

ESSAY

POETRY

Football and other games in Shakespeare

Md. SHAFIQUIL ISLAM

The game of football was a nasty sport in England during Shakespeare's era. It is more appropriate to say football was considered a lower-class diversion in Shakespeare's time. By the early 17th century the kings of England were still trying to rid the land of football. James I outlawed the game from his royal court because it was, 'meeter for lameing than making able the user thereof', i.e., the game ended with too many injuries.

The reflection of contemporary animosity towards football is beautifully portrayed in the works of Shakespeare too. At least we find two references to football in his plays. Because all cultures have had various forms of recreation, people of Shakespeare's time were no different. Many of their sports and games were similar to the ones we play today; others are no longer played. Though we begin with football, we will make references to various sports in the works of Shakespeare.

References to the game of football became more and more widespread in England at the time. Shakespeare referred to football in King Lear (Act I, Scene IV) when Kent taunts Oswald, a steward to Goneril, by calling him a 'base football player'.

In Comedy of Errors (1592, Act II) Shakespeare's humorous dialogues on football read:

Adriana: Hence, prating peasant! Fetch thy master home.
Dromio of Ephesus: Am I so round with you as you with me, That like a football you do spurn me thus?
You spurn me hence, and he will spurn me hither:
If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.

Apart from football, the Bard has made interesting and thought provoking references to sports like billiards, rugby, tennis, bowling balls, backgammon set, tennis balls, croquet set, bear-baiting, archery, chess, wrestling, dice game, card game, board game, jousting, hunting and falconry.

In Hamlet's famous "to be, or not to be" soliloquy, the Prince of Denmark ponders, "To die, to sleep; / To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub" referring to a game called bowling. Hamlet's procrastination whether to kill or not to kill himself is vividly drawn here with the image of 'rub' which is an obstacle that disrupts the path of the ball in bowling.

Shakespeare employs imagery that not only evokes a picture but also carries meaning and relevance. Before King Henry V leads his army into France to reclaim the French throne, the French Dauphin sends a peculiarly insulting gift to Henry with the implication that he is more fit for games than kingship. Henry maintains his composure after receiving the insulting memento but prophetically pronounces the grave consequences that will come upon France after their final defeat at the battle of Agincourt.

King Henry V enquires about the gift and the dialogue follows:



Henry: What treasure, uncle?
Exeter: Tennis balls, my liege.
Henry: When we have matched our rackets to these balls / We will in France, by God's grace, play a set / Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard.

In Measure for Measure (1.2.190), Lucio mentions the game of tick-tack in a sexually suggestive way. Tick-tack, in Shakespeare's time, most resembled the game named backgammon. Scored by means of pegs set into the holes, the game lends itself easily to a comparison with sexual intercourse, the predominant theme of the play.

Another popular game in Shakespeare's time called loggats involved throwing shaped pieces of wood at a stake in the

ground. Hamlet mentioned this game in the grave digging scene.

In As You Like It, we find a wrestling match with a highly regarded wrestler named Charles, who is however defeated by Orlando.

Primero refers to card game played during Shakespeare's days. In The Merry Wives of Windsor (4, 5), Falstaff says, "I never prospered / Since I forswore myself at Primero. It is also the game Shakespeare has Henry VIII and the Duke of Suffolk play in Henry VIII, as they await the birth of Anne Boleyn's child, the future Queen Elizabeth I.

Mark Antony was fond of women as well as games and sports. Brutus describes Antony as one who "is given to sports, wildness and much company" in Julius Caesar (2.1.89). In Antony and Cleopatra, Octavius says, "From Alexandria / This is our news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revels" (1.4.4).

Billiards, a variation of the game known to us today as billiards, is mentioned in Antony and Cleopatra. Pining for her absent Antony, Cleopatra suggests playing billiards with Charmian (2.5.3).

A supposedly innocent fencing match turns murderous at the end of Hamlet. King Claudius and Laertes plot to murder Hamlet and make it seem as if it were a fencing accident. However, their plan is foiled, and virtually all characters of note who gathered to enjoy fencing end up dead.

Rugby is a character in Shakespeare's play, The Merry Wives of Windsor. Although it really has nothing to do with sport other than his name, John Rugby is the servant of the foolish Dr. Caius.

In a number of Shakespeare's plays, the Bard makes references to masques, a special type of dramatic entertainment that was performed at court and involved elaborate scenery and spectacle. In A Midsummer Night's Dream (5.1.39), Duke Theseus says, "What abridgement have you for this evening? / What masque? How shall we beguile / The lazy time, if not with some delight?"

