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100 poets against the war

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Thank you.

Hyperbole for a large number

Stephen Brockwell

Not the hair that you or I have touched
but the follicles all lovers hands have combed
their fingers through, that number so much
greater, say, than all the teeth from speechless

mouths that now the fish and birds
perceive as stream and garden pebbles.
Not the breaths our mother exhaled
since mud filled her father's lungs

at Amiens but all the breaths of children
put to rest since Iphigenia's sacrifice.
Not the drops of blood that have
fallen on all the battlefields of spring

but the particles of mist the sun has scattered
from them – enough to weigh your khakis
down after a patrol, enough to resurrect
your face from its evening mask of ash.

Not the number of the stars that burn
and burn out like eyes of but the number
of the particles that give the stars their fire
surely exceeds the number of our crimes.

The Virtual Total Information Awareness Office

Allen Cohen

After Sting and Santa Claus

The Virtual Total Information Awareness Office

is watching you

virtually wherever you are.

It knows what you are buying.

It knows where you are living.

It knows where you are working.

Every step you take

every move you make

the Total Information Awareness Office

is watching you.

It sees you on the street

on the train and in the buses.

It knows your diseases

and measures every drug you take.

It knows who your lover is

and keeps track of your divorces.

It wants to put a chip in your head

and give you a number like 666.

It counts debts and can collect.

It can steal your identity and make you dead

The admiral is keeping a data base

and he's checking it twice

in the total information awareness office.

Every step you take

every move you make

the admiral will be watching you.

Editor's introduction

100 poets against the war 3.0 is the third edition of our 'instant anthology' chapbook series for peace in as many weeks; surely another record. But beyond that, it continues to present a remarkable series of voices, from China to the Middle East, Ireland to America, raised in protest against the looming possibility of an unjust US-led attack against Iraq.

In the weeks ahead, and particularly during the coming weekend of peaceful demonstrations, we hope that this anthology of over 100 poets, can come in handy. We encourage you, as before, to host it, swap it, share it, print it up, and most importantly, read it (and read from it), and mail it to your political 'leaders'. Along with other recent poetry initiatives, such as PoetsAgainstTheWar.com in America, we seek to promote peaceful protest through poetry.

We will continue to seek a global, multilingual, not-for-profit perspective. This week will see nthposition (www.nthposition.com) launch a French anthology, *100 poètes contre la guerre*. Poets speak many languages, and the broad consensus, world-wide, seems to be for peace, not saturation bombing.

This edition has added, like *Redux*, about 25% new poetry. So, version 3.0 is, in fact, 50% different from the first, launched on January 27, 2003. By adding new poems, some of the favourites of the previous collections are replaced. But they continue to have a powerful physical and Internet presence in the earlier editions, still extant. The constantly evolving text that emerges from these updated versions is a sort of team effort: some players come off the field for a break, and others go on. But the struggle for peace continues. And many, if not all, the poems from all versions will be represented in a printed version from Salt Publishing, due out in early March, 2003, with any profits to go to Amnesty International's campaign against the arms trade.

Val Stevenson and I would very much like to thank the poets who have kindly donated their poems to these collections. Without them, and the many other poets and activists who continue to share this book with the world, the message would not get out. And the *raison d'être* for these books, beyond well-written political poetry, must remain the need for peaceful resolutions of international disputes. War is certainly where humane language ends; let us continue to use language to end war.

Peace.

Todd Swift

Editor, *100 Poets Against The War* series

Paris, February 10, 2003

this happened: south dakota standing rock
but she says she says she says south dakota
sanity with thighs of timber and crows nest
this happened: south dakota wounded knee
but she says she says she says south dakota
sanity with a hunger for thunder and wind

this happened: south dakota mount rushmore
but she says she says she says south dakota
sanity in the center of caves

somewhere in the bad lands.

OF
a part, a piece
a story in succession
lineage.

AMERICA.
an unsolved mathematical equation:
land plus people divided by people minus land
times ocean times forest times river.

escape and the delusion of discovery:
across the mad ocean to the rocky shore
step foot onto land call it yours.

promised land lemonade stand.
auction block stew pot.

the dreams:
of corn field wheat field tobacco field oil
of iron cage slave trade cotton plantation
of hog farm dairy farm cattle ranch range
of mississippi mason-dixon mountains
of territories salt lake lottery gold
of saw mill steel mill coal mine diamond.

topographic economic
industry and war.

a box of longing
with fifty drawers.

United States of America

Jennifer Benka

UNITED
in the better case
when one pledges
oneself to the other
the one is hoping
this can be true.
in the worse case
when one pledges
oneself to the other
the one knows
the inevitability of betrayal.

STATES
she says she says she says
sanity is south dakota
somewhere exactly in the middle

read this: the total length of the canadian boundary is 5,360 miles
and thought stars
read this: the total length of the mexican boundary is 2,013 miles
and thought stripes
read this: the total length of the atlantic coastline is 5,565 miles
and thought red
read this: the total length of the pacific and arctic coastline is 9,272 miles
and thought white
read this: the total length of the gulf of mexico coastline is 3,641 miles
and thought blue

this happened: south dakota pine ridge
but she says she says she says south dakota
sanity with a heart of river

this happened: south dakota rosebud
but she says she says she says south dakota
sanity with eyes of eagle

this happened: south dakota cheyenne river
but she says she says she says south dakota
sanity in arms of black hills

My collaboration with George Bush

Robert Adamson

Quote of the day, New York Times: "Our wars have won for us every hour we live in freedom." President Bush, at a cemetery above Omaha Beach 27-5-2002

Our wars have won for us every hour we live in freedom
our freedom is for us a thing of countless hours
and after we win each war we wait in fear once more
the more we win the less time there is for living

The more we win the less time there is for living
yet our wars have won for us every hour we live in freedom
as we fear what war brings we rejoice in the hours won
and go on to live out fears in the way we wage each war

Our wars have won for us every hour we live in freedom
even though to afford this freedom costs a bomb
we teach our youth that war will make them free
their freedom is for us a thing of countless hours

and as we take away from them their secret liberties
they understand that living here involves a dreadful fee:
Our wars have won for us every hour we live in freedom
our freedom is for us a thing of countless hours

Collateral damage

Jackie Sheeler

In a place of sand and wind and want, worn
cotton looped across her forbidden face
a woman without pleasures tends to her sons.
She believes what she is told, owns no flags
knows life by the taste of cloth at her mouth.
Bread and leaflets drop from the sky, then
other things. We meant to bomb the airport
one mile north of this village with no name,
this village on no map,
this village of no more.

Other barbarians will come along

Mahmoud Darwish

Other barbarians will come along.
 The emperor's wife will be abducted.
 Drums will roll.
 Drums will roll and horses will trample a sea of corpses
 all the way from the Ægean to the Dardanelles.
 And why should we care?
 What on earth have our wives got to do with horse races?

The emperor's wife will be abducted.
 Drums will roll.
 And other barbarians will come along.
 The barbarians will take over abandoned cities,
 settling in just above sea-level,
 mightier than the sword in an age of anarchy.
 And why should we care?
 What have our children got to do with the progeny of the rabble?

Drums will roll.
 And other barbarians will come along.
 The emperor's wife will be abducted from the palace.
 From the palace a military campaign will be launched
 to restore the bride to the emperor's bed.
 And why should we care?
 What have fifty-thousand corpses got to do with this hasty marriage?

Will Homer be born again?
 Will myths ever feature the masses?

Translated by Sarah Maguire with Sabry Hafez

*

It would be war; but now these twelve years later
 we see-saw in a rhythm with the days
 while leaves are cascading from branches in utter
 confusion, strewn over avenues and drives,
 are clawed at like the last rags on frayed trees;
 and, as when a cartoon character
 steps inadvertently out above a drop,
 from nowhere somebody among us says –

‘Don’t look, but we’re having the time of our lives.’

Each time I snowshoe I hug a tree and pray for world peace

Katerina Fretwell

After the towers tumbled like tinker toys,
 the corners of your mouth
 curl upwards, Mr U.S.A.;

you line up a toyshop of troops and tanks
 outside your sandcastle: we must
 march to your dad's drums or we're dust!

Head Cowpoke, with pouted lip,
 your sandbox talk strikes fear because
 you holster the world's biggest gun

and you're King of the blasted heap. And you love,
 you claim, your people to pieces, though
 most can't afford your magic bullet – and die.

Tell us, do towers dissolve into the OK Corral;
 do you drool playing Shoot 'Em Up
 in your box of sand? Talk tough, your valleys

engulfed in blood. Our blood. Never yours.

Calm autumn

Peter Robinson

‘Stretched out on the floor,
ear to a short-wave radio,
we were bent to hear
would it be peace or war?’

After the traumas, storms and disappointments
sometimes an autumnal calm
day, like this one, comes as if in recompense;
yes and at moments like this one,
lucky, it’s all I can do to enjoy
a strobe-effect of sunlight through the high,
anti-suicide fence’s bars
as I take the same old bridge across that gorge.

There’s a lurid yellow glow above the sea;
there are stark factory
smoke-stacks standing out against it;
then flashed off the estuary
are similar tints like a boy with a mirror, sky
still showing its complement of hawks,
and again that interrupted sun
signals like an echo of the ships within far gulfs.

*

You see the line of national flags
at a sports day’s end where somebody drags it
through grey dust; and I’m put out by swags
strung across roof-space in a gym –
then think again now rows of them
hang limp above the Luna-Park
in a post-dusk, a first dark.

And yet once more I’m dealing
with the thought of us stretched out on a mat floor
in another seaport, feeling
nausea come like the breakers at its groyne –
heard too in our shore hotel;
ear to a short-wave radio,
through the crackle of static we were trying to tell
would it be peace or war...

Are there children

Robert Priest

are there children somewhere
waiting for wounds
eager for the hiss of napalm
in their flesh –
the mutilating thump of shrapnel
do they long for amputation
and disfigurement
incinerate themselves in ovens
eagerly
are there some who try to sense
the focal points of bullets
or who sprawl on bomb grids
hopefully
do they still line up in queues
for noble deaths

i must ask:
are soul and flesh uneasy fusions
longing for the cut –
the bloody leap to ether
are all our words a shibboleth for silence –
a static crackle
to ignite the blood
and detonate the self-corroding
heart
does each man in his own way
plot a pogrom for the species
or are we all, always misled
to war

from *Blue Pyramids: New and Selected Poems* (ECW Press 2002)

Regime change begins at home

Sue Littleton

“Like fish in a barrel, man,
it was like shooting fish in a barrel!”

The barrel has no water in it;
the fish lie stacked on their sides
like silver playing cards,
gills gasping frantically,
mouths opening and closing
in silent screams.
The pupils of their round lidless eyes
reflect flashes of light
as their bodies jump and twitch
beneath the hail of bullets,
their flesh splitting to release pale blood.

The barrel holds no water...
but somewhere in its depths
there is the dark, iridescent sheen
of oil.

Hot milk

Patrick Chapman

Your father would hardly speak to me.

One afternoon, he brought home cans
Of carrots, peas, Carnation, Spam.
He reinforced the concrete walls
With mattresses.

*Strontium in the milk, they'd said, but
No cause for alarm.*

I might as well have suckled you
– My babe-in-arms –
On long-range missiles' noses
As on the teats of bottles, warmed
At four a.m. to quiet you.

