**Stamp Collecting – Kim Cheng Boey**

Starting with Australia, she slides the stamps
behind the filmy strip, the album breathing
promise in its fresh gluey feel, the world
being collected and unfolding as it fills up
shelf by shelf. As her five-year-old fingers
gingerly slip the countries into place, the questions
spill out, like the stamps from an old album
I opened yesterday, forgotten pressed flowers
of a time when the world arrived
in a philatelic queue, surviving
emblems from my stamp-mad phase.
*Is Australia our home?
What is this country? Why doesn't it exist
anymore? Why is the Queen's face
on the stamps of so many nations?*We finger an atlas
of vanished countries: CCCP, Yugoslavia
East Germany, Rhodesia, Malaya,
my childhood coming into place
under her learning fingers.
I remember the thrill as my fingers walked
the filmy rows, past the flora and fauna,
the faces of presidents and royalties,
gleaning a sense of a world out there
from the passage of stamps.
Those were my first travels,
transported on those serrated tokens
beyond the one-room flat
in Geylang Bahru
to the origins of those couriers.
The years of collecting culminated
in three bountiful, loaded albums
tokens that brought those countries,
their histories and languages
to my fingertips.

I want to bequeath my daughter the albums
whole, the worlds I found and arranged,
but they have diminished to this half-filled, yellowed
album, proudly marked 1973, owned
bilingually in English and Chinese.
A few stamps have slipped from their moorings
and some lodge in the wrong countries;
others like the Burmese row still sit
faithfully in place. The missing ranks lost,
like many other things,
in transit, between houses, countries
and lives.

But in a strange way they are here,
all of the missing stamps and years,
the way those vanished republics
emerge in the atlas with new names,
present as my daughter picks
the last of a Singapore series
when it was still part of Malaya,
fingers the face of a youthful Elizabeth
pendant over a Chinese junk,
and slips it home.

**Father and Child – Gwen Harwood**

**I. Barn Owl**

Daybreak: the household slept.
I rose, blessed by the sun.
A horny fiend, I crept
out with my father's gun.
Let him dream of a child
obedient, angel-mind-

old no-sayer, robbed of power
by sleep. I knew my prize
who swooped home at this hour
with day-light riddled eyes
to his place on a high beam
in our old stables, to dream

light's useless time away.
I stood, holding my breath,
in urine-scented hay,
master of life and death,
a wisp-haired judge whose law
would punish beak and claw.

My first shot struck. He swayed,
ruined, beating his only
wing, as I watched, afraid
by the fallen gun, a lonely
child who believed death clean
and final, not this obscene

bundle of stuff that dropped,
and dribbled through the loose straw
tangling in bowels, and hopped
blindly closer. I saw
those eyes that did not see
mirror my cruelty

while the wrecked thing that could
not bear the light nor hide
hobbled in its own blood.
My father reached my side,
gave me the fallen gun.
'End what you have begun.'

I fired. The blank eyes shone
once into mine, and slept.
I leaned my head upon
my father's arm, and wept,
owl blind in early sun
for what I had begun

**II. NightFall**

Forty years, lived or dreamed:

what memories pack them home.

Now the season that seemed

incredible is come.

Father and child, we stand

in time's long-promised land.

Since there's no more to taste

ripeness is plainly all.

Father, we pick our last

fruits of the temporal.

Eighty years old, you take

this late walk for my sake.

Who can be what you were?

Link your dry hand in mine,

my stick-thin comforter.

Far distant suburbs shine

with great simplicities.

Birds crown in flowering trees,

sunset exalts its known

symbols of transience.

Your passionate face is grown

to ancient innocence.

Let us walk for this hour

as if death had no power

or were no more than sleep.

Things truly named can never

vanish from earth. You keep

a child's delight for ever

in birds, flowers, shivery-grass -

I name them as we pass.

*"Be your tears wet?"*You speak

as if air touched a string

near breaking point. Your check

brushes on mine. Old king,

your marvellous journey's done.

Your night and day are one

as you find with your white stick

the path on which you turn

home with the child once quick

to mischief, grown to learn

what sorrows, in the end,

no words, no tears can mend.

**Thirteen Ways Of Looking At A Blackbird – Wallace Stevens**

**I**

Among twenty snowy mountains,

The only moving thing

Was the eye of the blackbird.