Shakespeare uses sports in his themes not for sports alone. In addition to serving the trend of his time, he refers to sports which border on reality, sometimes heightening the tragic note in a play. In King Lear, Gloucester is hoodwinked by his bastard son Edmund. It leads to his losing both of his eyes and unfortunate banishment of his legal and loyal son Edgar. After losing eyesight, he philosophizes on the action of divinity, "As flies to the wanton boys, are we to the gods / They kill us for their sport."

It is a cliché to say Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist. He deals with imperial themes but he makes use of all these otherwise trifling games so artistically that they fit in his great design to impart comic relief on one hand; and on the other they also meaningfully define a philosophy of life.

Md Shafiqul Islam, a senior civil servant, studied English literature at Dhaka University.

NON-FICTION

TANVEERUL HAQUE

Here I was munching away at my plate of French fries and contemplating the juicy looking hot dog in front of me while enjoying reading William Dalrymple's collection of real life stories *Nine Lives* at the Chittagong Club bakery when in walks my good friend Capt. Inamur Rahim in Friday pyjama/panjabi. His face lights up when he sees me as does mine and we embrace in a bear hug. Capt. Inam is a ship's captain, a Master Mariner who was once a senior bureaucrat with the government. Our acquaintance goes back two and a half decades. He is retired and I know he is financially well off, living in his own nice apartment on the same high rise building where we have also bought commercial space to house our offices, modified to accommodate two bedrooms where we stay while in Chittagong. We both have married daughters and his son has just graduated from a private university in Dhaka; my son graduated in 2007 from University of California, Irvine, and works for Western Digital on an H1B visa that he won in a lottery. Our son married in December 2009 and Capt. Inam is looking for a suitable bride for his son.

Inam Bhai looked over Dalrymple's book and wondered aloud where I got the time to indulge in the pleasure of reading. I retorted he was the retired guy and thus had all the time in the world to read books whereas I had to scrounge for scraps of time to squeeze in my reading! I said,

Retired bliss

"You are the retired guy with loads of time on your hands. I wonder when I'm going to have the luxury of retiring." "Count your blessings," he said. "Don't even think of retiring, even if you have all the money in the world." My curiosity was piqued, as I have lately been hearing such things from a lot of my retired friends. So I egged him on to tell me what bothered him and why on God's earth the joy of having nothing to do was not worth it! For starters he said it's the wife. I immediately looked furtively over my shoulder to see if any ladies were around, fortunately none. Then turned my expression into one of incredulity as I knew his *begum*, who was a rather nice person actually, good looking too! "Well, so what's with *bhabhi*?" He brought his voice down a shade: "That's the crux of the matter. Now that I'm at home all the time, she's always picking on me." "Ah!" I said. I know the feeling my wife too doesn't let go of an opportunity to snap at me, nothing to worry about that's an occupational hazard of being married! "Tanveer Bhai, but you have a business to run, you have to go to the office." "Yes," I said, "I leave home as soon as possible after breakfast." "Pray may I ask, why is that? Why do you leave home immediately after breakfast?" asked Inam Bhai. "Well, basically to avoid the verbal spears that my wife hurls at me when I stick around too long at home." "There you are!" and Inam's face beamed. Grinning like a Cheshire cat, he said, "Imagine my predicament I am at home 24/7 and you cannot imagine the barbs that I have to

fend off!" Oh! I said, I know, I know petty stuff like not folding the newspaper properly after reading it or leaving the bathroom untidy. "Hold on," he said, "how about not squeezing the toothpaste tube properly or having done that to her liking, why the cap of the tube is not screwed on all the way? Why is the toilet wet? Why is the towel not properly hung on the rack? Why is the napkin not stowed away in its proper place after dinner?" I got the hang of it I'd faced a good deal of such scolding myself but forgot them as soon as I was out of home. "That's the lucky part", he said. "You've got an escape, somewhere to go, first thing in the morning. Imagine, for me the only place to go is make myself scarce in the veranda till such time fresh charges are brought against me like being lazy, not watering the plants or doing any housework, watching too much of HBO or Travel and Living and ogling Nigella Lawson. 'Why on earth do men have to watch cooking lessons?' says my wife," said Inam Bhai.