Architecture (Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal)

Michael Redhill

On the gallery walls
hung the drawings by the Jewish artists –
dream cities and glass buildings
all clean curves and buttresses.

They worked at their tables, cigarettes
burning long fingers in the ashtrays,
and when they looked up out of their windows,
the gaslight ghosting their faces,

they saw the miracles of their lives
against those dusky European cities,
which was to live in peace.
And then, every line they drew

grew underground and formed a wall,
and garden plants drove their roots
into spigots and locks, and suddenly
they were tied to earth by their hopes.

At the end of this row of pictures
are the scrawlings of lunatics
who drew themselves trapped
in their own architecture, circled

by pigs and dogs. When you stand there
your focus shifts back and forth
between the nightmare and your face ghosted
in the glass, and the other movement there –

the rushing traffic in the window.

“Deterrence!” what a ghastly joke!
 Our politicians fly around on their “peace missions”
 selling armaments to warring allies. Why do we allow it?
 Why do we salute the flags that hold us hostage to instant fire and endless ice?
 Why tolerate the death builders who blackmail our entire race,
 our Earth and all Her bounteous beauty?

How shall we write another poem,
 when all the music and art of all our histories
 mean nothing to our fools, our fiends who run our world?
 We live on hair-trigger alert – all of us –
 my beloved daughter with her long red curls,
 my husband with his newspaper, the Calico cat,
 irises glowing purple in our gardens, trees giving breath,
 you, Arundhati there in New Delhi,
 me, here in New York, in the bull’s eyes of omnicidal despots, hoping
 they will spare us and all we love.

In praise of salt

Sinead Morrissey

I’m salting an egg in the morning.
 It’s one year on. The radio is documenting
 the threats we face... the cut and lash
 of voices pitched to shatter glass.

For a second I don’t hear the kettle boil
 and wonder: if Iraq mined salt instead of oil...?
 At Leonardo’s table, salvation spilled
 as Judas scattered salt. And we’re still poised to kill.

In India they made salt and shook an Empire.
 Salt makes us what we are, and takes us there.

killer

Marcus Moore

a woman’s child is ill
 she will have to buy a pill
 she will have to pay the bill
 she will have to earn a shilling
 she will have to use her skill
 she will have to use a drill
 she sits behind a grill
 the poor woman makes weapons chilling
 a rich man owns the mill
 he has an iron will
 he sits behind the till
 he likes to watch the coffers filling
 selling arms gives him a thrill
 so while on some distant hill
 a poor woman’s blood doth spill
 the rich man makes a killing

Ode to all concerned with that ‘baby milk’ factory in Iraq

Helên Thomas

Bombs go off and so does milk,
 And both events make you grumpy,
 But given the choice between the two,
 I’d rather have milk that’s lumpy.

Beirut, August 1982

Ghassan Zaqtan

How I wish he had not died
in last Wednesday's raid
as he strolled through Nazlat al-Bir –
my friend with blond hair,
as blond as a native of the wetlands of Iraq.

Like a woman held spellbound at her loom,
all summer long the war was weaving its warp and weft.
And that song, *O Beirutuuut!*,
sang from every single radio
in my father's house in Al-Karama –

and probably in our old house in Beit Jala
(which, whenever I try to find it in the maze of the camp,
refuses to be found).
That song sang of what we knew –
it sang of our streets, narrow and neglected,

our people cheek by jowl in the slums made by war.
But the song did not sing about that summer in Beirut,
it did not tell us what was coming –
aeroplanes, bombardment, annihilation...

Translated by Sarah Maguire with Kate Daniels

Living in bull's eye

Daniela Gioseffi

For Arundhati Roy of India

We live in ballistic bull's eyes of nuclear missiles.
Shall I flee New York, shall you flee New Delhi?
If we run away, our friends, children we love, gardens
we've planted, birds we've watched at our windows,
neighbors we greet each morning,
homes arranged as we've wanted, books lining our shelves,
will be incinerated and who, what shall we love?
Who will welcome us home to be who we are?

So, we stay huddled in our homes near beloved children,
friends, gardens, trees, and realize how *much* we love them.
We think what a pity to die now. We put the dire threat
out of mind until the macabre becomes normal.

While we wait for the weather report,
justice at last for the poor, we listen to TV news of "first-strike capabilities"
in Pakistan, India, Russia, America, as if a game of checkers is discussed
or the baseball scores. We prophesy and shake our heads, appalled. We talk
of documentaries on Hiroshima, Nagasaki.

A huge fireball, white flash, burnt bodies clogging streams,
a crying child with skin seared off, head bald, eyes glued shut by heat,
breathing mothers', fathers', babies' bodies smoking black,
poisoned water thick with oil, scorched air, cancers implanted everywhere,
a malignant death sent to the unborn, sealed genetically in seed, sperm, ova.
We remember the woman who melted onto the steps of a building.
We imagine ourselves melted onto concrete, our whole being
a mere stain on a sidewalk. We imagine future children, sickly, deformed,
pointing at the stain that was our heart
saying, "that was a poet!" Not "*she*," but "*that*!"

I see my husband reading his newspaper by the lamp –
his thoughts the product of millions of years of evolution
vaporized out of mind or touch.
I know a Calico cat who runs along the street,
hiding under this or that step. Will she be a radioactive stain
orange and black on the walk? Oh, each exquisite iris, rose, leaf
of the garden, puffed away in a flash of smoke! Ash
in an instant! The people of our cities have no where to hide.

We go in procession against war

Chin Yin

Daughter asked me,
 “Which mountain is the highest on the earth?”
 I told her,
 The mountain that was piled with the skeletons from the wars is the highest!
 Daughter asked me,
 “Which river is the longest in the world?”
 I told her,
 The river that was amassed with the bloods from the wars is the longest!
 Daughter said,
 “I don’t war!”
 Son asked me,
 “Which investment is the biggest on the earth?”
 I told him,
 The money that was paid to wars is the biggest!
 Son asked me:
 “Which harm is the strongest in the world?”
 I told him:
 The people who was harmed by wars is the strongest!
 Son said,
 “I want peace!”
 Hence, we go in procession against war.

A natural history of armed conflict

Pat Boran

The wood of the yew
 made the bow. And the arrow.
 And the grave-side shade.

At home, at war

Tony-Lewis Jones

Now there is silence in the house, except
 The pipes tap-tapping under floorboards and
 The clocks’ slow rhythmic messages. You are
 Late coming home for an argument:
 The night holds terrors every parent knows.
 Your mother is away. She, I’m certain,
 Would have played this same weak hand
 Quite differently. The morning paper
 Demonstrates with images how words
 Can lose all meaning: mouths that cannot speak
 Tell how desperately we need to understand.
 Wars begin when language fails us. The missiles
 Fall, undiverted by the right command.

Bristol 20.1.03

Notwithstanding

Harriet Zinnes

Notwithstanding
 and so forth
 But it is oil
 and the dark tunnels disappear
 and the ghosts of tanks
 the sand covering dead bodies

The missiles, where are they stored?
 And imports of uranium and of aluminum tubes
 for making missiles
 and stores of VX nerve gas
 and United States spy planes?
 And weapons inspectors
 The United Nations
 Oh, they did not include a meeting with
 President Saddam Hussein

Ah yes, stopping weapons proliferation
 Notwithstanding
 and so forth

Waiting for the Marines

Fadel R Jabr

Translated from the Arabic original by the poet

Twelve years have passed
And the Iraqis are turning over
Like skewered fish
On the fire of waiting.

The first year of the sanctions
They said: The Arabs will come
They will come with love, flour, and the rights of kinship.
The year passed with its long seasons
The Arabs never came
And sent no explanation for the delay.

The second year of the sanctions
They said: The Muslims will come
They will come with rice, goodness, and the predators' leftovers
The year passed with its long seasons
The Muslims never came
And sent no explanation for the delay.

The third year of the sanctions
They said: The world will come
They will come with manna, solace, and human rights
The year passed with its long seasons
The world never came
And sent no explanation for the delay.

The fourth year of the sanctions
They said: The Americans will come
They will come with hope, sugar, and warm feelings
The year passed with its long seasons
The Americans never came
And sent no explanation for the delay.

The fifth year of the sanctions
They said: The opposition will come
They will come with victories, water, and air
The year passed with its long seasons
The opposition never came

All set

Charles Bernstein

For Gerrit Lansing at 75

No matter, say what you will,
when the slide comes, and it
better, or sometimes bitter knots knit
their brew against an all-encompassing
(recompensating?) agenda, not set of burdens,
nor gravity, like the image of

the cat jumping at the image
of the canary only to find
the bird has flown the loop
in a figure of love wasted
on the o'erlasting. Spear hay where
aloft is high and spare the

poltergeist faster than a whip catches
the gloom, then slides into a
hailstorm of regret. You know what
I meant, maybe, but not what
I mean to say, to intend,
to proffer without hope for suppler

thought, a stupor a day to
drown the neighing in a sea
of bougainvilleas, vines for the marrow
of the soul's sartorial passage to
points beyond even the imagination's imaginary
capacities, like the day the turtle

told the teller...

“That’s insubordination,” he said,
 and grabbed my left arm hard with his right
 and marched me down to Colonel Will.
 I shook myself free of his grip and glowered.
 “Do you know what insubordination means, private?”
 They stared, jaws clenched, faces red.
 Private – what a joke. “Not telling the truth?”

“To an officer, and that makes it worse.
 I regret to say you’re out for the year.
 Unless you’re willing to get here an hour
 before school and march around the track
 carrying your rifle and infantry pack.”
 “For how long?” “How long do you think, Private
 RUDMAN, until school lets out, is that clear.”
 When he said “clear” I glanced down at his spit-
 shined shoes, saluted, and asked if he cared where I dropped off
 my uniform, swivelled and walked away while he,
 apoplectic, boomed abuses, threatened repercussions –

ROTC struck the wrong chord with me.
 In another life the Colonel’d been a pit bull.
 Yet he appeared almost likeable when I glimpsed him
 waiting in line at the 7-11 or chopping at a golf ball.
 To be fair, I take it back, to be accurate,
 I had more freedom to behave this way
 than the Mormon kids for whom this was life.
 I knew that my real father would take my side
 when I said that there was no way I would stay
 and finish high school in Salt Lake City.
 ROTC struck the wrong chord with me.

And sent no explanation for the delay.

The sixth year of the sanctions
 They said: We will sell whatever is extra
 We will be frugal until relief comes
 The year passed with its long seasons
 The Iraqis sold all unnecessary things
 Relief never came
 And sent no explanation for the delay.

The seventh year of the sanctions
 They said: We will give up our semi-necessities
 We will be patient until we get support
 The year passed with its long seasons
 The support never came
 And sent no explanation for the delay.

The eighth year of the sanctions
 They said: We will sell some of our organs
 We will be strong until the coming of justice
 The year passed with its long seasons
 Justice never came
 And sent no explanation for the delay.

The ninth year of the sanctions
 They said: We will sell some of our children
 We will sacrifice until the coming of mercy
 The year passed with its long seasons
 Mercy never came
 And sent no explanation for the delay.

The tenth year of the sanctions
 They said: We will emigrate
 To the wide world of Allah
 We will entertain ourselves with hope
 Until the coming of the gods’ orders
 The Iraqis separated east and west
 The year passed with its long seasons
 The gods’ orders never came
 And sent no explanation for the delay.

