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100 poets against the war

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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.

“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 stuck the wrong cord with me.

Editor’s introduction

Never before has a book travelled the globe so quickly. Or so it seemed the week of January 27, 2003. *100 Poets Against The War* was launched at www.nthposition.com to coincide with Hans Blix’s report to the UN. Within days, news had spread around the world, via print media, Internet, radio and TV. More importantly hundreds of web-sites hosted the PDF, tens of thousands of people emailed and downloaded the “instant anthology” and many more printed it up and made copies. Our DIY chapbook has become part of various peace demonstrations, readings and rallies world-wide, from Oxford to Seattle. And all this week, hundreds of new poems, from Gambia to China, kept arriving by email.

Clearly, a nerve was touched. The interest in *100 Poets Against The War* has been in proportion to how unpopular the planned attack on the nation of Iraq is. As the Copper Canyon initiative – and the week’s surge of interest in poetic protest – lead to the First Lady cancelling her White House poetry event because “poetry and politics” shouldn’t mix, the rest of us realised an important cultural point had been made. Walt and Langston and Emily can’t be silenced by any politician – poems rise above the moment, and echo across history with power to speak to all people working to stop injustice and oppression. Poetry does make things happen: in people’s lives, in the way they see the world and act in it.

One week later, here is *100 Poets Against The War Redux*. If our first version made history by being the fastest anthology ever, then maybe this is the quickest second edition. But it is more than that. Due to the many exceptional poems that arrived this week, we have added more than 20 new ones. In the process, sadly, we have had to cut just as many, for practical reasons (a chapbook has an optimum size or it can’t be bound well). *Redux* compliments, rather than replaces, its earlier sister. That being said, we have tried to correct any typos in the first edition. The errors that remain continue to be my fault. Once again, let me thank all the poets who have generously donated their work to our project – it is brave and good of them. While they retain copyright, they agree to let you freely share their words. I also wish to thank Val Stevenson, publisher of *nthposition*, whose vision and hard work have been indispensable.

Val and I hope that you will mail this book of poems to friends, family, colleagues, media and leading hawkish politicians everywhere. We want to keep the momentum for peaceful poetic protest going, until we are able to say we stopped this war before it started.

Peace.

Todd Swift

Editor, *100 Poets Against The War / 100 Poets Against The War Redux*
 Paris, February 3, 2003

Why do you hate me so
 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

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.

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)

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.

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.

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.

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...)

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 K 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

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

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.

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.

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 furry 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.

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.

Women in Black

Leza Lowitz

fields of gypsies
 growing dark across the Danube,
 dark across the desert,
 across the world, now at home.
 Widows and weeds.
 Homes of broken chairs,
 half-standing walls,
 empty door-frames,
 another fresh grave.
 Town square, open market
 rows of orange-red tomatoes,
 tattered clothes,
 blood-stained plaza
 centuries-old buildings
 stripped bare to brick.
 Across the Danube
 across the desert
 across the world
 now at home
 old women in black,
 fields of young men,
 families laid to waste
 women waiting for bread,
 counting grains of sugar,
 grains of salt, minutes,
 the hours, waiting for peace.
 Once friends, now enemies.
 Once lullabies, now eulogies.
 Old women in black
 bent in half, whispering
 across the world... when will it end?
 "Will they fight
 even over the moon?"
 Hands lain
 over another coffin,
 hands lain
 over their hearts,
 women in black
 praying, praying.

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.

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?

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.

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.")

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.

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.

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.

A poem for my Muslim poet friend

Larry Jaffe

I was not taught to hate or love,
 my depression era parents only
 trained survival of the meekest.
 When parental guidance spoke,
 it was work or be worked
 from above as slaves.
 Family was to be cared for
 as extension of self,
 blood of course thicker than water.
 Love was bestowed by gods not mortals.
 Liking was taken personally –
 "You are always loved," they said.
 "We just don't always like you,"
 they spoke true.
 But I did not need to learn to hate you
 it came naturally a by product of heritage
 a natural extension of ancestral strife.
 One day I dropped out of ancient conclave,
 never having learned these lessons,
 actively fighting thoughts intrusive.
 It was then I decided if I was going to hate
 it would be for good reason and not self-indulgence.
 And it is for this reason, that when we met
 I saw no colour of nationality or culture
 I only saw poet.

