the unit. You are not asked to make superhuman creative efforts.
- In most of the activities, you will be sharing information, opinions and ideas with a partner or in a group. In other words, you are not left alone with your problems.

*So what does a 'unit' look like?*

- First there is a section called *Warming up*. It prepares you for the theme of the poems which follow. You may be asked to do activities in connection with a picture, make notes on a recorded conversation, or perhaps read a brief prose passage. These activities all involve discussion with a partner or in groups.
- You will then listen to the first *Poem* as you read it. This is followed by activities aimed at helping you to understand it.
- The same procedure follows for the second *Poem* (and in Unit 1 for the third and fourth *Poems*).
- A section on *Writing* usually follows. This contains activities leading you to produce your own poems, usually in groups. This also involves discussion of your own and other groups' work.
- Finally there is a poem for you to read and listen to on your own, with no work attached – simply for your enjoyment.

► Means that the poem, prose extract or conversation is recorded on the cassette. (For copyright reasons not all the extracts are recorded.)

🔑 Means that you will find the answers in the key at the back of the book.

Enjoyment is the keynote of the book. We hope you will enjoy using it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

►      *The Language Tree*

Out of the language tree  
The leaves float down.  
Whirling, they criss and cross,  
Writing new patterns on the ground,  
Slowly coding this year's messages.

Below, the wadded strata  
From past years  
Distil and mature old meanings.

And down among the roots,  
Half-forgotten, skeletal memories  
Muted by the loam,  
Stir in their sleep,  
Mutter and moan.

And way above, twig ends,  
Bud within bud, dream  
Of meanings for next year,  
And the next, and the next.

Every year the same tree,  
Roughly the same shape and size.  
And every year a subtle  
Change of size and shape;  
A small surprise –  
A limited escape.

(Alan Maley)




# 1 Who is today?



'Days are where we live.' So it is very natural that people associate different days with different things.

## Warming up

►  1. Listen to the recording. You will hear a man and a woman talking about the colours they associate with the days of the week. Write the colours in the grid under *Man* or *Woman*.

	<i>Man</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>Why</i>
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

2. Now discuss your completed grid with a partner. Do you both have the same answers?

► 🔑 3. Now listen to the recording again. This time make brief notes in the grid on why the speakers have chosen these colours. Fill in *Why* in the grid.

4. Now write down the colour which *you* associate with each day, e.g. Monday – black

Tuesday – blue, etc.

Then compare your notes with your partner.

5. In groups of four try to make a poem which uses the association of each day. Each of you should first of all work on your own, writing out a sentence about the associations of each day, using the pattern ‘... day is ...’ (e.g. Monday is bad moods). Then compare your ideas as a group. Choose the best sentence for each day, and combine them into a poem.

Who is today?

Here is an example:

- ▶ Sunday is warm sheets  
Monday is drab streets  
Tuesday is all grey  
Wednesday is a tasteless day  
Thursday is thin lips  
Friday is fish and chips  
Saturday is sports, TV and friends –  
A pity that it ever ends!

When you have finished, compare your poem with one written by another group.

## Reading: Poems 1 and 2

1. Read this traditional rhyme about Solomon Grundy as you listen to the recording.

- ▶ *A Traditional Rhyme*

Solomon Grundy,  
Born on Monday,  
Christened on Tuesday,  
Married on Wednesday,  
Took ill on Thursday,  
Worse on Friday,  
Died on Saturday,  
Buried on Sunday –  
And that was the end  
Of Solomon Grundy.

2. Now compare it with this poem.

- ▶ *Solomon Grundy*

Solomon Grundy,  
Bored on Tuesday,  
Manic on Wednesday,  
Panic on Thursday,  
Drunk on Friday,  
Hung over on Saturday,  
Slept on Sunday,

Back to work on Monday –  
That's the life  
For Solomon Grundy.

(Martin Bell)

## Writing

When somebody copies the form of someone else's poem, often with a humorous intention, we call it a parody.

In pairs try to write your own simple parody of Solomon Grundy. Here is another example:

► Solomon Grundy,  
Happy on Sunday,  
Sad on Monday,  
Tired on Tuesday,  
Worried on Wednesday,  
Harrassed on Thursday,  
Exhausted on Friday,  
In bed on Saturday –  
What a life  
For Solomon Grundy!

When you have finished, compare your parody with one written by another pair.

## Reading: Poem 3

1. Read the following traditional rhyme as you listen to the recording. It describes the characteristics of people born on different days of the week.

► *A Traditional Rhyme*

Monday's Child is full of grace.  
Tuesday's Child is fair of face.  
Wednesday's Child is loving and giving.  
Thursday's Child works hard for a living.  
Friday's Child is full of woe.  
Saturday's Child has far to go.  
And the Child that's born on the Sabbath day,  
Is bonny and blithe and good and gay.