The eleventh year of the sanctions
 They said: The best thing for us is to die
 We will stay settled in our graves
 Until the coming of the day of judgement

The year passed with its long seasons
 Cancer, tuberculosis, and leukæmia consumed their bodies
 The day of judgement never came
 And sent no explanation for the delay.

The twelfth year of the sanctions
 The Iraqis found nothing to wait for
 They said: Now is the time
 For the earth's worms to devour us
 They might rescue us from this hell
 Where we are turning over like skewered fish.

Mark the day

John Asfour

I will light a candle
 and read Justice books, only
 to find out that justice will be abused.

Light a candle and talk about humanity, only
 to find out
 that humanity, in the time of crisis
 resorts to revenge. I will

light a candle
 and talk to the children, ask them
 how they tolerate one another,
 how they abandon play once they disagree
 and later invite their playmates
 to the same game. I will

light a candle and
 die for a day, only
 to see if death would
 teach us to choose peace
 over war.

I wrote this in the movies
 Even in the dark these thoughts
 Do not stop dive-bombing
 It is dark here
 It is hard to write in the dark
 It is hard to think in the dark
 The bombing outside takes on a steady rhythm
 As I pull down my mask, get runway clearance
 And take off with my babies under my wings
 Claws extended, bill open and screaming
 Tweet tweet

N.O.T.R.O.T.C.

Mark Rudman

ROTC struck the wrong chord with me.
 I couldn't take it seriously.
 I raised the question with my friends, no, they
 didn't like it but it was required
 to graduate high school in Salt Lake City.
 I hadn't thought much about pacifism
 by the age of fourteen, but had warred
 against war all my life; I tormented
 the Rabbi with the question why?
 Why why why? A dispute over land.
 Was this a reason for a man to die?

ROTC struck the wrong chord with me.
 I kept wondering how to be excused.
 Asthma would keep me out of the army
 but not exempt me from ROTC.
 We were required to wear the heavy woolen
 uniforms all day every Monday,
 but since drill preceded first period
 I wore a tee shirt and jeans underneath
 and changed in the bathroom –
 a simple, elegant solution until a tall
 senior crashed through the BOYS bathroom door

while I, now in my tee shirt and jeans,
 was stuffing the woolen uniform into my briefcase.
 He asked "what's your name, private."
 "Tom Jones," I fired back.

For the birds

Bob Holman

The Birds are whispering
Tweets into my ears
Tweet tweet
Tweet tweet
I must be a Saint
St. All of a Sudden

What are they tweeting?
That is between
Me and the Birds

Now I am in The Birds
And they are in me
They are dive-bombing me
They seem no longer
To regard me as saint
And I seem to be running
As St. Alfred Lord Hitchcock
Screams out “Cut! Cut!”

However the Birds are not cutting
They are not whispering Tweets anymore either
They are slicing and diving
And I am running across the desert

Is it because I would not tell my own people
The secrets of the Birds?
Who are my people, anyway, I ponder
Now that I am a movie star

As I stumble on in the desert
Upon the answers I receive
Divine illumination and I see
Tiny insects swarm round the heads
Of the Birds that swarm round me
Tiny insects dive-bomb Birds
Birds dive-bomb me

I can no longer translate
Tweet tweet into Bzz bzz
Why do you hate me so

The day after

Seán Street

There's no time now,
at least we won't notice anyway,
seas can't be tidal any more,
no time today.

No seasons now,
and lost the loving interplay
of light and dark. No dusk or dawn,
no night and day.

No future now,
all options, choices gone away.
Time signatures? Impossible,
no songs today.

Just sadness now
because Time heals, they used to say,
and without Time of course our pain
will always stay.

Stars? No. None now
turning, nothing dances today,
no winds, there's nothing linear,
today's the day

all ends, this now
is when, this stasis is the way.
Transmitters fail, the clocks are still.
Time stops today.

Rania

Curtis Doebbler

Based on an interview with 5-year- old Rania in Baghdad

Wildly flinging arms,
the flurry of colour of a child's lit eyes,
the tales of dress and hair,
flung into the sky,
mixed with holler.

Her ornamented animation,
tears lingering in perpetual balance,
failing to fall, glimmering, Silver,
under her black eyes.

"From the sky will come the fire.
and men will come, all in black
to take daddy and mommy...
and my brother, he will stop them.
He will hit them. He will defend me.
But they will put off my arms and legs."

Shuttering in excitement,
terrified by what she sees,
Rania, just one little girl,
cowering under the clouds of war,
waiting, hoping, losing, day by day,
her life in any other way.

To Miklós Radnóti

Yerra Sugarman

Radnóti was a well-known Hungarian poet, whose "body was exhumed from a mass grave in 1946. His widow, going through his pockets, discovered a notebook full of [his] poems."

My mind throws its crumbs into the night's stopped river.
This is its ceremony to cast off sin, to become pure,
What we Jews call Tashlich, an emptying of pockets.
Night's dark darkened by the museum of human ash, its lights switched off.

The stars' corollas stammer and, muzzled by clouds, vanish.
A spot of blood throbs under God's moony thumbnail.
I would like you to know our foundations for burning flesh have not yet been
razed.
I pay their victims homage by day's inebriated bright.

But understand, I still love the glass scent given off by groves of lemon.
I gladly feel the olive trees' arthritic branches pulsing in my knees.
And despite everything, I participate in the crime of music.
My body still an instrument, strums its many forms of abandonment.

(Although I ask you whether what's truly ephemeral can be abandoned.)
My lips, after passion, scrape like leaves along pavement, incoherent,
tarrying...
Yes, my mind flings crusts into the night's taut river.
And I see by the moon's weak lamp, it's as flat as the bottom of a pot.

The night so motionless, it seems an inertia devised by angels or devils,
Who pull on it from both ends.
The night's surface like a trampoline, resistant, rubber.
And so, my sins fly back at me.

They splash my face like spindrift, leaving river on my lips.
They reenter me through my eyes and teeth,
As my mind rears up, a wild horse.
For I understand, you were murdered by hands like mine.

And I understand I am helpless, a reveler at the table of the void,
A pilgrim who's journeyed only to discover herself.
And I'm ashamed to speak you or read the poems you shine on my skin.
And the sky does not kindly let me empty my pockets.

Can we have some peace and quiet please?

Eliot Katz

The belligerent voices are yelling in the streets
 & on the radios calling for the big bombs of peace
 to fall, the smart bombs, the bombs that have passed
 their college entrance exams. It's Orwellian the way
 everyone claims Orwell for their side – these days
 everyone is fighting on behalf of Orwell and God.
 Years ago Don Rumsfeld & Saddam Hussein met in
 the corner & exchanged secret diplomatic handshakes –
 it is only after peaceful gestures like these that the missiles
 can fly. In the meantime, the time between the world
 mean as is and the world we mean to become,
 the endless rains are Yehuda Amichai's tears watching men
 still violently beating their swords into ploughshares and back
 into rifles & remote-control fighter planes. On the corner
 of Spring & Broadway, a taxicab driver threw a baby lamb
 out the passenger-side door – everyone in a two-block radius
 ran away screaming. In New York City the yelling is
 so loud and the quiet so quiet that everyone I know, just below
 the surface, is scared out their wits, knowing the violence
 these days that can follow an apparent peace. They are calling
 Senators with empathetic American voices, urging earthly
 generosity and kindness, which their elected leaders interpret
 as a vote for pre-emptive strikes. The next century's gods
 have not yet been born and the last century's are no longer
 able to show a child the simple magic trick of pulling
 its fingers away from a newly lit flame.

To a veteran of the last wrong war

Susan Ludvigson

Every time we speak of it I understand
 another loneliness. What lives in us?
 Every atrocity, a landscape filled
 with mountain paths, every prayer committed
 to a deeper wilderness.

The morning sky twists yellow
 above the nearest peak.
 I think of the spirit dissolving.

You lift yourself onto a shaky elbow,
 your voice so low I can hardly hear.
 You speak of the origin of hymns,

move your head slowly from side to side.
 You talk about the mind, its grooves carved deep.
 The hollow the head makes.

Shocks to the psyche, buried in years,
 no light touching the body
 as detonations ripple through.

From time to time, my hands warm on your skin,
 I dream what was intended. As the world threatens
 to implode, I turn in a strange kind of hope,

though I am a child of the only myths
 in which the gods die too. What can we do
 against the determined dark?

Press conference

Ana Doina

It's hard to keep your senses orderly
when hearing the general's words
to visualise how all the heavy equipment
will be moved through an alien landscape
how the food will be cooked
the laundry done
while everything around is advancing
or retreating, worst yet, exploding.

It looks simple; all the toothpick flags
stabbing the map; here a town we had
conquered, there one where heavy
fighting is still going on. On the flat map
places look as nothing had happened
though reports tell of old temples
destroyed, roads closed, hospitals on fire
children orphaned, people maimed. Today only
the smell and the smoke of burned flesh, blood
and smouldering ruins blackened
an incinerating sunset.

The general
his voice calm, his poise almost jovial
answers questions shuffling papers
he rarely glances at. He seems to know
all the answers, as if the war had
taken place in a history book
centuries ago.

It is hard to keep your senses orderly
when he, rolling his papers like a scroll
says: we don't expect more
than 2, maybe 3% casualties for our troops
as if the forecasted dead
their life pre-written on scrolls
are ready for eternity like mummies
packaged in history's embalming.

From Peace walk & rally, San Francisco

Stephen Vincent

If You Are Not Outraged
You Are Not Paying Attention

No Blood for Oil
Did Your Car Start This Walk?
How Many Lives Per Gallon?
Go Solar Not Ballistic
Start Drafting SUV Drivers Now

Bush on Crack
Don't Attack Iraq

Somewhere in Texas
A Village (Crawford)
Is Missing An Idiot

Clone Change Needed:
A Heart for Cheney
A Brain for Bush
Courage for Powell

War Is A Tragedy
Not A Strategy

War Orphans Make
Great Terrorists

Homeland Insecurity

January 18, 2003

Let the people speak
 Do not turn your back
 Patroness
 of poets
 Give open your parlour
 Our Parlour
 Let the poets read

January meadow

Sandra M Gilbert

January meadow,

whistles and simmers in the low, south-sliding
 California sun, clack of crows
 in hedgerows, prickle of grasses still abiding
 winter pallor, silence of cypresses
 upholding sheaves of needles – here they are! –
 like gifts of darkness to a sky whose light's
 so fierce and clear it arches like forever
 in the tiny shine of noontime minutes.
 The tree guy's dragged and dumped the tree that toppled
 last week (when the power failed). Let's gather
 sunshine now, lounge in the hot tub, tipple
 a little, watch the twelve o'clock news together –
 (peace marchers shouting in the city
 under a sky like this, so blue, so pretty...)

un-UN inspected

Tony Hillier

five hundred marched to Fairford
 stealth home of wealthy Yanks.
 Marchers came in peace for peace for Pete's sake.
 December grey skies threatened
 but seeing five hundred march to Fairford
 held back their inconvenient though life-giving rain.
 Even the cold war gave its respects
 to these peaceful, non-military marchers
 out of step with some legs
 in step with millions of caring minds worldwide
 to Fairford's barbed wire front door came placards, plays and protest
 came music, singing and love.
 Yellow Gloucester bobbies shielded from exposure
 khaki-violent yanks whose mass destruction weapons lay
 another day
 un UN inspected
 lay, until another day
 when five mill will march to Fairford
 with letters and es to MPs
 and quiet talk with neighbours

Filofax

David Harsent

The entire township, heading north in cars, in trucks, on bikes, on foot,
 some with next to nothing, some choosing to cart
 (as it might be) armchair, armoire, samovar, black and white
 TV, toaster, Filofax, Magimix, ladle, spindle, spinet,
 bed and bedding, basin and basinette,
 passed (each in clear sight) lynx and wolverine and bobcat,
 heading south to the guns and the promise of fresh meat.