While we are lost in conversation, in walks *bhabhi*. Seeing me she flashes her familiar smile and turns on Inam Bhai, transfixing him with a withering glare. "Why are you wasting your time here, while we are waiting in the car for you to bring the food that we'll consume at home? Why does it take you so long to do the simplest things?" I tried to fade away into the woodwork if that were in some way possible. Fortunately the waiter came over just then with the food order all wrapped up and Inam Bhai blubbered

an apology, gave me a 'you know what I mean' look, signed the bill and ran off after his wife before I could render a civil goodbye to *bhabhi*! My French fries and thereafter the luscious hot dog suddenly went bitter in my mouth. Ahem! Well, was this the retirement that I was looking forward to, the blissful lazy mornings, the late nights in front of the TV watching "World's Best Beaches" on Travel / Living or lounging on the sofa with my favourite book, listening to all the piles of CDs collected over the years. Oh no! Retirement's not for me not by a long shot. As long as there is a functioning bone in my body, I'll keep on working -- aches and pains be damned. Up with the larks, a quick breakfast and out of home, sweet home post haste; to return late at night all exhausted, to get at least an appreciative hug from the wife, a sweet word or two and off to bed and the land of nod. Day in day out! Okay with me! Any smart alecks want to differ?

At least the wife gives me a few calls during the day while I'm at work saying I'm missed and enquiring when I will be back. What would I like for dinner? What about the movie that we were planning to see this weekend! At least a passionate embrace on return from the office. Plans for early morning breakfasts with friends. I can imagine all these will be distant memories once I retire and try to spend all day at home with no specific routine! I'm dreading retirement already.

Tanveerul Haque runs his own business, reads and travels.

REFLECTIONS

AINON M

Remember I had said I would get back to you? Well, today I would like to start by saying for some days it is okay to let events choreograph their own course and fall in place where they may.

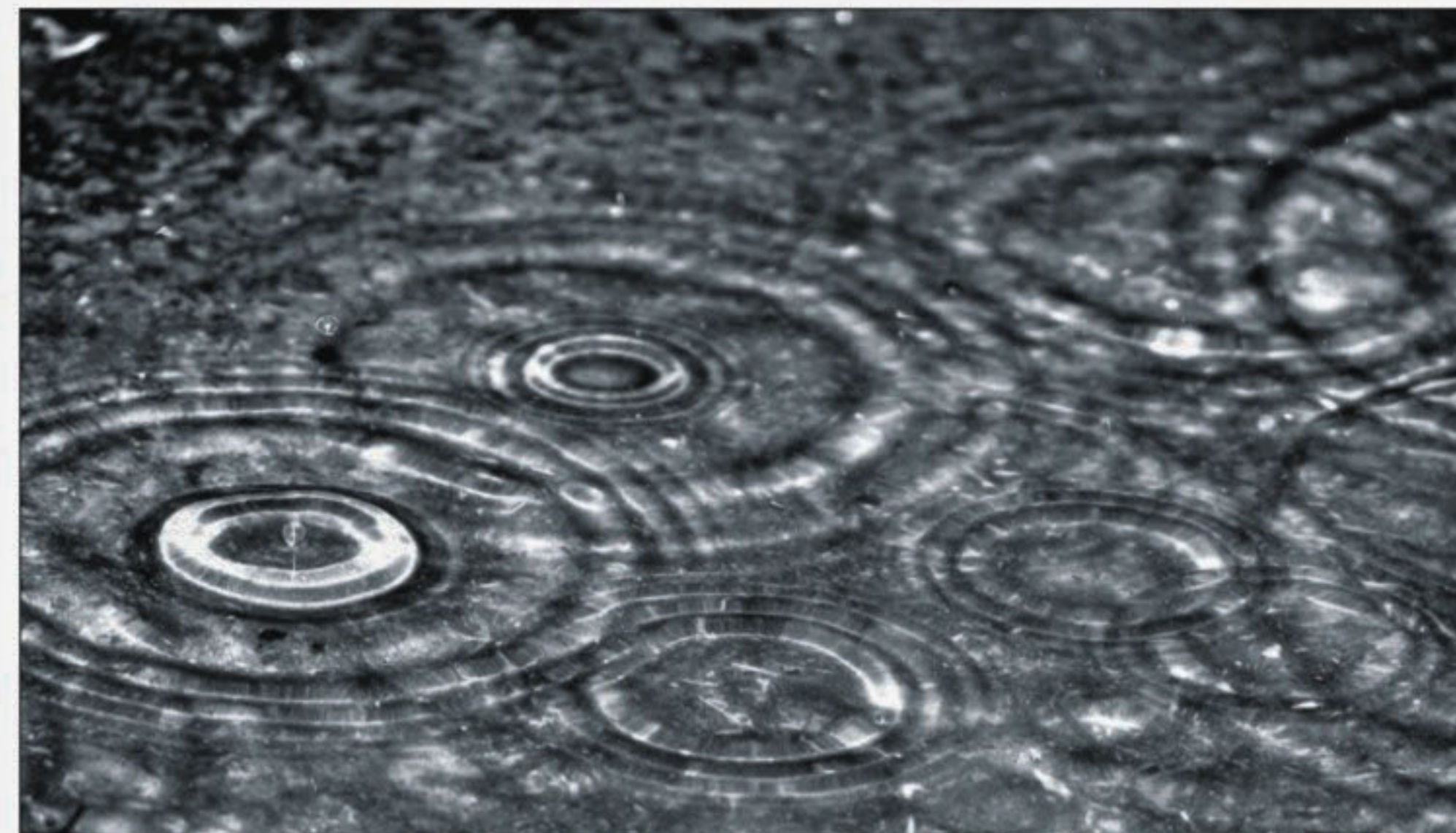
My daughter and I are visiting my parents' village home. They are no longer living. And yet I come here to innocence, to the glow of golden evenings, to the fireflies of the night, to the frankness of good people, to sealed memories, to an anchor. I come back to love. And each time as I leave I reflect on my thirsting attraction for this home...

