

## Gallery of poems: Ruth Padel

Ruth Padel has published five collections of poetry, the latest of which is 'The Soho Leopard' (Chatto & Windus, 2004) and is also well-known as a journalist. Her book '52 Ways of Looking at a Poem or How Reading Modern Poetry can Change your Life' (Chatto & Windus, 2002) is based on the 'Sunday Poem' column which she wrote for the 'Independent on Sunday'.

She was inspired by two objects: firstly a spinet which almost certainly belonged to Elizabeth I and which bears the royal coat of arms and the falcon holding a sceptre, the private emblem of her mother, Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth is reported to have played 'excellently well ... when she was solitary, to shun melancholy'.

The second object chosen is a hanging with applied panels of embroidery which was probably made by Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury and members of her household at Sheffield Castle where Mary was imprisoned. Mary's emblem of the marigold turning towards the sun (in lower right of the panel) has been combined with various coats of arms and emblems representing courage in adversity.

### Mary's elephant, Elizabeth's spinet

Some night in the 1580s, she snaps the last  
knot off with her teeth

By candle-light. One blob under the tail and  
she has him, in tent

Stitch: startled king from *Icones Animalium*, a  
beast she's never seen.

Ears, silver-pink abalone. Feet lost in a webbed pool

Of bubbles: blue muttonfat peas. She rests him on her lap

Writing letters in her head, unsendable as words for resin

In Armenian akrolect. Her cousin knows everything she has to say

Already. It's been said. Outside, the black unbroken forest

Rides to London. Wolves kill a roe, for cubs whose last descendent

Will be shot in Mary's realm, two hundred years down the line.

But she, in these walls, is marigold: a heliotrope,

Turning to sun that will never warm her skin again,

Ransacking old books in Spanish for emblems of hope.



Spinet, Benedictus Florianus,  
1570-80, Museum no. 19-1887

Down south, the keyboard's come from Florian, in Venice.  
Cousin E tries some Byrdian version of *Only the Lonely*, checks

The gilt inlay, Islamic painted whorls, the logo of  
falcon and sceptre.

(Her mum's. She paid extra for that.) A fretted bronze  
rose

For the sound-hole: an eavesdropping sun.

She's awaiting her spies.

She has become her own grotesque. She can never  
give in.

She sends men to the tropics, men to death. When  
her blood says

Dance, she will gavotte the night away with the Earl of Leicester.

Are there tears for what she looks like now; for who on earth else

May show up in her bed? When melancholy strikes, they see

Her turn to a Pavane. Shadow-bones, capitate, triquetral, lunate,

Stripe and flinch in the back of her hand. One frizzed hair,

White and red, drifts down over black middle C.

And if you and I held hands across this room, touched DNA

Of their touch sloughed off on this tusker

Embroidered in velvet and lint, this Venice lacquer,

Cypress, ebony, we would join fingerprints that never met.



Oxenford hanging, 1570-85,  
Museum no. T.33GG-1995