

# ASM TUITION ACADEMY

## A PORTABLE PARADISE

### A Portable Paradise

By Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise,  
then I'm speaking of my grandmother  
who told me to carry it always?  
on my person, concealed, so  
no one else would know but me.

That way they can't steal it, she'd say.  
And if life puts you under pressure,  
trace its ridges in your pocket,  
smell its piney scent on your handkerchief,  
hum its anthem under your breath.

And if your stresses are sustained and daily,  
get yourself to an empty room – be it a hotel,  
hostel or hovel –  
find a lamp  
and empty your paradise onto a desk:

your white sands, green hills and fresh fish.  
Shine the lamp on it like the fresh hope  
of the morning, and keep staring at it till you sleep.

### **Summary of "A Portable Paradise":**

In "*A Portable Paradise*", the speaker reflects on advice given by their grandmother about carrying paradise within them, concealed, so no one can steal it. This metaphorical paradise symbolizes an internal refuge, something personal that offers comfort and hope. The grandmother suggests that during tough times, one can "trace its ridges," smell its presence, or hum its anthem to find solace. When stress becomes overwhelming, the speaker is advised to retreat to a quiet space, where they can metaphorically unfold their paradise, fill their thoughts with hope, and find rest in its embrace.

### **Analysis:**

Roger Robinson's "*A Portable Paradise*" explores the theme of inner resilience. Through the grandmother's wisdom, the poem presents the idea that paradise isn't an external, material place, but a state of mind or a collection of comforting memories and thoughts that can offer refuge during challenging times. The grandmother's advice teaches a form of survival – by carrying this internal paradise, one can remain grounded, hopeful, and self-reliant in the face of life's hardships.

The poem shifts from abstract wisdom to a concrete ritual of imagining paradise. When stress becomes unbearable, the act of mentally reconstructing this paradise becomes essential. The image of "emptying" paradise onto a desk, and then shining a lamp on it, suggests that focusing on this inner peace can offer relief, akin to morning light symbolizing hope after darkness.

Robinson's language evokes a sense of warmth and safety, symbolizing the enduring strength of cultural wisdom passed down through generations. This reliance on intangible, internal resources contrasts with a world that is often harsh and relentless, emphasizing the power of the mind and imagination in overcoming adversity.

### **Themes:**

1. **Inner Resilience and Hope:** The poem revolves around the idea that inner strength and hope can be carried like a portable paradise, shielding the individual from external hardships.
2. **Personal Refuge:** It explores the notion of finding solace in personal, internal spaces. The portable paradise represents an emotional refuge that can be summoned whenever life becomes difficult.
3. **Legacy of Wisdom:** The advice of the grandmother serves as an important legacy of emotional survival passed down through generations, teaching the speaker how to handle life's pressures.
4. **Escapism:** The poem highlights the necessity of mental escape when confronted with stress, suggesting that constructing an internal paradise can provide a much-needed mental break from life's challenges.

### **Poetic Devices:**

1. **Metaphor:** The central metaphor of the poem is the "portable paradise" itself. It symbolizes internal strength, hope, and a mental space of peace that one carries within.
2. **Imagery:** The poem is rich with imagery, especially in the description of paradise. Robinson uses visual imagery like "white sands, green hills, and fresh fish" to make the paradise vivid and tangible to the reader.
3. **Repetition:** The repetition of "if" at the beginning of many lines emphasizes the conditional nature of the speaker's coping mechanisms, suggesting that paradise is always present but must be actively recalled in times of need.
4. **Symbolism:** The lamp that shines on the paradise represents clarity, understanding, and hope, while the act of emptying paradise onto a desk symbolizes the intentional focus on one's internal refuge.
5. **Tone:** The tone of the poem is soothing and reflective, filled with warmth and a sense of protection. The gentle advice from the grandmother and the serene imagery combine to create a tone of calm reassurance.
6. **Alliteration:** Subtle alliteration can be seen in phrases like "paradise onto a desk," which enhances the musicality of the poem.
7. **Personification:** The paradise itself is personified to some extent, as it becomes a companion to the speaker, offering emotional comfort and support.

Roger Robinson's poem invites readers to think about their own internal reserves of hope and strength, reminding them that, like a portable paradise, solace can always be carried within.

# COMPARISON WITH

1-in a London drawing room

2-thirteen

3-England in 1819

Comparing "*A Portable Paradise*" by Roger Robinson with poems like "*In a London Drawing Room*" by George Eliot, "*Thirteen*" by Philip Larkin, and "*England in 1819*" by Percy Bysshe Shelley highlights the distinct approaches each poet takes to explore societal, personal, and existential themes. While "*A Portable Paradise*" focuses on internal refuge, the other three poems critique societal structures and external realities, offering a sharp contrast in tone and message.