**II**

I was of three minds,

Like a tree

In which there are three blackbirds.

**III**

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.

It was a small part of the pantomime.

**IV**

A man and a woman

Are one.

A man and a woman and a blackbird

Are one.

**V**

I do not know which to prefer,

The beauty of inflections

Or the beauty of innuendoes,

The blackbird whistling

Or just after.

**VI**

Icicles filled the long window

With barbaric glass.

The shadow of the blackbird

Crossed it, to and fro.

The mood

Traced in the shadow

An indecipherable cause.

**VII**

O thin men of Haddam,

Why do you imagine golden birds?

Do you not see how the blackbird

Walks around the feet

Of the women about you?

**VIII**

I know noble accents

And lucid, inescapable rhythms;

But I know, too,

That the blackbird is involved

In what I know.

**IX**

When the blackbird flew out of sight,

It marked the edge

Of one of many circles.

**X**

At the sight of blackbirds

Flying in a green light,

Even the bawds of euphony

Would cry out sharply.

**XI**

He rode over Connecticut

In a glass coach.

Once, a fear pierced him,

In that he mistook

The shadow of his equipage

For blackbirds.

**XII**

The river is moving.

The blackbird must be flying.

**XIII**

It was evening all afternoon.

It was snowing

And it was going to snow.

The blackbird sat

In the cedar-limbs.

**The Lady Of Shallot – Alfred Lord Tenyson**

**Part I**

On either side the river lie

Long fields of barley and of rye,

That clothe the wold and meet the sky;

And thro' the field the road runs by

       To many-tower'd Camelot;

The yellow-leaved waterlily

The green-sheathed daffodilly

Tremble in the water chilly

       Round about Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens shiver.

The sunbeam showers break and quiver

In the stream that runneth ever

By the island in the river

       Flowing down to Camelot.

Four gray walls, and four gray towers

Overlook a space of flowers,

And the silent isle imbowers

       The Lady of Shalott.

Underneath the bearded barley,

The reaper, reaping late and early,

Hears her ever chanting cheerly,

Like an angel, singing clearly,

       O'er the stream of Camelot.

Piling the sheaves in furrows airy,

Beneath the moon, the reaper weary

Listening whispers, ' 'Tis the fairy,

       Lady of Shalott.'

The little isle is all inrail'd

With a rose-fence, and overtrail'd

With roses: by the marge unhail'd

The shallop flitteth silken sail'd,

       Skimming down to Camelot.

A pearl garland winds her head:

She leaneth on a velvet bed,

Full royally apparelled,

       The Lady of Shalott.

**Part II**

No time hath she to sport and play:

A charmed web she weaves alway.

A curse is on her, if she stay

Her weaving, either night or day,

       To look down to Camelot.

She knows not what the curse may be;

Therefore she weaveth steadily,

Therefore no other care hath she,

       The Lady of Shalott.

She lives with little joy or fear.

Over the water, running near,

The sheepbell tinkles in her ear.

Before her hangs a mirror clear,

       Reflecting tower'd Camelot.

And as the mazy web she whirls,

She sees the surly village churls,

And the red cloaks of market girls

       Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,

An abbot on an ambling pad,

Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,

Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,

       Goes by to tower'd Camelot:

And sometimes thro' the mirror blue

The knights come riding two and two:

She hath no loyal knight and true,

       The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights

To weave the mirror's magic sights,

For often thro' the silent nights

A funeral, with plumes and lights

       And music, came from Camelot:

Or when the moon was overhead

Came two young lovers lately wed;

'I am half sick of shadows,' said

       The Lady of Shalott.

**Part III**

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,

He rode between the barley-sheaves,

The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,

And flam'd upon the brazen greaves

       Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd

To a lady in his shield,

That sparkled on the yellow field,

       Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,

Like to some branch of stars we see

Hung in the golden Galaxy.

The bridle bells rang merrily

       As he rode down from Camelot:

And from his blazon'd baldric slung

A mighty silver bugle hung,

And as he rode his armour rung,

       Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather

Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,

The helmet and the helmet-feather

Burn'd like one burning flame together,

       As he rode down from Camelot.

