

## **Robert Nisbet – Two Poems**

### **Ten Years Old**

Light burnished our boyhood's classrooms,  
falling through high windows. It often seemed  
to glow on the ochre of wooden desks,  
on the gentler fawns of our exercise books,  
glowing even on Sir's fingers' nicotine.

On wintry days a pale blue chill  
would shiver over a shining playground  
and shone in the boys' breath, a cloud, a coil  
of confederacy, rhyme and joke.

Chalk was dry and undemonstrative,  
in our inkwells was a dull black paste,  
but, in the smell of book and satchel,  
we daily bowed to desk and task.

Outside, our playing field dipped  
from muddy goalmouths to a chestnut tree.  
We had the conkers every autumn,  
a glossy brown, a ruddy brown,  
with their creamy, splintering core.

### **The Beefeater**

Along the quay and housed in history,  
the restaurant, the Beefeater, a place  
where managers of small concerns  
will take their girl friends and the smarter wives,  
for choicer cuts and ambience.

It was a warehouse once, when barques and sloops  
and masts jostled the quay. Apples were ferried in  
from the Forest of Dean, that cider smell  
oozing for decades to the inmost chinks.

Later on, a candle store, leaving within  
the smell of tallow, strung on history's wick.  
Post-war, a butcher's cold store, diffusing  
the flat and brutal scent of sides of beef.

For a while, a snooker club, but the Beefeater now  
has lost that sound, the clack of reds and pinks.  
One sound survives though, from the boxing club  
where the town's young tyros went three rounds.

If you're ever in the restaurant now,  
listen for a ghost sound, below the kitchen's clatter  
and the smart wives' ripple. Listen for a dull sound,  
of glove dug in, below rib, below breath,  
a grunt of sudden nauseous pain.

**Robert Nisbet** is a Welsh poet who has been published widely in Britain and the USA. During his time teaching creative writing at Trinity College, Carmarthen, he was professor to exchange students from the Central College of Iowa.