

# Texts presented in Class 12

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## **Carol Ann Duffy: *Premonitions***

We first met when your last breath  
cooled in my palm like an egg;  
you dead, and a thrush outside  
sang it was morning.  
I backed out of the room, feeling  
the flowers freshen and shine in my arms.

The night before, we met again, to unsay  
unbearable farewells, to see  
our eyes brighten with re-strung tears.  
O I had my sudden wish —  
though I barely knew you —  
to stand at the door of your house,  
feeling my heartbeat calm,  
as they carried you in, home, home and healing.  
Then slow weeks, removing the wheelchair, the drugs,  
the oxygen mask and tank, the commode,  
the appointment cards,  
until it was summer again  
and I saw you open the doors to the gift of your garden.

Strange and beautiful to see  
the roses close to their own premonitions,  
the grass sweeten and cool and green  
where a blackbird eased a worm into the lawn.  
There you were,  
a glass of lemony wine in each hand,  
walking towards me always, your magnolia tree  
marrying itself to the May air.

How you talked! And how I listened,  
spellbound, humbled, daughterly,  
to your tall tales, your wise words,  
the joy of your accent, unenglish, dancey, humorous;  
watching your ash hair flare and redden,  
the loving litany of who we had been

making me place my hands in your warm hands,  
younger than mine are now.  
Then time only the moon. And the balm of dusk.  
And you my mother.

### **Alice Oswald: *Memorial* (excerpts)**

The first to die was PROTESILAUS  
A focused man who hurried to darkness  
With forty black ships leaving the land behind  
Men sailed with him from those flower-lit cliffs  
Where the grass gives growth to everything  
Pyrasus Iton Pteleus Antron  
He died in mid-air jumping to be first ashore  
There was his house half-built  
His wife rushed out clawing her face  
Podarcus his altogether less impressive brother  
Took over command but that was long ago  
He's been in the black earth now for thousands of years

Like a wind-murmur  
Begins a rumour of waves  
One long note getting louder  
The water breathes a deep sigh  
Like a land-ripple  
When the west wind runs through a field  
Wishing and searching  
Nothing to be found  
The corn-stalks shake their green heads

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And HECTOR died like everyone else  
He was in charge of the Trojans  
But a spear found out the little patch of white  
Between his collarbone and his throat  
Just exactly where a man's soul sits  
Waiting for the mouth to open  
He always knew it would happen  
He who was so boastful and anxious  
And used to nip home deafened by weapons  
To stand in full armour in the doorway  
Like a man rushing in leaving his motorbike running  
All women loved him  
His wife was Andromache  
One day he looked at her quietly  
He said I know what will happen  
And an image stared at him of himself dead  
And her in Argos weaving for some foreign woman  
He blinked and went back to his work  
Hector loved Andromache  
But in the end he let her face slide from his mind  
He came back to her sightless  
Strengthless expressionless  
Asking only to be washed and burned  
And his bones wrapped in soft cloths  
And returned to the ground

### **Melissa Lee-Houghton: *Beautiful Bodies***

You tell me I'm beautiful and I feel at my most beautiful  
when I'm alone and the curtains are drawn. When  
my shoulders collapse into my spine and momentarily  
everything is incalculably unspecific, and what I mean by that is  
no one can trace a line around my cheek to my mouth  
to pressure a kiss on their thumbs, to pressure a kiss.  
In the night my mouth is not only silent but absent,  
and my tongue tastes nothing but the space where pain dissolves  
into the ghostly wilderness of a lover  
falling apart, palm from palm, sole from sole,  
to the dead and dry skin on the heels, to the smooth  
inner skin of the thighs where all love is drawn.

You said porn is damaging to the heart.  
I said I like to look at pictures of naked women, that  
I liked looking at them very much and that it wasn't acceptable  
and you said you couldn't see the harm in it.  
When you talked about its effect on the heart you pointed  
your hands inward, your fingers poking your chest quite determinedly  
as though to instil the thought within yourself,  
that the images you relay and crave are less than what is right  
and what is best. And you talk so often about what is right  
and what is best, and in that equation my naked body confronts  
your very core. What you want is what the heart cannot defer.  
Your open palms are the open graves of my commitment.

I said I don't like it when you say I look beautiful. You say  
it breaks your heart. Because I was half drunk I told you about  
how he told me I was pretty so often the words seemed sharp enough  
to slit a person's throat. How his fingernails were sharp, how  
I am sure I am not as beautiful as Sigourney Weaver, or as sexy  
as Goldie Hawn. I have spent so many years trying not to be beautiful,  
and wanting to be beautiful and wanted, and hating myself  
for being wanted. Because you want me,  
my dresses have all shrunk, and I spray my hair so it doesn't smell  
of me. I think I can smell myself all the time and that men smell me.  
I feel like living pornography. I feel like someone  
just out of shot. I feel like a freak and a whore

and I let my bones sink into the memory foam. I know  
everything I do is wrong. Where my skin sings  
the scars burn. I hold my breath until I find the words to say to you,  
I can't hang on. I release my heart till it feels  
magnificently broken and all the pieces blister on the sheets.  
I don't bleed for anyone but myself and all the broken babies.  
I know you will hate this poem  
because its legs are crossed and its fluffy sweater won't pull off.  
Roll over forever out of my life, everyone who ever  
believed in me with pressured fingers. You should always  
keep your nails clipped for love. When I become truly beautiful,  
the steam rising up inside me will simply evaporate.

## **Warsan Shire: *For Women who are Difficult to Love***

you are a horse running alone  
and he tries to tame you  
compares you to an impossible highway  
to a burning house  
says you are blinding him  
that he could never leave you  
forget you  
want anything but you  
you dizzy him, you are unbearable  
every woman before or after you  
is doused in your name  
you fill his mouth  
his teeth ache with memory of taste  
his body just a long shadow seeking yours  
but you are always too intense  
frightening in the way you want him  
unashamed and sacrificial  
he tells you that no man can live up to the one who  
lives in your head  
and you tried to change didn't you?  
closed your mouth more  
tried to be softer  
prettier  
less volatile, less awake  
but even when sleeping you could feel  
him travelling away from you in his dreams  
so what did you want to do, love  
split his head open?  
you can't make homes out of human beings  
someone should have already told you that  
and if he wants to leave  
then let him leave  
you are terrifying  
and strange and beautiful  
something not everyone knows how to love.