The field

George Murray

The sky has been aged, is ancient enough now
to have lost its teeth, clamping one smooth gum

down on the other in a wry horizon's bite.
That the violence we have witnessed

was not random while the kindness was,
how insulting to our attempts at existentialism!

Can we not even frighten ourselves
with philosophy anymore? That intent

could replace randomness as our greatest fear
speaks of how far we've come;

from there to here, from right to just left of right,
from fallen to the lower part of down. The corn

that stretches into the distance,
once an orderly army, has grown slack, wild,

and hoary, each stalk standing at ease
instead of attention, and in a place of its choosing,

bearing those heavy yellow arms in a silence
similar to hushed anticipation. Listen to the wind,

the brewing rain, the field of fire, the flight
of distant machinery, the coded plan of attack.

Dear lady, fear no poetry

Rebecca Sellars

Dear lady, fear no poetry

Those you revere so highly
Twain,
Whitman,
Hughes
Even your beloved Emily
Wrote beyond
Bees and blades of grass

They wrote the human condition

How can you turn your back
on the human condition
of all times
now?

Now is the time to look
beyond
the sweetness
the goodness
the pleasantries
of poetry read
in parlours

And consider the reflection
poetry
all poetry
evokes

not to remain silent
but to provoke thought
to provoke question

not to ignore the eyes we have all seen,
Children's eyes,
black moons reflecting emptiness,

Do not promote war, Dear Lady,
let the children live
Do not fear it, Dear Lady

The land of hope

Ethan Gilsdorf

An opening between anvils blocking the sky:
was the dark age parting?

The clouds outside contain their own ideas,
and release them as they fly eastward over the bois
towards the steely blue city states and principalities,
their fortresses and parking garages.

The 10 am sun just kisses the facing rooftop
on its journey up its snowy blue trajectory, its infinite
orange-white core blinds me so I shift left to where the sun blast
is bisected by the window frame, crucifying my good vision
trying to look only towards the east, to the forest,
the ring road, to the land of hope, they say,
because we are gradually revealed by the
roving planet repeating,
because that direction endlessly lights itself along the way.

The late afternoon light surprises someone hoarding
his dogs and chicken coop in the shadow of the overpass.
Surprises the houseplants and herbs left outdoors
too late into winter's subterranean tunnel.

Would a pot of coffee
shimmering on a hotplate bring 100 years of peace?

Excerpt from little dead things

Maggie Helwig

the small bones of birds
meaning: death from the air

it is not clear where this is happening, this
is happening everywhere

Other demands

Colin Morton

Peace makes other demands: unfailing
years of neverfailingness;
the courage to reach into a wound
and begin to heal; the bravery
of a Barry Armstrong, the blue beret doctor
who stood up in the Somali sun
and told the truth to power.
Retired from the military now, demobbed
to the woebegone lakes of northern Ontario,
he feuds with the hospital, which would cut corners,
and the picture over his mantel at home
shows it is conscience the forces drove out,
paid off, retired and forgot:
in the muted colours of a tent at night
somewhere in the Kuwaiti desert
the army doctor bends over his task
of suturing the shrapnelled brain of an Iraqi
soldier wounded at the start of the war
and found on the battlefield at its end days later
by advancing allied forces.

Nets at Gennesaret

David Morley

One mirror: he walked the water
and the water
allowed it: a web's face of surface tensions:
a pondskater's halo. *We have toiled all night
and have taken
nothing: nevertheless, at thy word.*

'I sank three nets in the lake's edge,
each with a plumb,
lattice corks strung skew-whiff of the ante-lines,
mesh thinned to catch swimming needles of elver.'
And when this was done
'the taut sea exploded with fish'.

The palace of art

George Szirtes

In a classical porch two angels
Are steadily beating their God.
You must train your deities properly.
No point sparing the rod.

St Veronica lends her hankie
To the fallen. Next day
she opens it up: Oh my god!
I have taken his face away.

A wheel on a pole. A raven.
The crowd has formed a ring.
In the centre: death.
And still they keep coming.

Always this bare hillside and the crowd
huddling and thinking aloud,
thoughts that collect in the valley beneath
with folded spectacles, shoes, gold teeth.

It is awfully black down there,
And their limbs are terribly bent:
How lifelike the darkness is
We seemed to be doomed to invent.

Hell is muscular and crowded
Like a gym where the demons work out
Their frustrations on apparatus
Unhindered by rust or by doubt.

God slides down the chute of his robe:
His body seems almost to float.
The late romantic chorus of love
Belts on in full throat.

We watch the universe collapsing
About the victim's head.
The living are turned away from us.
Not so the dead.

Bigger than time

Dawna Rae Hicks

I heard them scream
in the valley of hatred
when Lucrezia was in my mind
I hear them wail, as Mona prayed:
This tear in my eye
is bigger than time

I heard them grieve
when the president was shot
I heard them sing
to keep the others alive
I heard them shout
as they went over the top
and I heard them weep
at the sorrow he had brought

I heard their voices over the hills
in a sad old earth tongue
I heard the death-cry at night
when only the good die young

I heard the plea
I heard the laugh
I heard the sigh
I heard the sigh
when I found we were destined to
destined to
the tear in my eye
is bigger than time

Psychotic sea

Sonja A Skarstedt

The spread of algae amplifies undercurrents of disease
 crabs stutter and starfish are hooked on obliterations of lichen and foam
 did radios hiss like this
 the day before Pearl Harbour
 the day after Hiroshima?
 shores and shores away through foreign skies
 the crawl of bombs migratory as lice
 predatory wings deposit larvae
 their mothlike bodies sophisticated as microchips
 satellites map a watery screen
 each slick, foreseeable blip
 impassive as allegory
 goads the ocean's trampoline
 its red-tide arrogance
 its coral-toothed caves
 its bric-a-brac processions
 the sea spits out poxes
 parasitic brigades
 each trauma drives the malignant tide
 lacerations upset the sepia sand magnifies its scathed surfaces
 interplanetary jaundice
 post-radar transmissions
 inland inspections pump its arteries
 with purple connotations of mourning
 civilian echoes
 a woman's palms dipped in tuscan
 mark a wall for the dead
 the sound in her throat
 is permanently pierced.

Soldiers asleep, he stands
 Stiff backed: his eyes burn.
 Resurrection begins.
 Now it is our turn.

You put your fingers in the wound
 Gingerly, since you doubt.
 The problem is not so much poking it in
 As getting the damn thing out.

Georgie Porgie Rochelle Ratner

*Georgie Porgie pudding and pie
 Kissed the girls and made them cry
 When the girls come out to play
 Georgie Porgie runs away.*

Except it isn't girls, exactly,
 But women in veils,
 Who without them might look
 As old as Mother.

And it's not the Father
 Going after the bully
 But the Son setting out
 To avenge the Father.

And the oil, of course.

When even Tony Blair
 Turns against him,
 He pouts.

Damn the UN,
 We offer them a home
 And this is the thanks we get.
 They're foreigners, all of them,
 Not part of this One Nation,
 Under God.

the war is on the kitchen table

Myrna Garanis

the war is on the kitchen table
 the war is on the kitchen table
 waiting to be read,
 I brew the coffee black as buildings,
 charred, collapsed,
 I load the toast with butter,
 chew my way through cluster bombs,
 smear raspberry jam on screaming headlines
 which do not disappear
 I flip the page to guaranteed results:
 hockey scores, ice dance competitions,
 there the gains and losses
 line up in soldierly columns,
 no wavering parades of souls,
 filing down disfigured roads,
 walking, falling, left behind,
 long after the page is closed

The flying flag

Eric Paul Shaffer

Call them mad, call them evil,
 they are men with ideas
 like the ones we celebrate
 on the proper occasions: God,
 freedom, forgiveness, justice.

But none of us love one long.

Witness now: we turn again,
 arms above our hearts,
 to pledge allegiance to vengeance.

Eyes raised to blue, we look
 without learning the first lesson
 of the sky, stars, and stripes:

The flying flag follows the wind.

From How it's been

Elmaz Abinader

How has it been for you... since 9/11?

You, the Arab, you mean.
 You say it with such sincerity
 and love that I almost forget to be frightened.
 *

Might as well ask how it's been for me
 forever... how it's been watching hatchet
 images of my uncles starring enemies on t.v.

How it's been for almost twenty years
 not one year, standing in airports, pronouncing
 my name, verifying my birthplace, and wishing
 it actually was different.
 *

But don't ask me how it's been since 9/11.

Ask them: the boy soldiers in lions' cages
 in Guantanamo bay,
 the Afghani villagers, standing at the tub
 while their homes are ransacked,
 the American boys shivering in the encroaching
 winter in a mountainside that does not
 remind them of Macon, or West Chicago
 or Harlem.

Ask them where they lay their heads
 at night, and will it be there tomorrow.
 Ask all the them in the Sudan, Somalia, Ivory
 Coast, Nicaragua, Colombia, Vieques, Philippines,
 Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, East Timor, Tibet,
 the countries in the Axis of Evil.
 South Central L.A., West and East Oakland, Newark,
 Chicago, Chiapas, Pine Ridge; Wounded Knee.

Ask the people of Iraq whose prayers now
 must condemn our country because we have
 bulls eyed them, hair lined them; taken aim.

Easy

Sampurna Chattarji

Death is easy to pronounce.
 He deserved to die.
 They ought to be shot.
 Hanging's too good for him.
 The words fall glib.
 Throwaway lines
 sentencing them to death.

Distant observer,
 you speak without guilt, or fear
 of misplaced allegiances.
 You just need something to say,
 that's all.

The right sentiment, rightly declared
 whichever way your loyalties blow
 in the gust of the smokefilled air.
 A country burns.

The death-dealers deserved to die, you say.
 Death is easy to pronounce.
 It's the smell of burning children that's hard.

January 2003, Mumbai, India.

King Rat

Edwin Torres

*the rain in Kabul smells like smoke
 overcooked mist burned by an ocean of fear*

All followers want to be leaders
 All leaders follow themselves
 All rats follow the king rat
 All king rats are rats

In a pack of rats
 The newest one will be trampled
 The biggest and brightest will stand out
 The one who stands out will be killed eaten
 Stomped into the earth
 All rats follow themselves
 All tails as long as their outcome

In a pack of rats
 The sharpest teeth
 The dirtiest dirt
 The slickest spit
 The lowest low
 The damndest of the damned
 Will win every time

All rats are rats
 In a world of rats
 All followers are rats
 In a world of rats
 All kings are rats
 In a world of rats
 Who needs cheese
 When we got rats

We accept

Vicki Hudspith

We accept that things have changed
 Walk past closed shops to the movies
 Little League fields hold equipment, debris trucks
 We accept that everyone

Will wear photo ID necklaces
 Bags and briefcases will be searched, scanned, X-rayed
 We accept that though we walk through all of this
 We may still pass through metal detectors to enter a building

We accept that we won't eat as well, sleep as sound
 Too many appointments will produce confusion, inertia
 We accept that we will check exits
 Crowds will make us nervous

The subway will be a target of captured life
 Overflowing wastebaskets will be potential hiding places
 Sirens will make us jump
 Sudden, loud noises, will irritate, even enrage

We've accepted mountains of information but so few facts
 We've accepted politicians who don't read their mail
 We have waited and waited for the other shoe to drop
 Accepted seeing ordinary people in air filter masks

And that everything is fine, for now
 We've accepted so much
 Will we accept or even recognize
 When we've given up?