With memories fleeting I lift my eyes / To the home that holds synthesis of lives / The old walls stand / quiet, true to history / Not laughter but notes of lives remain a mystery / By the pond I see the palm trees swing to blue / The lilt of the *krishnachura* creates beautiful hue / I could not rewind life nor fast forward the affinity / I stood a moment on the verge of now / And then took the step towards life's rhapsody / Home is what I left behind...

During this visit I have been especially longing for rain, to savour the same quiet thrill that you had recently enjoyed on sultry wet days. I want to hear the even-tempered rhythm of raindrops on tin-shed roofs; walk barefoot in the rain, smell the fragrance of the good earth, feel the union of nature in me. Re-learn to know myself time after time!

Today was a hot and humid summer afternoon. The sky was gradually becoming darker. With each clap of thunder growing louder, Doel, my three-and-a-half year old daughter, curled up in my arms. Her eyes were shut and the sensation of sound made her eyes quiver. She is growing up to be quite a brave and headstrong person! Realizing she is of an age that does not allow for a confession of fear, I simply mentioned that with rain the cool would come! 'Aahaan...' is all I could get out of her. Then I

Catching rain



asked her: "Do you know why it thunders?" This made her attentive. Why, she inquired. The gift of reason she will acquire with age, but today I needed to give her a simple story that she could relish in her imagination-filled young mind. "You noticed how the clouds in the sky move?" "Yes," she replied. "They love to dance." "They dance!" Now I had her full attention. "While dancing they bump into each other making thunder and it causes beautiful rain." She smiled. Now it made sense to her. She said, "They are having too much fun! The clouds are making a lot of noise." Fun, she understands. I said, "And you know what happens when it rains? Water comes down from the sky and makes the grass greener, the trees become more beautiful, the ponds fill up, birds take showers, and you know what else? The flowers need water

to become even more colourful!" Eagerly she interrupted me, "I know, I know! I love magenta color, like the roses in your garden, mommy. The grass and trees and flowers cannot drink, so they need water to fall from the sky." After a brief pause, with a sigh of relief she said, "I like that." I wanted her to feel the fineness of nature, and so I asked, "Do you want to catch the rain?" Her affirmation was the shine of curiosity in her eyes. She held my hand and off we went outside to sit on the rust colored stairs that slopes into the pond. Here and there the cement has come off because of aging. With the changing seasons this pond has gone through generations of bathing, swimming, gossip sharing; and during winter folks have paused for sun warmth before the dives. In the west corner, a few water lilies float to gather the algae. I gathered two lotus leaves, dried them with my *anchal*, kept one for

myself and gave the other to my daughter. I showed her how to hold it between her two little hands to form a cup. Her eyes sparkled. We dipped our feet in the water. A gentle breeze started to blow, and we waited for the rain to come to earth. To us!