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## Comparison with "In a London Drawing Room" by George Eliot:

### 1. Theme and Subject Matter:

- **A Portable Paradise:** Roger Robinson's poem deals with the concept of an internal refuge, a paradise carried within oneself as a form of emotional survival. It is centred on personal coping mechanisms, offering hope and resilience in the face of life's struggles.
- **In a London Drawing Room:** Eliot's poem, on the other hand, focuses on external realities, specifically the stifling and dreary atmosphere of London as seen from a confined space. The poem critiques the industrialized, monotonous urban landscape and reflects the alienation and monotony of city life.

**Contrast:** While Robinson's poem encourages the reader to seek solace within, Eliot's poem underscores the oppressive and bleak nature of external reality, leaving little room for escape or personal refuge.

### 2. Tone:

- **A Portable Paradise:** The tone is calm, meditative, and hopeful. It offers reassurance that paradise is within reach, even in difficult times.
- **In a London Drawing Room:** Eliot's tone is sombre, detached, and critical. The relentless uniformity of the city's architecture and the suffocating environment convey a sense of entrapment.

**Contrast:** Robinson's tone inspires hope and resilience, while Eliot's tone evokes disillusionment and oppression, offering no solace within or outside.

### 3. Imagery:

- **A Portable Paradise:** Vivid imagery of "white sands, green hills, and fresh fish" constructs a mental sanctuary, evoking feelings of peace and calm.

- **In a London Drawing Room:** Eliot's imagery of a dull and repetitive urban landscape—"square folds of uniformity," "brick houses," "row of dumb"—conveys monotony and lifelessness.

**Contrast:** Robinson's paradise is alive with nature and sensory detail, while Eliot's London is lifeless, marked by industrialization and the absence of nature.

### **Comparison with "Thirteen" by Philip Larkin:**

#### 1. **Theme and Subject Matter:**

- **A Portable Paradise:** Focuses on personal survival and hope, finding peace in an internal paradise.
- **Thirteen:** Larkin reflects on a critical moment in adolescence, portraying the realization of the stark realities of adulthood, societal expectations, and loss of innocence. His theme focuses on the disillusionment of growing up and the inevitable loss of youthful freedom.

**Contrast:** Robinson's poem is about maintaining hope and retreating into one's paradise, while Larkin's poem reflects the harsh intrusion of reality into the innocence of youth, leading to disillusionment.

#### 2. **Tone:**

- **A Portable Paradise:** Hopeful and introspective.
- **Thirteen:** Cynical, nostalgic, and bitter. The poem embodies Larkin's characteristic pessimism about life's disappointments and societal constraints.

**Contrast:** Robinson's optimistic outlook contrasts with Larkin's sense of loss and resignation.

#### 3. **Imagery:**

- **A Portable Paradise:** Imagery of nature, light, and sensory richness (e.g., "piney scent") evoke warmth and tranquillity.
- **Thirteen:** Larkin uses stark, everyday images of the ordinary world, focusing on the harsh reality of growing up rather than the possibility of escape into a metaphorical paradise.

**Contrast:** Robinson's imagery represents an internal world of beauty, while Larkin's imagery points to the inevitable intrusion of reality on youthful idealism.

### **Comparison with "England in 1819" by Percy Bysshe Shelley:**

#### 1. **Theme and Subject Matter:**

- **A Portable Paradise:** Personal resilience and the ability to create a sanctuary within oneself.
- **England in 1819:** A deeply political poem, Shelley critiques the state of England, portraying a decayed society ruled by an unjust government. The

poem denounces the monarchy and the widespread suffering of the people, expressing outrage at the nation's state.

**Contrast:** Robinson's poem is introspective and personal, focusing on individual survival and hope. Shelley's poem, by contrast, is outward-facing, focusing on societal injustice and the potential for revolutionary change.

2. **Tone:**

- **A Portable Paradise:** Optimistic and comforting.
- **England in 1819:** Angry, bitter, and revolutionary. Shelley's tone is intense dissatisfaction with the political situation and a desire for radical transformation.

**Contrast:** Robinson's tone offers personal consolation, while Shelley's tone is one of political protest and despair about the state of society.

3. **Imagery:**

- **A Portable Paradise:** Uses peaceful, natural imagery (e.g., white sands, green hills) to construct a mental haven.
- **England in 1819:** Shelley uses harsh, dramatic imagery to describe the decaying state of the nation, such as "leechlike" rulers and "starved and stabbed" people, to evoke outrage.

**Contrast:** While Robinson uses soothing imagery of nature to reflect inner peace, Shelley uses violent and decaying imagery to reflect societal decay.

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**Conclusion:**

In comparing "*A Portable Paradise*" with "*In a London Drawing Room*", "*Thirteen*", and "*England in 1819*", we observe a clear distinction between Robinson's focus on internal refuge and the other poets' emphasis on external realities—whether they are political, societal, or existential. Robinson's poem stands out for its emphasis on personal survival, hope, and introspection, in contrast to the other poems' critiques of society, disillusionment, and oppressive external conditions. While Eliot, Larkin, and Shelley focus on the stark realities of the external world, Robinson's poem offers an internal escape, advocating resilience in the face of life's pressures.