Untitled

d.m.

Since the death
 of 500,000 Iraqis goes unmourned
 so I will not mourn them
 but continue drinking to excess.

Though it has been written
 that under the eternal threat of war
 children gain anxiety disorders
 and are found banging their head against floor and other available cement –
 I will not mourn them.

I will not mourn the dying and deformed
 because an idealist cannot be happy.
 And I want to be happy.

So I will laugh and marry
 and continue drinking to excess.

Divine haiku for the New Patriotism

ryk mcintyre

i don't like you, so
 i am blessed by gods that don't
 like your ass either

("I ain't gonna study war no more",
 but Woody Guthrie should've said,
 "I'm gonna study war some more
 so that it never needs to happen again.")

Good morning middle age

Robin Lim

I woke with a backache.
It's no use blaming the mattress, I got older.
Here it is, the time I waited for, promising myself
that my peers and I would change the world.
From the clay of our hands and a few seeds of justice,
we would grow peace and food for the people.

Today I can't bear the pressure of listening to my friends, my goddamned friends,
talking about meditation and art. Their heads twist side to side, puppets.
They do this because they woke up with backaches too.
They do this because they can't admit that they really care about their two or three cars,
their VCR, their vacation in florida.
They earned their wealth, the right to ignore the lies.

The lie that we in the United States elect a President,
and all the lies he tells, smiling on their TV sets.
The lie that this nightmare will be over after the next election.
The lie that demonizes an underfed Iraqi child,
who might, if we let her grow up, become a terrorist.
She might give birth to a whole litter of terrorist pups,
every one of them with a grenade arm,
poised to take out your recreational vehicle with one thrust.

When Congress gives this so-called President the infinite power to protect
our jobs
and our schools, where our children are taught
to talk about meditation and art,
these men will go home and try to have sex
with their wives, or someone, anyone.
Ignoring all the phone calls and the cries of the constituents, our Senator
just wants to get it on. But this time, having gone too far,
having betrayed every last dream, he can't get it up.

In the basement, his son, and all our American
babies, are huffing glue and household chemicals.

Ballad

Sean O'Brien

1 February 2003. With apologies to William Empson.

Here we go to war, boys –
Rally round the flag.
Tony cleans it up, boys –
He's the oily rag.

Tony talks in sentences
And even paragraphs:
When Dubya tries a speech act
Half the planet laughs.

Wonder what's at stake, boys?
Why we're off to war?
Someone on the take, or
Was that the time before?

Just keep it in the Firm boys,
Like the OSS:
Take away the 'O', boys –
Familiar address?

Could it be the oil, boys,
Waiting in the ground?
Could it be the oil, boys?
Is the planet round?

Treat us all like mushrooms,
Hidden from the light.
Here it comes again, boys,
Lorry load of shite.

Let 'em show the way, boys,
Dubya and Tone,
And if they want to fight, boys,
Let 'em fight alone.

Let 'em ride a missile
Down to old Baghdad.
Never coming back, boys –
Wouldn't that be sad?

Treasured ghost

T Anders Carson

Fields of turmoil
sown with pain.
Festering wounds
hold power.
Free the foothold
of insanity,
as the sacred bush
of Golgotha
is charred
by military observers.

pEACE ICON 21c

rYAN kAMSTRA

The red g-tar is larger
than hysteria.

Anyone who plays the red g-tar
is stealthier than atom bombs.
Anyone who sings
can have my phone number.

Anyone who looks to the blue sky
not expecting a sleek all terrain coffin
knows that clouds
are the river's soldiers.
To kill them is poison.

Anyone who helped build
those buildings keeps them standing long after death.
In desert clubs, playing a red g-tar.

This is the valley of death.
A mass grave inhaled
at red lips with a hint of gloss.
Or you with us or against us?

Sim Shalom

Susan Freeman

In a rush of air and wings, soaring up, they arrive,
small, still statues in the open spaces
of an old and rangy tree.
Three, four, and finally, twelve mourning doves
dark against the fogbound sky,
one week beyond that indelible darkness, that fear,
as the world begins again the slow circle of renewal
we call the new year.

I stand alone in the turning garden
lifting a song for the ash-covered city,
for its tumbled dead and the living
who search, exhausted, remembering life.
Words fly up, begging solace,
and the answers that come sound nothing
like the raw noise in angry men's throats.

Between the fire and our fury, dreams
disconnect from our hearts. Apples turn to ash,
the honey of ironic prayer thickens to ash in the mouth.
Everything we believe lies open for inspection;
who shall live and who shall die, and who will be inscribed.
From the east, the smoke floats up the river,
across the country, over our eyes.

The doves offer no song, absolutely still in the bitter day.
The weight of war clouds the sky
and twelve birds sit watching.

No war then

Fred Johnston

To The Lighthouse lay on a pillow
Big enough for both of us.
The curtained room was warm, quiet –

We made love here. No war then.
The radio was a long way off,
A voice in another part of the house.

A gasometer gloomed on the garden,
Blood-rust coloured; we were near
The sea, and we had a few friends,

Innocent as dust, as leaves falling –
We know better now. Too grown for
Our own good, war is everywhere.

These bad days I think (forgive me)
That it could be no possible sin now
To feel your breath in my breath
In such a warm, quiet room.

Gulf War and child: a curse

Annie Finch

He is sleeping, his fingers all curled,
his belly pooled open, his legs gathered, still
in their bent blossom victory.

I couldn't speak of "war" (though we all do),
if I were still the woman who gave birth
to this soft-footed one: his empty hand,
his calling heart, that border of new clues.

May the hard birth our two heartbeats unfurled
for two nights that lasted as long as this war
make all sands rage, until the mouth of war
drops its cup, this bleeding gift we poured.

Where there's war

Ken Waldman

Where there's war, there's an anti-war
of writers writing, readers reading,
veterans recalling what they served for –

to make the world more
open for children, to share understanding.
Where there's war, there's an anti-war,

and in between a heavy warped door
old, creaky, and infuriating. Seething
veterans, recalling what they served for,

can't find sense in making only the poor
pay for the needs of the rich – and suffer dying.
Where there's war, there's an anti-war

of you and I walking into the music shop, the food store,
greeting friends, finding peace in being.
We're veterans who recall what we serve for –

not god, not country, but the chore
after chore that is the daily chore of living.
Where there's war, there's an anti-war –
writers, readers, veterans recalling what we serve for.

The man of principle

Mr Social Control

I absolutely refuse to go
on this insane and murderous
suicide bombing mission to Oxford Circus
unless
we first have the full agreement
of the United Nations Security Council.

War – the concise version

Rachel Bentham

contention between people
this is how we begin
specific conflicts
armed hostilities

the “art of war”
– it’s certainly not a science,
but doesn’t art create?

strategy and tactics
been in the wars?

war baby
war bride
war crime
international laws of war as if laws are effective
that which violates
in wartime

war cry
war of attrition
war of nerves
war grave

war weary, just reading the words.

Off the record

Maureen Gallagher

He tipped the twin towers off
the *Guinness Book of Records*,
the World Trade Centre no longer holds
the title; there's meat here for a class

recording statistics; not so much anti
as pedant: concrete examples
are always best; not so much cynic
as blind to the tragedy of so many lives

lost in a massacre; blind to the backlash
such terrorism unleashes on people
around the globe; the gendarme-in-chief
of the New World Order promises revenge:

scapegoats will be found; the lesson learnt:
the importance of history is not about
the circumstances of an ordinary crowd,
the towers of commerce are what count.

Unrhymed peace sonnet

Marilyn Nelson

Who are the Good Guys now? Who are the bad?
 Nobody's wearing Stetsons, black or white.
 Each has a history of evil deeds:
 one individual, one centuries
 of rapine and ideals. It's almost noon.
 One leader straps on bombs. The armies mass.
 We'll blow that s.o.b. to kingdom come,
 everyone thinks; bring on Armageddon!
 Yosemite Sam, frustrated and enraged,
 jumps up and down, shooting holes in the clouds.
 And Africa is dying out, of AIDS.
 Why the hell doesn't the moving finger write?
 What the hell are you waiting for, my God?
 Why don't you tell those bastards not to fight?
 For Pete's sake, send an angel! Burn a bush!
January 28, 2003, a.m.

'Christendom'**Graywyvern**

there was once a king
a stupid king
son of a king

and he ruled a great empire
greatest of his time
and a pious king was he

so pious
he wanted to punish
everyone that didn't believe

and he made a department
to spy on his own people
this pious king

but it was war he loved
constant war
war with no object

he made war till he exhausted
the wealth of this richest empire
he ruined his country

to utter bankruptcy
and it became
the most backward country in Europe

and after this king
whose name was Philip the Second
a Golden Age of art & literature

was snuffed out
like it never existed
and it was three hundred years

three hundred years
till Spain produced anything good again

Harvest**Barbara Berman**

For Amos Oz and David Grossman

There are no enemies
insist your rugged hands
and muscled backs half hidden
in olive branches shading
women darkly veiled.

There are no enemies
but the enemy of a piece
of fruit, its oil, its balm
for the rest of us
who need to be so brave.

Untitled**Tom Bell**

Dearest Angel,

As I said I will be for us while I can still stand. But I do have a story to tell you, today. They just told me that pill popping pilots are protecting you from terrorists. We've watched television together, you and I. I know you didn't understand all you saw, but also felt your fear of the pill poppers. I don't want to hand your care over to the world out there.

It's not all hippos hoppin'. It's not all mamas shopping at the mall and grampapas bopping. Be strong, dearest.

Love,
Grampa

The servant

Mimi Khalvati

Ma'mad, hurry, water the rose.
Blessed is the English one that grows
out in the rain.

Water is scarce, blood not so.
Blood is the open drain that flows
out in the rain.

Bring in the lamp, the olive's flame.
Pity the crippled flame that blows
out in the rain.

Where are the children? What is the time?
Time is the terror curfew throws
out in the rain.

Hurry, Ma'mad, home to your child.
Wherever my namesake, Maryam, goes
out in the rain.

The border

Grace Schulman

Perhaps because of the twiggy cigars
he offered me, his showy "Come, American"
the outstretched hand, the hasty, sidelong stares
at shorts I packed to wear in whitehot sun

and windblown hair, I knew he was a friend.
On my side of the gunfire, date-palm fronds
waved in groves. On his, white sand. In Kfar Saba,
they warned, don't walk the path too near the border.

Soldiers were shot, and would be, ours, theirs;
and new borders, none deadlier than the mind's.
Why was it then I had to cross, and why,
at that dizzying moment, fear disguised
as ignorance, I asked: "Where is the border?"
"Moved," he answered. "Now it is where you stand."