And then it happened. One drop, two drops, and three and four! Doel looked at the first raindrop on her leaf. It slipped from one end to the center, and then another and another without leaving a trail, till it was so full that it spilled over. I could see her first inquisitive look and then a smile of pride gave way to a sense of satisfaction. She looked at me as if we had both witnessed a miracle. Life has its magical moments! Just as I would have, she closed her eyes and lifted her face to the sky to feel the rain. The rain drops bounced off her little nose, lips, eyes, forehead. Giggling, she said, "It tickles, mommy." And I whispered in my heart, feel the rain music, my child...feel the music! Then she opened her mouth to catch the rain. She was drenched and so was I. We sat there and allowed the rain to wrap us in its playful whim. And I prayed,

Give me freedom, so I endure / To savor your tender curiosity / Let us dance with clouds tenderly / Share the marvel of thunder / See the glory of rain yonder / Let me embrace your innocence / You are spiritual communion of mine / So, when I go / Let it not end so / The bond with thine...

With age she will encounter the changing world as it comes, but at that moment her divine face connected our separate beings. From now on, the scary thunder is never to be back in my child's life. There is enough time for her to find out how rain happens!

I know...your and my experiences are different, that is meant to be...I am *we*, whereas you are the bohemian! Today I had the pleasure of adding one more gem of a memory to my warm sanctuary.

Ainon M writes from Carbondale, Illinois, USA.

... from KAY

1. Time
Time hangs like wet clothes on a line
The present wet with tears
We failed to wipe
Years pass swift
in the wash of events
that leaves pain
in untold stories of the past

Today

A time that holds no memories
Crisp and Dry, its folded away
To bring forth a line of youth
Rushing to dry the past
Moving a future
To amend a legacy
of tragic histories

2. Insane: bloody but unbowed

Your nails are long
That can draw blood from human flesh
Your laughter a raucous shriek
That draws fear into the heads of decent folks

Body beautiful, semi naked
flaunting a sexual flame
Faces turn in shame
You a woman..tearless, numb with pain
Thwarted..Rejected and Exploited
and yet unbowed?
Is declared insane

3. Single Mom

They call you a brat
They call you a bastard
But you are my honey boy
golden hair to match the sun
Eyes that laugh in joy
You are my lovely boy
Throw away the lost heritage
Move on to meet the world
as a proud son of a single mom

4. Mornings Bright and Beautiful

Mornings bright and beautiful
Sunlight chintzed through bamboo screen
flower's fragrance on my right

It's another day
The sun rays
beckon the news
on a breakfast tray

News is bad as news can be
Massacre in B'bay, woman raped
families lost, a child burnt
News is good as news can be
Global issues to be settled
A new star rises in the west
To heal the scars of years gone by

Must I brood over this intrusion
of bombs and blasts
on a bright and beautiful morning
Must I shake under the pain of the other's loss
Do I have a choice?
On this bright and beautiful morning
In the clink of the cup and plate
I hear the shattering of glass
on the whiteness of the serviette
I see the coffins of my mate

On the Television
The sorrows of the bereaved
The death numbers
rising by the day

Sums up the fact
That on this bright and beautiful morning
There are hundreds for whom
It is the beginning of an endless night

5. Yet another day

Morning comes upon us, a yawn
like a languid dhuon of a rag
Fog mellow as a diaphanous veil of dawn
Morning screams with twittering birds
The milkman's wake up call
The Azan, a reminder that drowns all other sounds
Outside the lorries doze on the stand
The sweepers swish the streets clean
Inside the tinkling of teacups
The sun rays settle on the breakfast table
The newspaper slashes headlines

The morning has come upon me
Reluctant to shed the night
I emerge to face the challenges
of yet another day

6. Drift Wood:

(The widows lament)

Her body lies like
Driftwood on the sand
Oceanic desires wash over it each night
That is how she feels
singled and unloved
Driftwood on the sand
The brittle exterior glistens in the sun
Upright in the day, holding its own
A woman who does not understand

That she will grow brittle day by day braving the
waves of unmet desires crumpled into unidenti-
fied pieces
drifting gladly, as lemmings do,
to her final annihilation

7. This city no longer mine

Withered memories of emotional ties
Of families frittered away
Memories
Of parental care
Of mates no longer alive
Of the native language
forgotten...distorted
With words from other lands
This city no longer mine
The ominous blackness of the kites
across the highrise
Scar the sunlit skies
birds in flight
send a message of fright
To the return of the prodigal
That Karachi is no longer
the city of light
The fiery laburnums shed no light
shadowed by black shrouds
marching in
This city no longer mine

(Kay is a psychotherapist who discovers herself through poetry)