*Who is today?*

2. Discuss the rhyme with a partner. Do you agree with the descriptions? Which day of the week were you born on? Does the description fit you? Do you have a rhyme or saying in your language which is similar to this one?

## Writing

Work in groups of seven. Each person in a group is given one day of the week. You then write a sentence to describe the characteristics of people born on that day. For example:

Monday's Child is very bright.

When everyone has written a sentence, the group puts them together to form a poem. At this stage you may decide to change a few words to make it rhyme – but this is not essential. You may also find it easier if everyone is writing a sentence with the same structure. For example:

Monday's Child likes ...

or Monday's Child is good at ...

or Monday's Child has ..., etc.

When you have finished, compare your poem with another group.

## Reading: Poem 4

1. The poem *Days* treats each day of the week as if it were a person. First of all read it through, day by day, and check with a partner that you understand all the expressions the writer uses.

### ► *Days*

MONDAY

You'd better not try anything

just don't try anything

that's all.

You're all the same

you days.

Give you an inch ...

Well

I've got my eye on you

and I'm feeling light

fast  
and full of aggro  
so just watch it  
OK?

TUESDAY

Listen, Tuesday  
I'm sorry  
I wasn't very nice to you.  
It was *sweet* of you  
to give me all those stars  
when you said goodbye.  
They must have cost a fortune  
and they really were  
*just*  
what I've always wanted.

WEDNESDAY

Cracks, spills, burns, bills, broken cups, stains, wrong numbers,  
missed trains:  
you're doing it on purpose  
aren't you?  
Trying it on  
to see how far you can go.  
I swear to you  
if the phone rings again  
while I'm in the bath  
I'll pull it out  
and ram it down your throat.

THURSDAY

'A difficult day for Aries  
caution is advisable  
in business dealings  
setbacks possible  
in affairs of the heart.'  
Thursday, my friend  
if we've got to get  
through all these hours together  
we might as well do it  
with as little trouble  
as possible.  
You keep to your side of the horoscope  
and I'll keep to mine.

*Who is today?*

*FRIDAY*

Day like a shroud  
ten feet down  
black  
in an airless coffin  
you wrap me  
in my own  
clinging  
loathsome  
sticky skin.  
I scream  
and you laugh.

*SATURDAY*

Day  
oh day  
I love your perfume  
(you put on daffodils  
just for me)  
and your yellow eye  
sparkling  
and the sexy way  
you rub up  
against me  
day  
I love you.

*SUNDAY*

Sunday and I  
got drunk together  
and you know  
it turns out  
we went to the same school.  
He's a bit strange  
at first  
but actually  
he's not a bad chap  
when you get to know him  
old Sunday.

(Michael Swan)

2. Discuss each day with your partner. Do you agree with the way they are described?

## Writing

In pairs, use the following framework to write a similar poem. (Wherever there are dots . . . it means you should complete the line in your own way.)

### MONDAY

What an old rascal you are!

Don't think you . . . *can always bring a bad day,*

I'm watching . . . *to try and catch you out,*

So just . . . *be careful what you say!*

### TUESDAY

Well, I suppose I'll have to . . .

Tuesday, you're really not . . .

How do you expect me to . . .?

Sorry if I've offended you, but . . .

### WEDNESDAY

You're getting on my . . .

How do you think I can possibly . . .?

If you are . . ., I'll . . .

Just because . . ., you needn't

Think you can . . .

### THURSDAY

Who knows what . . . today?

Thursday, you have no special . . .

I just can't get excited . . .

Why don't you try to . . .?

### FRIDAY

You are so . . .

I can't stand the way you . . .

You fill me with . . .

I just can't wait . . .

### SATURDAY

This is what I've been . . .

You smell . . .

You taste . . .

You sound . . .

You feel . . .

How can I ever . . .?





*Who is today?*

*SUNDAY*

Sunday and I went ...

And do you know what happened?

Well ...

So I said to old Sunday,

'...'

And he said, '...'

Sometimes life feels really ...

When you have finished, compare your poem with another pair.

## Reading alone

These poems are to read on your own.



### *A Day in the Life of ...*

'It was a Sunday I met your father.

Midsummer it was, in the park.

I still remember his waistcoat

And the proud way he held his head.

I still can't think he's dead.

The Saturday we got married

It snowed all day. Freezing it was.

A white wedding

But a warm bedding.

Difficult to believe for you I know.

But we didn't always show

The things we felt.

It doesn't mean – oh never mind.

There isn't time.

You were born on a,

Let me see, a Monday.

Midnight it was. What a business!

You the first, and in a thunderstorm too.

Not like your sister –

A Tuesday in July,

Midday it was ...