What did Adorno say?

Jeffrey Mackie

Do you think anything really matters
In the extreme?
Do you think (country)
Should be capitalized?
Is it any different
Now that the war is over?

And the bodies found
And the bodies counted
And the bodies
Continue to be found
Will continue to be found

Do you think civilians
Should be bombed from the air?
Running again
As they did from snipers in the hills
It's all the same
Bodies are collateral

Is there a flag in the world
Without the colour red?
Without
The colour of blood,
Hidden somewhere?

The Garden of Eden

Ruth Fainlight

It started here, somewhere between
Euphrates and Tigris: the Garden of Eden
where good and evil were first defined.
Now, that appointment with Death
whether in Babylon, Nineveh or
Samarra, seems unavoidable.

*

At the historic sites, shadowed
by half-eroded ziggurats,
hidden aircraft stand prepared
for battles which the six-thousand-year-
old walls of Nebuchadnezzar's
imperial city will not survive.

*

The leaders talk of culture-clash.
But all cultures might end here,
where they began, in burning oil
and torn flesh. In desolation.

The good prospects

George Bowering

Curious
this dream of
pure glass
buildings

with no dirt
but grass, and
trees growing
out of it.

Because
there may be
half erected
superstructures

left unfinished
done
with ash
falling on them.

1964

The pomegranates of Kandahar

Sarah Maguire

The bald heft of ordnance
A mortar
A landmine cool in its shell

Red balls
pinioned in pyramids
rough deal tables stacked to the sky

A mirrored shawl
splits
and dozens tumble down –

careering through the marketplace
joyful fruit
caught by the shouts of barefoot children

Assembled, they are jewels –
jewels
of garnet, jewels of ruby

A promise deep as the deep red of poppies
of rouged lips (concealed)
Proud hearts

built of rubble
Come, let us light candles in the dust
and prise them apart –

thrust your knife through the globe
then twist
till the soft flesh cleaves open

to these small shards of sweetness
Tease each jellied cell
from its white fur of membrane

till a city explodes in your mouth
Harvest of goodness,
harvest of blood

let us step around this time

Lisa Pasold

take my arms, we might dance
do you know how to tango? or maybe some kind
of boogie-woogie, is there music there? can we listen.
this is a story for which there is no witness, for I wasn't born or even
thought of. I was only told about this war
by my elder brother and then he died. in this story, the century is still new,
my brother is tall and no one expects him yet
to sicken and cough through my childhood, no one expects
we will disappear.
when I am not yet born, this story: uniforms, you see. the cloth needed by an army
of new recruits. they were given freshly-made fatigues. let them go
cleanly. some blessing, some clean shirt. there's a lot of cloth needed
in wartime. a war is good for business
when you're in textiles.
after a while the shortages set in. this is the real beginning of most war stories.
they began sending us old uniforms. I mean, taken from the dead.
any denomination of man, when dead, his body's not worth the next soldier's cloth.
you know how they died in that war, don't you? the shortest english word
is mud. what they turned into.
trucks piled with empty uniforms arrived at our factory.
my brother's job, it was to cut off the buttons, medals, any
clasps or zippers, anything that wasn't cloth then take what remained, fabric,
to soak. vats full in the factory, break down the fibres,
reweave it into new cloth for fresh lambs. my brother only wondering right at the end
whether these uniforms were coming through
repeatedly, unending, his hands going over the cloth, the buttons, the dead men.
he would wash his hands. he was only thirteen and he had buttons
from all over the world, he was proud of his metal collection. it included
colours from every country. you understand what I mean. the dead
came from everywhere.

The tooth

Robert Minhinnick

(Amiriya, Baghdad)

In your head I whisper:
A tooth, blue as a cinder
And I ask: Coward,
Whose pain is it anyway?
Your cells are a blizzard,
Your mind a ragbook, yet
I dream you into growth
Luscious as papaya flesh
Around my black seed.

Why this need to condemn?
I have felt your bones
Gasp in their foundry,
And at night you do not know
But I have heard your blood
Like a bench of silversmiths
Pause at its work.
Then continue.

Once I dreamed
You inside a laboratory
When you stared at a kernel of phosphorus
Until it sprouted fire;
And thirty years later
Ached in your skull
As you stooped in the shelter
Of Amiriya to pick the tooth
Of a child like a rice grain
From the ash.

We've been together
Such a long time now.
And my roots
Go all the way down.

All those home spun places

David Plumb

The old man's fist
thumps the dais again.
Flags wave. Slick
cars stream cool.
The price of gas
runs down, runs up.

Cell phones ring.
Oil Oil Oil screams
the endless whopper
click click game
show of them all.

Bombs bomb bomb
pipelines run
who knows where
the stink started?

What do we dance
on this moonless
night of cut off thumbs
and business as usual?

I dream of war

James Cervantes

I dream of war. I dream of poets being poets
along a riverbank in a war. There are no books, no prizes,

and they pack food in boxes: cereal, rice, dried fruit,
bread, and beans, each in their plastic bag,

for they must row across the river to gather. They must leave
their parapets of three stone walls open to the land

away from water, and open to the sky. They are dreamless
in the dream and wake to row every day. When they bend

to fill their boxes or sweep bare ground, they are faceless,
and it is only hands and arms that row, only hands

that open palms up to read the air. If you are one
of them and stay behind, you see the broad, brown river

and a face, finally, across the water, too small
even for a child, and there is time before you hear the sound

of bloodless hands, a clap that starts the song.

A quiet place

Nancy Fitz-Gerald Uiens

Go someplace quiet,
Move to the country –
Plant Scarlet Runner beans.
Grow raspberries, potatoes,
And Big Boy tomatoes.
Build a windmill, find a clear stream,
Make the forest home.
Boil your drinking water.
Don't put in a phone.
Read Dickens and DeMaupassant,
Memorize the Beatitudes
And teach them to your sons.
Make up games to play
With pebbles and white stones.
Lie to anyone who asks you where you're from –
Pretend you are a poet!
Maybe they will overlook you this time,
Maybe they won't come, my friend.
There must be someone left behind
To start again.

Haunted house, October 2002

Sherry Chandler

Nearly Halloween and the high spooks tell
us we should be afraid, our boy king fumes –
we must exorcise the desert demon.
The old cold warriors creak and shriek like ghosts
of desert storms past.
Meanwhile our school
children bleed, our war vet sniper fades
into a fog of pundits.
The boys down
in Lubbock, who believe in evil, kiss
their virgin wives goodnight, pray
the thunder god will give mojo
to the boy. They put their faith
in F16s.
The tang of wax and rotted
pumpkin fills the air. Is the smell
of front-porch jacks stronger than the reek
of burning oil, the copper smell of blood?

Peace poem

Charles Potts

“The young men and women standing against the war
have made a green place in my heart,” sang Robert Duncan
protesting the Vietnam War in a former time but in the same place.

The earth doesn’t need us; we need the earth.

Let us try to act as holy as we’d like to think we are.

War is the attempt to control the economic future by force.

There are better ways to be secure than by making paranoia public policy.

Intellect and moral integrity are under assault and must survive.

Where the powerful sleep in fits and starts
with their troubled dreams of death,
the death of their system with its interlocking privileges,
no amount of security devices can ever make safe.

They want a stage to pose upon
from the depths of their gated communities
where they can throw fear into the hearts of others
to eclipse the fear in their own.

We are safe in love with truth
willing to march, live and die by and for it.

Peace is the way you live your life.

Candle, flame, stained glass and prayer for peace

John Kinsella

For Veronica Brady

Heliolithic, the taper honing the flame
ready for the passing, a plastic dish
of solid naphtha awaits its passive melting,
set rigidly as counterbalance, a wrought
iron candelabrum bracing ceramic insulators
left over from the town's rewiring – now
ensuring the thought is delivered safely.

The trinity unsettles and reseats itself,
the late morning sun cuts through the glass
and foot-notes the altar. Ezra moves through
the large print of text and looks far into
Babylon. A child unknowingly prays for peace,
enjoys the church as a house with thick doors
to keep the fear out, though he's not sure
about the glass. His father considers the candle,
the flame, how it fills the room, climbs
beyond the roof, outreaches itself.

From beneath the pews a liquid almost gold
seeks to flow freely over the floor – boards
parted by tremors preventing this. The father
knows it to be the candle, the flame wallowing
in its downfall, drowning at the source.
Legend would have it a bird passes through
a panel of stained glass to resurrect
the flame by lifting the wick and with rapid
movement of its wings cooling the naphtha.
Legend has it the flame hardens in its beak
and follows the release, that the gold
beneath the pews retreats, that the father
prays aloud for peace.

The paloma's lament

Rebecca Villarreal

for Our President, January 23, 2003 Washington, DC 20009 (paloma = dove)

i cannot name you
son of sons
for you only go by the bastard of your middle initial
i can only ask you
how many palomas
white feathers
curucucú
must fall to win?

it's minus sixteen degrees tonight
the next zip code over
i escape to the theater
away from your headlines
away from your ranch

i only ask you why a man of means
stayed so close to home
before moving to my neighborhood

Were you afraid of sand and outdoor markets?
Or was it the trill of another tongue?
now you embrace the last resort of the incompetent
despite halting words
from the civilized

nodding, I see you embrace your wife
confused
and happy your daughters stay on dry land
drinking to old papá
and his trigger finger

the weight of dead palomas
rests on you, your middle initial
and the lands you never visited

What you call it

Tony Brown

What d’you call it/that thing
 that came in the night/that hung above our village
 while a war fell onto us from its mouth
 what d’you call it/that thing
 I couldn’t see it too well in the dark
 I think it had grey skin/know it had red eyes
 it wasn’t a dragon
 it was too hungry to be a dragon/it was too angry
 a thing like that ought not to be free
 ought not to be let loose to do that/ought to be locked up
 ought to be somewhere else
 What d’you call that thing that
 roasts your children/cinders your wife
 takes your father in flame
 melts your tongue to the roof of your mouth and burns the consonants out of you
 until all you can do is scream open throated in only vowels
 with nothing to give shape or form to the sound
 what words could you have had before this to describe – this
 what d’you call it?

yes I suppose
 you could call it a helicopter
 a vertical takeoff and landing armored air support vehicle
 an Apache/a Cobra
 and I suppose its anger and hunger could be
 a mistake an unfortunate incident
 nothing to deter us from our mission
 but
 HELLMOTHER – BLADECLOUD – DARKRAPER – CHILDBURNER – SKYEATER
 STORMSWAN – DEVILROAR – DEATHBIRD – WIDOWERMAKER
 GODFLAMEHAMMER –

all work just as well
 just do not call us “collateral damage”
 there are no clean words for some things

News theatre

John Hartley Williams

Meanwhile Mouse
 straight-arms the doorframe of the hole in the wainscot,
 eyes up Tarnished Tom,
 whose floorbrush tail
 sweeps the carpet.

The vast thighs of Doris Blooper squeak together.
 From the door her nasal voice
 calls *kiddy kiddy kiddy*...

Bucko male chauvinist Tarnished Tom Pussycat
 has eyes on Meanwhile Mouse,
 who’s got Doris riding shotgun.
 Wait till Doris’ thighs go shuffle-piffing off.
 OK, OK, mouse –
 enjoy a little feminine mouse irony, why don’t you?
 Show a bit of slender rodent leg.
 Taunt old Tarnished Tom.