As often thro' the purple night,

Below the starry clusters bright,

Some bearded meteor, trailing light,

       Moves over green Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;

On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;

From underneath his helmet flow'd

His coal-black curls as on he rode,

       As he rode down from Camelot.

From the bank and from the river

He flash'd into the crystal mirror,

'Tirra lirra, tirra lirra:'

       Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom

She made three paces thro' the room

She saw the water-flower bloom,

She saw the helmet and the plume,

       She look'd down to Camelot.

Out flew the web and floated wide;

The mirror crack'd from side to side;

'The curse is come upon me,' cried

       The Lady of Shalott.

**Part IV**

In the stormy east-wind straining,

The pale yellow woods were waning,

The broad stream in his banks complaining,

Heavily the low sky raining

       Over tower'd Camelot;

Outside the isle a shallow boat

Beneath a willow lay afloat,

Below the carven stern she wrote,

       *The Lady of Shalott.*

A cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight,

All raimented in snowy white

That loosely flew (her zone in sight

Clasp'd with one blinding diamond bright)

       Her wide eyes fix'd on Camelot,

Though the squally east-wind keenly

Blew, with folded arms serenely

By the water stood the queenly

       Lady of Shalott.

With a steady stony glance—

Like some bold seer in a trance,

Beholding all his own mischance,

Mute, with a glassy countenance—

       She look'd down to Camelot.

It was the closing of the day:

She loos'd the chain, and down she lay;

The broad stream bore her far away,

       The Lady of Shalott.

As when to sailors while they roam,

By creeks and outfalls far from home,

Rising and dropping with the foam,

From dying swans wild warblings come,

       Blown shoreward; so to Camelot

Still as the boathead wound along

The willowy hills and fields among,

They heard her chanting her deathsong,

       The Lady of Shalott.

A longdrawn carol, mournful, holy,

She chanted loudly, chanted lowly,

Till her eyes were darken'd wholly,

And her smooth face sharpen'd slowly,

       Turn'd to tower'd Camelot:

For ere she reach'd upon the tide

The first house by the water-side,

Singing in her song she died,

       The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,

By garden wall and gallery,

A pale, pale corpse she floated by,

Deadcold, between the houses high,

       Dead into tower'd Camelot.

Knight and burgher, lord and dame,

To the planked wharfage came:

Below the stern they read her name,

       *The Lady of Shalott.*

They cross'd themselves, their stars they blest,

Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire, and guest.

There lay a parchment on her breast,

That puzzled more than all the rest,

       The wellfed wits at Camelot.

'The web was woven curiously,

The charm is broken utterly,

Draw near and fear not,—this is I,

       The Lady of Shalott.'

**Picture A Vacuum – Kate Tempest**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iK0iKu5KqQ

Picture a vacuum
An endless and unmoving blackness
Peace, or the absence at least, of terror
I see and amongst all this space
That speck of light in the furthest corner
Gold as a pharoah's coffin
Now follow that light with your tired eyes
Its been a long day, I know
But look
Watch as it flickers and it roars into fullness and fills the whole frame blazing a fire you can't bear the majesty of
Here is our sun
And look
See how the planets are dangled around it
And held in that intricate dance
There is our Earth
Our Earth
Its blueness soothes the sharp burn in your eyes
Its contours remind you of love
That soft roundness
The comfort of ocean and land mass
Picture the world
Older than she ever thought that she'd get
She looks at herself as she spins
Arms loaded with trophies of her most successful child
The pylons and mines
The powerplants shimmer in her still, cool breath
Now is that a smile that plays her lips?
Or is it a tremor of dread
The sadness of mothers as they watch the fates of their children
Unfold

In now
In fast
Kaleidoscopic vision
The colors like drugs in your belly
Churning
Your skin pulled loose as [a puck?] shaken and tighten
Now everything's flashing and the waves are magnified as they roll up towards you and you're tiny as sand
Just a speck
And as you approach the surface, all of that peace that you felt is replaced with this furious neverknown passion
You're feeling
The people
The life
Their faces are bright
In your body
You're feeling
You want to be close to them
Closer
Cause these are your species
Your kindred

Where have you landed?
Uncurl yourself, stand up, and look at your limbs
All intact
Clothed and the fashion
This is a city
Let's call her
[Number?]
And these are the only times you have known
"Is this what it's come to?", you think
"What am I to make of all this?"