**The Clown Punk**

Driving home through the shonky side of town,

three times out of ten you’ll see the town clown,

like a basket of washing that got up

and walked, towing a dog on a rope. But

don’t laugh: every pixel of that man’s skin

is shot through with indelible ink;

as he steps out at the traffic lights,

think what he’ll look like in thirty years’ time –

the deflated face and shrunken scalp

still daubed with the sad tattoos of high punk.

You kids in the back seat who wince and scream

when he slathers his daft mush on the windscreen,

remember the clown punk with his dyed brain,

then picture windscreen wipers, and let it rain.

SIMON ARMITAGE

**Ozymandias**

I met a traveller from an antique land

Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,

Half sunk, a shatter’d visage lies, whose frown

And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

Which yet survive, stamp’d on these lifeless things,

The hand that mock’d them and the heart that fed;

And on the pedestal these words appear:

‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

**Casehistory: Alison (head injury)**

*(She looks at her photograph)*

I would like to have known

My husband’s wife, my mother’s only daughter.

A bright girl she was.

Enmeshed in comforting

Fat, I wonder at her delicate angles.

Her autocratic knee

Like a Degas dancer’s

Adjusts to the observer with airy poise,

That now lugs me upstairs

Hardly. Her face, broken

By nothing sharper than smiles, holds in its smiles

What I have forgotten.

She knows my father’s dead,

And grieves for it, and smiles. She has digested

Mourning. Her smile shows it.

I, who need reminding

Every morning, shall never get over what

I do not remember.

Consistency matters.

I should like to keep faith with her lack of faith,

But forget her reasons.

Proud of this younger self,

I assert her achievements, her A levels,

Her job with a future.

Poor clever girl! I know,

For all my damaged brain, something she doesn’t:

I am her future.

A bright girl she was.

U. A. FANTHORPE

**Checking Out Me History**

Dem tell me

Dem tell me

Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history

Blind me to me own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat

dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat

But Toussaint L’Ouverture

no dem never tell me bout dat

*Toussaint*

*a slave*

*with vision*

*lick back*

*Napoleon*

*battalion*

*and first Black*

*Republic born*

*Toussaint de thorn*

*to de French*

*Toussaint de beacon*

*of de Haitian Revolution*

Dem tell me bout de man who discover de balloon

and de cow who jump over de moon

Dem tell me bout de dish ran away with de spoon

but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

*Nanny*

*see-far woman*

*of mountain dream*

*fire-woman struggle*

*hopeful stream*

*to freedom river*

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo

but dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu

Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492

but what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp

and how Robin Hood used to camp

Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul

but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

*From Jamaica*

*she travel far*

*to the Crimean War*

*she volunteer to go*

*and even when de British said no*

*she still brave the Russian snow*

*a healing star*

*among the wounded*

*a yellow sunrise*

*to the dying*

Dem tell me

Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me

But now I checking out me own history

I carving out me identity

JOHN AGARD

**The Laboratory**

**ANCIEN REGIME**
Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy--
Which is the poison to poison her, [prithee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prithee%22%20%5Co%20%22Prithee)?

He is with her; and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laughing, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them! -- I am here.

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder, -- I am not in haste!
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

That in the mortar -- you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly, -- is that poison too?

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree-basket!

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastille, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

Quick -- is it finished? The colour's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me--
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes, -- say, 'no!'
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall,
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

Not that I bid you spare her the pain!
Let death be felt and the proof remain;
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace--
He is sure to remember her dying face!

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee--
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it -- next moment I dance at the King's!

ROBERT BROWNING

**On A Portrait Of A Deaf Man**

The kind old face, the egg-shaped head,

The tie, discreetly loud,

The loosely fitting shooting clothes,

A closely fitting shroud.

He liked old city dining rooms,

Potatoes in their skin,

But now his mouth is wide to let

The London clay come in.

He took me on long silent walks

In country lanes when young.

He knew the names of ev'ry bird

But not the song it sung.

And when he could not hear me speak

He smiled and looked so wise

That now I do not like to think

Of maggots in his eyes.

He liked the rain-washed Cornish air

And smell of ploughed-up soil,

He liked a landscape big and bare

And painted it in oil.

But least of all he liked that place

Which hangs on Highgate Hill

Of soaked Carrara-covered earth

For Londoners to fill.

He would have liked to say goodbye,

Shake hands with many friends,

In Highgate now his finger-bones

Stick through his finger-ends.

You, God, who treat him thus and thus,

Say "Save his soul and pray."

You ask me to believe You and

I only see decay.

John Betjeman