Just wait.

Doris squeaks into
 her radiant stainless blossom kitchen
 and back into the living room.
 Imagine mouse horror, cat consternation
 when Doris slides
 her skirts up to her waist,
 tips herself into a chair,
 and stirs a broom handle briskly
 in the warm soupbowl between her thighs.
 All together... in italics now!
Academymiceawards
Irradiatedhorsetesticlehamburgers,
Gimmerockets
Gimmebiggerockets
Nukethealiens
Gimmethestars
Gimmethecosmos
Ooooooh...

Meanwhile Mouse,

Tarnished Tom Pussycat... hey!
 they just look at each other
 in creaturely crumpleface
 doom cartoon dismay.

Exaggerated hush-hush tippytoe goose-step...
 They're leaving by the kitchen door.
 They're vanishing down a winding road.
 They're spinning in a highly-coloured whirlpool.
 A loopy kind of writing is writing by itself:
No joke babies.
 War is next.

Imminent

Fred Marchant

even the heavy machinery seems tentative,
 as if the engines would like to quit,

as if the road itself was glass,
 as if iron or ice or anything solid we touch

wants only to fall apart,
 give way in relief

the jets cut across the morning
 nothing seems to stop them, says the pessimist

but sometimes I think the cold deepens
 forever and more, and like us

even the bombers will be grounded
 and all good pilots will want to stay inside

go nowhere all day,
 speak with no one they do not love

1/23/03

The hawk who became a dove

Hal Sirowitz

Most people start off supporting

their country's war efforts,

Father said, but as soon as someone

close to them gets drafted,

they suddenly change their tune

& begin to question their government.

Your friend's father was a hawk.

When his son received a draft notice

he became a dove. Instead of swooping down

on anyone opposed to the war he

started to do lots of cooing. He's

easier to listen to now, because he

isn't always ruffling someone's feathers.

It's a shame that he needed the possibility

of his son's death to improve his personality.

After the anti-war march

Minnie Bruce Pratt

We had a different driver on the way home. I sat on the seat behind her, folded, feet up like a baby, curled like a silent tongue in the dark jaw of the bus until she flung us through a sharp curve and I fell. Then we talked, looking straight ahead, the road like a blackboard, one chalk line down the middle. She said, nah, she didn't need a break, she was good to the end. Eighteen hours back to home when she was done, though. Fayetteville, North Carolina, a long ways from here. The math of a mileage marker glowed green. Was Niagara Falls near Buffalo? She'd like to take her little girl some day, too little now, won't remember. The driver speaks her daughter's name, and the syllables ring like bells. I say I lived in her town once, after another war. The boys we knew came home men cocked like guns, sometimes they went off and blew their own heads, sometimes a woman's face. Like last summer in Ft Bragg, all those women dead. She says, "One was my best friend." Husband shot her front of the children, boy and girl, six and eight. She calls them every day, no matter where she is. They get very upset if she doesn't call. Her voice breaks, her hands correct the wheel, the bus pushes forward, erasing nothing. There was a blue peace banner from her town today, and we said stop the war, jobs instead, no more rich men's factories, refineries, futures built on our broke bodies. She said she couldn't go to the grave for a long time, but she had some things to get right between them so she stood there and spoke what was on her mind. Now she takes the children to the grave, the little boy he wants to go every week. She lightly touches and turns the big steering wheel. Her hands spin its huge circumference a few degrees here, then there. She whirls it all the way around when she needs to. Later I hear the crinkle of cellophane. She is eating some peppermint candies to stay awake.

Brainstorm

Bruce A Jacobs

We've got to
Um,
Protect families children
Weapons mass destruction
Yeah, that's it,
A war fought from
An SUV. Stomp Saddam
In time for soccer practice.
Trust me, they'll buy it. Uh-oh:
North Korea.

Shit. Okay: Um,
It's different.
Help me here, Colin.
Possession isn't everything.
No proof he'll use them.
Huh? Contradiction? Well,
Shit. You tell me
How to duck a fucking A-bomb.
Okay. Okay. Think
Story. It's all in the

Telling:
Mustard gas becomes
Weapons Mass Destruction.
New Hiroshima becomes
Matter of Discussion.
See? We'll rev up an SUV,
Splat Saddam, give Kim the finger
And peel out. He'll never dare.
Damn! That's it. That's definitely
It.

Letter to Hayden Carruth

Marilyn Hacker

Dear Hayden, I have owed you a letter for
one month, or two – your last one’s misplaced. But I’m
back in New York. The world is howling,
bleeding and dying in banner headlines.

No hope from youthful pacifists, elderly
anarchists; no solutions from diplomats.
Men maddened with revealed religion
murder their neighbours with righteous fervour,

while, claiming they’re “defending democracy”,
our homespun junta exports the war machine.
They, too, have daily prayer-meetings,
photo-op-perfect for tame reporters.

(“God Bless America” would be blasphemy
if there were a god concerned with humanity.)
Marie is blunt about it: things were
less awful (Stateside) in 1940.

I wasn’t born... I’ve read shelves of books about
France under Vichy after the armistice:
war at imagination’s distance.
Distance is telescoped now, shrinks daily.

Jews who learned their comportment from storm-troopers
act out the nightmares that woke their grandmothers;
Jews sit, black-clad, claim peace: their vigil’s
not on the whistlestop pol’s agenda.

“Our” loss is grave: American, sacralized.
We are dismayed that dead Palestinians,
Kashmiris, Chechens, Guatemalans,
also are mourned with demands for vengeance.

“Our” loss is grave, that is, till a president
in spanking-new non-combatant uniform
mandates a war: then, men and women
dying for oil will be needed heroes.
I’d rather live in France (or live anywhere

Against the war

Susan McMaster

Against the war I’ll refuse
to be insulted today.
Against the war I’ll smile
at my boss till he smiles back.
Against the war I’ll recite
this poem on Wellington Street,
drive my car not at all,
gossip about love,
play Für Elise badly.
Against the war I’ll take
a break from doing bills
to watch the squirrels play
on the wires outside my room,
sign up for Italian,
listen closely to a child,
joke about the cold
with the newly arrived PhD.
who sweeps my office floor.
Against the war I’ll laugh
at Bush’s foot-in-mouth,
make love in the afternoon,
send clothes to St. Vincent de Paul,
learn to spell Qur’an,
phone up my daughter,
light a birch fire
and turn off the furnace,
shovel the walk for the mailman,
clean up after our old cat,
leave the door unlocked.

Against the war I’ll act
today, as I can, for peace.

Ottawa, 24 January 2003

We believe

Kasandra Larsen

“[US administration officials] acknowledged that the case must be made in a negative fashion: Iraq has failed to disprove the contentions of the U.S. [...] about its weapons of mass destruction. The administration asserts, without offering evidence, that Iraq has thwarted inspectors by hiding the weapons.” – from *The New York Times*, 23 January 2003

WE BELIEVE

in Democracy.

But without evidence, we will still proclaim you Guilty.

We enjoy playing global Judge and Jury. We will stridently enforce Accountability

as we avoid our own disclosures or Transparency.

We fully support the concept of Liberty

(with exceptions for those with whom we Disagree).

We prefer to call it War and not Brutality.

We strive to promote human Dignity

but call you Evil, Liar, warn of your Duplicity.

We have smart bombs but will risk civilian Casualties.

We joined the U.N. but like acting Unilaterally.

Let us avoid discussing our Economy,

ensure oil for our mighty S.U.V.s.

How dare anyone question our Authority,

our blatantly impatient, greedy Policies?

One nation under our own Divinity,

we hold that might makes right

and not Diplomacy. Prepared to march, we will ignore

all calls for Peace.

You would not bend. We gave you time. Now you will bleed.

We are America. We believe in Democracy.

there's literate debate in the newspapers).

The English language is my mother tongue, but it travels. Asylum, exile?

I know where I feel more like a foreigner now that it seems my birth country silences dissent with fear. Of death? Of difference? I know which city lightens my mornings.

You had New England; I had diaspora, an old folk song: “Wish I was where I would be, Then I'd be where I am not.” Would that joy claimed its citizens, issued passports.

“First, do no harm”, physicians, not presidents, swear when inducted. I'm tired of rhetoric, theirs or journalists' or my own ranting. I'd like to hole up with Blake and Crashaw –

but there's a stack of student endeavours that I've got to read, and write some encouraging words on. Five hours of class tomorrow;

Tuesday, a dawn flight to California.

This sky of lost miles

Ranjit Hoskote

Shield your eyes from this oblong patch of light where the towers once stood, where now there floods on our TV screens this sky of lost miles, miles yet to be – now never to be – redeemed, this sky that showers a rain of ash and scorched maple leaves, of powdered glass that settles on bridges and cars, a rain through which phantoms trundle their barrows, carrying heads, arms, bricks that rained from the burning towers, and through this poisoned rain we see as if for the first time, a sky that showers missiles without warning, striking without prejudice the present sacrifice. Heap up your cinders, pray for your dead, our dead: Baghdad, too, was a city of high towers once, New York.

Dubya Anabasis

Richard Peabody

Dubya Anabasis. Original name, George W[alker] Bush. (1946–?) 43rd President of the United States (2000–?) and the man who started World War III. It's difficult to understand how Dubya became president. His Republican Party (GOP) was famous for rewriting history in the style of evil dictators Stalin and Hitler before them. What we know now, post World War III, is that he was installed into power after a disputed election in which he lost the popular vote but won the electoral vote. A petty criminal, it appears he was a pawn of the corporations who expected to get rich on military excursions into Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea in order to corner the market on the world's oil reserves at a time when natural resources were dwindling. The son of the 41st President (George Herbert Walker Bush) Dubya is thought now to have been a puppet of his father and his father's staff. He disappeared in the fallout following the vaporization of Washington, D.C. For years it was claimed that he died in a bunker in West Virginia, or was hiding in caves in Texas or Argentina. (*See* Dick Cheney, Chomsky, Gulf War, Heroin Smuggling in Southeast Asia, Iran-Contra, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Zinn).

Dubya appears briefly as a Taniwha in Keri Waratah's rock opera Whiro, he is presented as a bland and puritanical man of relentless torpor, the "child is father to the man" who gradually mutates into a mythical demon, as contrasted to the heroic characters like Good Soldier Schweik, or Xing Zi famous for his magical feather cloak.

Dubya is to this day a curse word passed down by generations of Maori people. (*See* also: fuck, merde, scheisskopf, walker, wang ba dan, *et al.*)

blood in the snow

Conyus

storm clouds full of war & suffering
threaten from the mountain.
winter snow buries old men near the border
in Afghanistan, while young children in Detroit
protest the killing fields in Iraq, Israel, & Oakland,
with boycotts of Disneyland and McDonalds.
january half over and the ground is wet
with blood in the snow.
the war, just over the next mountain,
and threatening summer; a long way off.
somewhere, between the white rock and blue sky,
gray bones lie drying in the sand.
the day is like a soldier,
creeping slowly to a freshly dug grave,
and mourning flowers on a hillside,
somewhere near the far horizon
& red desert morning.

San Francisco, California

untitled

Kathleen Spivack

although she moves in a personal winter –
a red scarf against a black chair –
that red gash widens like the outcry of a widow:
a woman keens the world kills.