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.

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'.

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.

The 20th century man**Robert W Proctor**

In 1918, I, a man of the 20th century, ordered 10,000 men
 like me over the top. A similar man, on the other side,
 ordered machine guns, howitzers, and mortars to fire.
 He had to stop my men.

He did. Few of them returned. And most of them – like me –
 were scarred in mind for life.
 I did it. He did it. His Emperor did it. My President did it.
 Our Stone Age ancestors did it.

In a hundred days I sent a thousand bombers across the Channel
 to blow apart and incinerate my fellow man, just as some of them
 had gassed and burned to ashes many more of my fellow man.
 They did it. We did it. I did it.

And you know something? I wasn't even born when I sent
 my fellow man to death at Belleau Wood;
 and only a child when I rained fire on Hamburg.
 But as certain as I live today, I did it.

Years later, when I am gone, when others bemoan
 the slaughter at Verdun, the fiery atomization of Hiroshima,
 the disembowelment of Vietnam, the consuming fireballs of 9-11,
 death grants me no rest, because if others don't know him,

I know the 20th century man behind those horrors.
 If it could, my earth bound fleshless jaw, bone grating against bone,
 would try to form these words:
 I – did – it.

November 2002

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.

Off the record

Maureen Gallagher

He tippexed 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

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.

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 white-throated sparrow can't compare

Eleanor Wilner

He had made it through so many winters,
an optimist in the blizzard's heart, staying on –

so it seemed wrong, unfair (if such a word
has any currency), that the gray expanse
that used to mean the rain of spring
should be the solid metal of a sky
in motion overhead, and nowhere
for a small and singing thing to fly,
now that the bombers had come back,
a phalanx overhead, a Roman legion
given wings, and the land below
grown dark – the way a shadow slips
across the land when a cloud passes
overhead. But there resemblance ends.

As does ours with the sparrow, who, resting
on a shaded branch, shakes his wings
and gives the clear, reflective whistle
for which his kind is known.

And now the very thought of him
has flown; the mind can't hold for long
the sparrow and the bombers
in a single thought. Mad
to make them share a line, as if
to balance power so unequal
on the creaking fulcrum
of the merest *and*:
a pennyworth
of weight with its live, pensive song
against a roaring overhead – pure dread,
its leaden tonnage, and its tongue.

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

In the abundance of oxygen the refugee is choked

Essa Bokarr Sey

Sparks! o! sparks!
 The rumbling sound shook our walls within the dusty
 desert.
 Earth quakes?! No! Typhoons?! No way!!!
 B fifty twos... Hmmm... souls are being wiped by
 styles and smiles.
 Is the bomber feeling the pain?
 Refugees are spreading like wild geese.
 Oxygen is abundant but they are choked by the
 whistling stones that are
 propelled by flames!
 Gunpowder cannot save us from napalm!
 Save the refugee-operation or save the
 powerful-operation?!
 Resolutions have been buried. Is might the answer?
 Shadows behind gallows or silhouettes upon pillows?
 Who's who within these wars of our time?
 Those jailed cannot be bailed by truth and those
 bombing cannot snore when
 flying.
 Our time is as sour as lime.
 Please stop it! The ghosts that are peeping through
 a futuristic window will
 haunt our generation.
 Some want to rest in the west and eat cheese in the
 middle east.
 Oh lord! our time is sour.
 Kindly grease our world with peace.

Gambia, 2003

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.

a short list of short lists**devorah major**

miracles:
 silk worms
 pearls
 thousand year-old redwood trees
 lightning
 the sun rising every day
 the ocean and its tides
 human existence in a universe
 that is mostly ice rock and fire
 tragedies:
 starving children
 oil drowned gulls
 sonar beached whales
 rape
 murder
 uranium dust
 bullets and bombs
 that shatter peoples'
 walls, doorways, beds,
 heads, hearts, lives
 remedies:
 justice
 peace
 love

We accept**Uicki 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?

