

Home Fires

You taught me the art of fire making:
'Place scrunched balls of newspaper
in the hearth, position kindling wood on top
in criss-crossed 'tepee' fashion.
Ignite the paper at each corner.
When the flames catch, gently lay
on seasoned logs, one at a time.
If the fire smoulders, pump
the bellows from beneath,
too fierce - close a damper.'

I don't make fires now.
The bellows lie breathless in the attic,
their last remembered gasp
before the final fire's death.

Alphabets

His voice on the phone,
the cadence of 'alifs, baas, taas,'
and I am taken back to
date-palmed paths beside the Nile.
A first felucca trip -
him haggling with the boatman,
fricative 'kh', pharyngeal 'ayn'.

On board we eat a picnic
of flat bread, cheese and fruit.
I have my first Arabic lesson.
'Apple' - 'tif-a-har, tiffa-hah, too-fah-hah'.
He and the boatman
laughing at my English accent.

Later that day we sit beneath
temple pylons, shrouded
in their ancient shadows.
'Can you hear the voices of the pharaohs?'
His tongue a golden cartouche
sparked with hieroglyphic charm.

THE PK POETS

The PK Poets is a series of free to print poetry leaflets highlighting the poetry of a single poet. It is intended to be a sample introduction to the work of a poet.

The Poetry Kit is a free online resource for poets listing competitions, events, open floor events, online and print magazines. <https://www.poetrykit.org/>

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ABOUT Shirley Anne Cook

Shirley is a poet and author. Her poems have won or been placed in a number of competitions including the Plough Poetry Prize, Mslexia, Basil Bunting and Bridport. She has also had poems published in various anthologies and magazines. She is a three times winner of the Swanwick Writing School Poetry Prize, and she also won the Swanwick Writing for Children Prize. Her first poetry collection, 'Turning the Map Over,' is available to purchase on Amazon.

Shirley also writes books for children which are published under the name Shirley Harber. Recently, she published her first non-fiction book, Broadfield House: History and Memories.

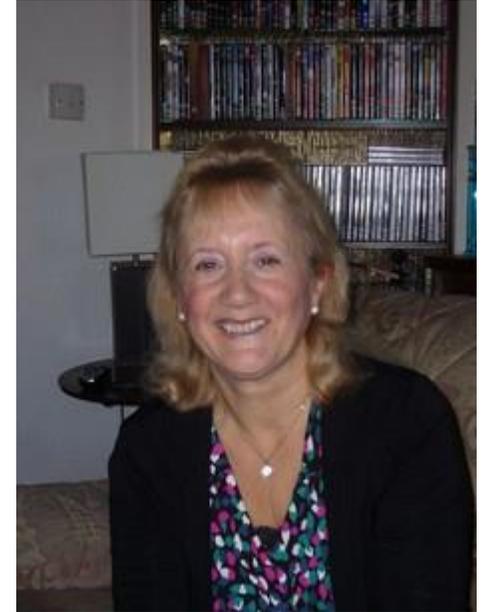
Shirley was a primary school teacher in the UK and Egypt, where she lived for a while. She now resides in Denham Buckinghamshire.

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For further details, to make comment, or to contact the poet or the publisher please email; info@poetrykit.org

THE PK POETS SECOND SERIES

#2 Shirley Anne Cook



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Heirloom

When I look at the clock in the hall
I'm reminded of my father:

the daily ritual winding,
precise correction of the hands

and him saying to me,
'This will be yours when I'm gone.'

Now I wind the clock
and say to my son.

'One day when I'm gone
this will be yours.'

Nudging clouds

The smell of rope and I am
sitting on the swing
beneath the apple tree,
white-socked legs dangling.
It's spring and blossom
snows onto my green school dress.

I twist round and round
until the ropes are a plait of my hair,
then unwind to a zoetrope world -
house, tree, washing, house, tree, washing,
and my mother in her paisley patterned apron
there...there...there...

When I come to a halt
she gently pushes me to and fro.
I stretch legs back and forth, rise higher.
I can see the cows in the field,
the new town houses.

Higher still I rise until I'm nudging clouds.
I glance down, my mother's
apron strings snake away.

Echoes

The saddest sounds I heard
as a child: my father's
finger stroking the rim
of his whisky glass

round and round
and my mother's
retreating footsteps
on the gravel path.

Sir

The first Spanish lesson
of a new term and there you were,

brown hair flopping
over gold-rimmed glasses -

straight out of university.
Each day I searched for you

to catch a glimpse, a smile.
I wrote your name

on my exercise books,
embellished it with hearts

and arrows. When the others
had gone, you taught me about

Lorca's imagery. I still write
your name on steamy windows

and in dust on shelves.

Turning the map over

So I take the Piccadilly line through
dew-laden fields,
everywhere early morning
bird call, no garbled guard call.
A solitary rabbit sits on the platform,
rumbles a warning then scurries
down the subway.

Following a buttercup path I head
to the next stop, the woodland copse.
I breathe in bluebell and wet earth smells-
no nine to five body smells.
Bracken brushes my legs,
a bramble wants to walk with me.
I wander aimlessly. I've no sense
of direction and I'm lost
in all my senses.

I come to the lake.
No-one is breathing
down my neck,
treading on my feet.
I take a seat.
A king-fisher hovers over the water,
a drake says good morning (that's a first)
A swan unfolds its newspaper,
but there's not a trace of print in sight.

The sun is climbing through the trees,
it drenches me in light.
I'm glad I caught
this morning's kingdom
and not the eight thirty to Earl's Court.
I walk to the end of the line,
and thank God I turned the map over.