From 'The Jane Poems' (Doubleday & Co NY, 1974)

Unleashed

Kate Evans

Wild legs flying, my dog barks into the waves
full force. Planting her feet,
she pushes her body down,
haunches up, and flies off. Tangled white fur,
her legs lock and spin and her alien blue eyes
whirl. Sand whips thick and wet.

After the flash
he put his hand to his
face. It slid down
with his skin,
a Hiroshima survivor
said on TV.
There are too many ghosts,
he said.

Terrorist warnings,
countries and people
stretch rubber band taut,
nuclear edge. And the President
promotes pre-emptive strikes.
Full force.
Dogs of war,
wave after wave.

My salt-matted dog spins, red gums
flashing, suspended tongue
quivering. Ignoring my calls,
she flies to the gray waves,
an angry wraith. I touch my sea-cool face
and wonder why wildness takes us.

Crossing Kurdistan

Nadine McInnis

The sky is a country we cross
with our heads bowed down.

We no longer notice the mud,
so chilled
the bones of our feet ache.
It is not our mud,
these are not our mountains,
complicated
with invisible borders,
rising and falling like a fever.

But when the sky speaks,
we strain to listen
to dialects we cannot understand:

thunder and helicopters, sleet
cooling the babies in our arms
until they are still
as stones.

The burden we carry
lightens
as they drift up
and become citizens of the sky

and what falls from the sky
is called relief.
Sweet and strange, fall
chewing gum, hard candy,
powdered instant tea.

This must be what children eat in heaven,
or in America,
after they've already

had their fill.

Talking with the cat about world domination the day George W Bush almost choked on a pretzel

Kevin Higgins

Now that pretzel's gone and done
something an expert like you never would
– loosening its hold a split-second too soon –
I think it's time we revised our strategy.
Just sitting back waiting for the big collapse?
Face facts. It isn't happening.
If there's a job to be done, why not us?

This time tomorrow we'll be in Washington
telling Bush to come out with his hands up.
Faced with me and you, Puss, I bet he'll just crumble.
And we'll whisk him off to Guantanamo Bay
where he'll share a cage with the Emir of Kuwait.

I see from the frown wrinkling your brow,
you're worried, perhaps, how
Mariah Carey fans everywhere might react.
Too late for all that. To put it in terms
I think you'll understand: after the years wasted
here in this litter-tray, it's time to deliver
for me and you, Puss. Our battle-cry?
Something snappy? Like?
Yes, I have it! Repeat after me:
Don't make me angry, Mr Magee.
You wouldn't like me when I'm angry.

Priests' skulls

Michael R Brown

“Hell is paved with priests' skulls”*
laid gently in place by nun's hands,
and soldiers' boots have worn them flat.

The archbishop of Madrid blesses fascist cannons.
The cardinal of Berlin admires newly acquired art
and chats with Hitler about ethnic purity laws.
What the Pope can't see can't be pointed to.

First the Jews and gypsies go.
When the war goes badly, Nazis disappear,
and no one can say where anyone went.
Trains run to Auschwitz and to Switzerland.

Mass deaths draw crowds out of Serb towns;
rosaries dangle from bloody hands.
Scapulars and blessed medals
ring their necks like strings of garlic.

Ministers foam at the mouth with oaths
against strongest enemies, weakest friends.
Add another bead to the charm bracelet:
Carthage, Jerusalem, Carcassone, Mostar.

A Rwandan nun sprays huts with holy water,
screams at the devil in arms wielding Hutu machetes,
justifies God's destruction in hands firing Tutsi guns,
with never enough salt to sow bloody ground.

Priests in eternal fire give each other absolution.
Burning nuns lay hot bones in mocking patterns –
swastikas, stars of David, fasces, crosses –
crushed into paving by military boots.

After the final judgement day
archaeologist angels spend another eternity
excavating layers of bone floors in hell.

**John Chrysostom*

Bubble Girl Song

Wednesday Kennedy

I shop with my white girl immunity and i'm safe till i get on that plane
 I want to stuff myself stupid and go back to sleep
 branded right down from my head to my feet
 yeah it's fat and obscene my american dream
 but you're only jealous cause you want the same
 tell me...

*Who's gonna die for my SUV
 come on...*

*Who's gonna die for my SUV
 And i'm thinking i might get a facelift
 because that might make the world seem more fresh
 because it's not been the same since the day the world changed
 and the war cry keeps beating it's tired old refrain
 I mean how can i shop in this negative frame.
 who knows what'll be the fashion next week?
 Tell me*

*who's gonna die for my SUV
 come on*

who's gonna die for my SUV
 And it's just not the same as it used to be
 the mcmuffins just aren't quite as sweet
 and the tips have dried up and the times nearly up
 on the joker who's taking the heat
 And i want another mcsunrise and i want another mcsweet
 a mcfuck, a mcstock, a car built like a truck
 a gas guzzling rip roaring empire's last wank
 come on...

*Who's gonna die for my SUV
 tell me...*

Who's gonna die for my SUV

war is gud 4 bizness in th 19th centur

bill bissett

war is gud 4 bizness in th 19th centur
 ee addiksyun 2 fossil fuel mind set sens
 but not sew gud 4 pees or life or 21st
 centuree aims receipes n realiteez

or is it th wepons sales by evree
 countree 2 evree countree n th
 kontinualee shifting allianases
 changing tongues killing mor

that have made th world sew
 unsafe sew squirellee that th
 i m f dusint seem 2 mind inkrees
 uv defisit 4 war yet 4 peesful

programs that is seen as sew
 kleelee fiscal irresponsibilitee
 mune 4 health 4 th environment
 not as gud as mune 4 big bizness

deth masheens that will definitlee
 keep konsumrs down ducking n
 lying being lied 2 hurts us toxiciteez
 now we can sell yu all thees wepons

uv kours but yu need 2 promise 2
 follo our leeds in almost evree thing
 n 2 not use thees wepons un less we
 say theyr onlee 4 yr proteksyun n 4

paying us n 4 downgrading individual
 human life preventing wind powr n
 solar panels being usd as frendlee
 enerjee sources wch dont kill us like

a lot uv organizd religyun can war
 famine povrtee hate is nevr as inter
 esting as love love is alwayze mor
 beautiful mor giving mor uplifting

mor intricate generous refind nevr

gross goez thru walls doors makes
 mor opnings that carree mor love
 bettr thn who controls th oil field

Leavening

Kate Newman

Walk beside us hear our time.
 Know that a perfect purchase is heaven here
 as leavening bread on Clark Street,
 likewise the pane gathering light
 on the east line down.
 If I catch a spark of knowledge
 on Tuesday, maybe Wednesday
 ever after I will give thanks.
 Lie as I have not lain
 sit without disdain.
 Crows shelter at the smack centre
 of the four way on Main
 while somewhere a lark sings
 what will not be heard.

Gulf War – aftermath

Mary Trafford

“Depleted uranium is the super weapon of the '90s: [it was] used in the Gulf War and conflict in Kosovo.”

One decade down this hazardous way
 wrings a freak show out of Iraq,
 where silver bullets of depleted uranium
 linger in dust and debris, detritus of war,
 infect the babies; split atoms / split genes,
 and a toddler stares at life's cruel turn
 through a single eye – all that nature
 can bestow of beauty; twisted hairpin
 turns of chromosomes, unlike
 anything scientists have
 ever seen, while young mothers
 bleed out foetal remains:
 unrecognizable might-have-beens
 the teratology of war.

A light

Anita Govan

they that know
 the truth of it
 with such brilliant color
 in bright eyed remembrance
 its breath upon the fire
 a light
 that feeds
 the very birth of it
 shattering
 into the quiet chaos
 like some bright bell
 in still silence

 a moment
 to change the world

An untitled place

Suzy Morgan

this used to be
 a city, town, local
 wherever
 maybe over there, maybe
 here.
 a splintered dreg
 of wood is the only object,
 passed over by the usual
 chaos and trivial frivolities,
 terrors – of war – and it
 stands
 this post.
 and the shell-spangled sky leans
 down upon it
 with such weariness.

the killing fields

Di Brandt

but don't we all dear Em doesn't everyone
 have cut off hands gripping knives in their
 too big heads aren't we all blood crazy thirsty
 in our midnight selves to avenge the curdled
 mother's milk rotted on our parched cracked
 tongues convinced the death of the little princes
 & princesses in the baby tower & the enemy
 their king will release us from her untimely
 abandonment like the Pharaoh like Herod
 like Hitler like Bush is this a dagger divine
 Will Shakespear said giving the words to
 regal Lady MacBeth I see before me handle
 toward my hand come let me clutch thee
 we must be able he taught us to imagine at
 least this much darkness in us & then & then
 Em then to wrestle down the spirits who
 would delude us into attacking the living
 breathing world turning to face the hot fanged
 wolves that haunt us who if we're brave enough
 would rather play & full leafed trees dancing
 toward us & the frozen child huddled asleep
 deep in her forest bed shivering in slow
 thaw as we remember ourselves her father
 her mother & the enemy our sister brother

A dark little psalm against war

John B Lee

"poem written after seeing a documentary on the rise and fall of Hitler"

lost
 between fear and the fairgrounds
 to the cult of fire
 and the idolatry of death
 these skull-browed men in red and black
 bowing to accept bouquets
 from bare-legged little
 flower girls
 blowing almost away in thin summer dresses
 or patting the forehead fidelity of dogs
 their own fuhrer in final scorched repose
 his uniform coat
 his pair of pyjamas
 a burned body in a bomb crater
 in April in Berlin bearing the tight-boned grin
 of eternity
 with sixty-million souls
 for company, remembering
 those sentimental interludes
 that poisonously sweet tea-cake ambrosia
 tasting of the smoke of burning flesh
 and the ash-drift confection
 like a Christmas evening snowfall
 oh, the wrong gods are in the mountains
 above the overcast
 or riding a red river of crushed roses
 when weeping and harp-willowed
 is the world
 it dashes our children on stones.

Even

Nathalie Handal

Nothing is even, even this line
 I am writing, even this line I am waiting in,
 waiting for permission to enter
 the country, the house, the room.
 Nothing is even, even now
 that laws have been drawn and peace
 is discussed on high tables,
 and even if all was said to be even
 I would not believe for even I know
 that nothing is even – not the trees,
 the flowers, not the mountains or the shadows...
 our nature is not even so why even try to get even
 instead let us find an even better place
 and call it even.

Still true?

Clive Matson

Yesterday I dreamt the sky
 turned orange and white,
 spawning giant mushrooms.
 I jumped into a ditch.
 Held my head in my hands
 for a few seconds until

everything went.

Today the western hills
 are hazy green and brown.
 I have things to do.
 People wander in and out
 of shops. Sun shines on
 the shimmering road as if

nothing happened.

This is the war that George fought

E Russell Smith

This is the land
 where the war was fought
 that George fought.
 This is the oil
 that comes from the land
 where the war was fought
 that George fought.
 This is the tractor
 that runs on the oil
 that comes from the land
 where the war was fought
 that George fought.
 This is the farmer
 who drives the tractor
 that runs on the oil
 that comes from the land
 where the war was fought
 that George fought.
 This is the son
 who lies in the sand
 and this is the oil
 that burns on the land.
 This the war that George fought.