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?

on the night she didn't feel like it anymore

danika dinsmore

she stuffed herself to claustrophobic proportions
 belly ache a reminder she still had work to do
 she baked during moments of frustration listening
 for the difference between fireworks and gunshots
 she had been startled the week before by a
 strange man in the yard tonight
 she baked without looking out the window

perhaps it was the *New York Times* story
 the Israeli tank blowing up two little boys
 on bicycles who didn't know the curfew was still in effect
 the whole one the one who maintained his limbs
 was buried with his chocolate bar in his hand

perhaps it was Noah's impending flood God with crumbs in his beard
 or the appearance of an angel-afraid-of-dogs in the forest

perhaps a lot of poets had died in the last few weeks
 and with them their hats

or perhaps it was the rose on the bus lying on the dashboard
 in wet paper towels confiscated at the border a memento
 a kiss an apology

what she really wanted was to stay up all night creating a path
 of words burning clay singeing the wick of mortal time

what she remembered was this is not a dress rehearsal
 what did it matter the embarrassment of being human
 when we are all pedalling away from the same tanks
 with our chocolate bars and
 our misinterpreted dreams

Sirens

Pat Jourdan

They waited for you on the landing
 on winter nights, black figures
 ready with guns.
 on the way to the bathroom, the bedroom,
 they hunched in the shadows.
 at the peak of my terror and bravery
 they disappeared, until next time.
 (Torches or candles made it worse,
 menacing shapes against the walls.)

They could appear at any time—
 always be ready to run,
 leave the plate or the bed.
 I don't know where we went
 or what we did.
 Pyjamas, coats, cold, running;
 crowded shapes, hushed voices,
 adults in adult talk.
 A mattress under the stairs – why?
 and her making tea at the corner
 of the iron table, a slice of light
 showing exhaustion in the set of her shoulders,
 the radio sacrosanct, the only guardian we had.

Ballad**Sean O'Brien, 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?

*1 February 2003***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

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?

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.

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.

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

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.

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 Ph.D.
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

Who shall be hung

Margo Berdeshevsky

How he writhes, bottle-eyed animal moaning for an eager
war, how a president stamps for orgasm not to be denied for –
now his troops are massed and time, the all we have, chanting.

In a dank stone prison cave in middle Paris, time-balm for
the hour, cave kitsch-ily named la Guillotine, its shined blade-
machina alertly cornered, wall behind our heavy heads we note
has words carved in since fourteen-twenty-one: *je serai pendu*.

I shall be hung. Who shall be hung, all souls, our damp
impatience for - I think that time's invented helm is wacky
spinning Weimar bodies, think it's spewing signs we can't
elude, this night a poet prays, her head
lolling and as though in her own bottle-glass-eye, blind too,
she now can see

a blade's truth of it, how it lowers so necessarily
out of this historic – glow,
more then more our nineteen-thirty-nine lifts now
with each sun's knife, lifts now.
How friends position to demand their prejudicial shoe to
stand in – is the human fact I find most evil to bear.
It stands so tall for – thrumming drum and trumpet ready
letting blood notes for –
Indeed "Israelis have chosen their Jews," dear poet.
How deserts choose their endless sands. The dead, their eyes.
Indeed self righteousness grows toes and fingers hourly, what
monster child is this we call our safety for -

A taller man at dinner – motor-minding so from the bowel of his
hates for fears for I must wish to leave the table and the de-boned
sole not to hide but out of protest for – oh I must not weep how
a brown-shirt rhetoric so spits like vomit from descendants of the last
world war. What world shall we defend, God, as we bear our beautiful
rope of causes, who'll be hung – for hoping?

My peculiar talents

Ifor Thomas

I linger next to the school ice cream van
Threaten the angelic horrors
As their tongues lap the cones
Say I believe in child slavery

I bite the neck of the strange woman
I'm standing next to in the lift
growl into her flesh
"take me to Transylvania – now"

I wander into the art gallery
reeking of gasoline and carrying a flame thrower
exclaim there's a need for more spontaneity
I steer this car into the queue at the bus stop
and as my wipers beat away blood
say "whoops"

I sprinkle white powder into an envelope
send it to the mayor with the message
Snort anthrax sucker

I stand up in the plane
shout – my shoes are filled with gelignite
we are all going down
And if I had a powerful rifle
And if my cross hairs
Were fixed on your chest
do you think I'd hesitate before pulling the trigger?

When they drag me into the dock
wearing an orange suit
weighed down with chains
wild-eyed, spitting feathers
the judge accepts that I am a victim
of a violent society
offers me 999 years in high security –
Or he says perhaps
a spell in the army may suit your peculiar talents
It's the army for me

I agree.

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.

Taking Sides

Aoife Mannix

There will be another war,
 many people will be killed,
 and I will be expected to have an opinion.
 But what can you say about a man
 who'd rather let thousands of children die
 then give them access to medical vaccines
 he claims could be used in bombs.
 Or for that matter a man
 who when the supplies finally arrive,
 locks them up in a warehouse,
 preferring to let his own people starve
 then weaken their hatred of the enemy.
 Talk about a rock and a hard place.
 The fundamental difference is questionable.
 Neither Jesus nor Mohammed
 would have allowed themselves
 to be pushed into this kind of choice.

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.

blood in the snow**Congus**

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 keeps 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.

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.

Life after wartime

Tom Phillips

Some things never change.
The garden bushes wag their beards
like arguing theologians while the orange fists
of passion fruit take cover in the leaves.
The sky aches with unmapped distances
and the sun hides nothing.
At dusk, it surrenders to the moon.
When there's small-hours muttering in the street
remember it's only someone deciding to go home or go on,
pushing through the night for the last of the great good times
and into a shell-shocked morning-after.
At least there's coffee again.
It takes our minds off the radio,
the smooth-voiced reassurances,
the metaphors encrusted like barnacles
on every announcement – your almost
imperceptible jump at the sound
of a pamphlet shoved through the door.
Somewhere further resolutions are signed.
Things never change.
People wear their silence like a cawl.
To bring them luck against drowning.
They were parents. Or siblings. Or both.
They are the ones that nothing surprises,
the ones who no longer look up
when a jet comes roaring in above the city,
framed against the orange sky,
seemingly picking its way among the towers.

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 Chrysostum*

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

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

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.

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.

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

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.

I'd rather live in France (or live anywhere
 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.

Miranda Rights**Marcos Flores**

You have the right to remain silent...

Silent about the injustice that exists, about underground modes and methods of survival...
About love and compassion and peace and giving and sharing...
And all that this earthly experience gives, what life's cycles bring and more.

You have the right to remain silent...

And be arrested for the homeless, for the sick, for the lame, and the poor, for those faceless, nameless, invisible human beings suffering, right outside your nation's living room door.

You have the right to remain silent...

And go home to your family while political tyrants plot paths to war.

You have the right to remain silent...

And live your life... living and looking through glass...
In a pseudo democracy, forgetting the past, forgetting to pay homage to all those things that truly make men, women and children free.

You have the right to remain silent...

And not ask questions, when you already know in your heart the answers.

You have the right to remain silent...

Because action is needed...words have no meaning...time is fleeting.
The world and its peace...our community...they're calling for more, not war.

January 2003

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.

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.

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.*)

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.

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
wings 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.

Anna's meal**Nuala Ní Chonchúir**

If it had not been for the fighting in Dagestan
 the two of us might never have met:
 the tinned meat of the Semikarakorsk
 processing plant and my digestive system.
 I was invited to share a meal with the troops
 in a border cellar, two flights down,
 and if the darkness wasn't enough to scare,
 the slovenly guardian of the kitchen was.

She disembowelled rows of unmarked tins,
 slicing the aluminium as easy as silk,
 "Tin 23, rotten. Tin 39, the same. Tin 42,
 for you. Try a sample of our daily fare,
 and tell Moscow how we feast,"
 and she plunged the blade through each tin,
 so I sniffed and licked - what else could I do?-
 then spewed my bile all over her floor.

The soldiers earn twenty-two roubles a day,
 for no medicine, no fuel, no faith; and for hours
 of ducking bullets their bellies are rewarded
 with putrid meat from the government's stores.
 If it had not been for the fighting in Dagestan
 the two of us might never have met:
 the tinned meat of the Semikarakorsk
 processing plant and my digestive system.

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.

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 allianses
 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

A verse to war**J R Carpenter**

I am afraid
 (of what will happen
 of the rhetoric
 of the silence
 of not knowing).
 I am afraid I don't know what to contribute.

I am afraid
 (of destruction
 of waiting
 of doing nothing
 of adding fuel to the flames).
 I am afraid I don't have any answers.

I am afraid
 (of trivializing
 of propagandizing
 of margins
 of error).
 I am afraid it is but a meager thing to add
 a verse adverse to war.