

Poems For A Better Future



Oxfam

Oxfam Summer Poetry Festival



Edited by Todd Swift

Poems For A Better Future features the best poems submitted to the Oxfam Poetry Competition, 2004, as part of the the Summer Poetry Festival at Oxfam Books & Music, 91 Marylebone High Street, which saw many of today's most significant UK poets perform or teach.

It includes the winning poems by Isobel Dixon, Roisin Tierney and Katy Evans-Bush, as well as those short-listed by Oxfam's Poet-in-residence, Todd Swift.

This compelling collection – at turns humorous and serious – is always inspiring as it presents various ways of imagining a way forward in complex times.

“Poetry is a way of happening,” as Auden said. This book is one of the best examples of just how that is so.

All money collected by the sale of *Poems For A Better Future* goes to the Sudan Crisis Relief Fund, Oxfam.

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Acknowledgements

The Oxfam Summer Poetry Festival ("Poetry at Oxfam") and my residency at Oxfam Books and Music at 91 Marylebone High Street, London, has been one of the highlights of my time as a poet and poetry editor. I have met so many fine people, and learned a great deal about giving. I very much appreciate being able to put my ideas about community, poetry, and cultural activism, into practice.

I wish to thank the many people who have kindly made the residency, with its readings, workshops, contest and anthology, happen.

First, thank you to the Arts Council, England, whose officers worked closely and thoughtfully with me, especially Sarah Sanders, Ruth Crawley and Charles Beckett; Melanie Abrahams, of renaissance one, for her advice at an early stage of this grant.

None of this could have happened without the humour, intelligence, good nature, foresight, patience, compassion and hard work of Martin Penny, manager Oxfam Books & Music, who has been so very open to all the poets in his midst; I have greatly enjoyed making a friend in the process.

Wayne and Elena at the Oxfam shop have been so enthusiastic and supportive, too. Thanks to the following Oxfam volunteers, whose hard work ensured the events were a success: Rose, Lucy, Nahid, Stephanie, Max, Nicole, Lorna and Emma. A special thanks to Father Terence Phipps and Susan from St James's Church for the kind loan of the chairs. Their patience and generosity were greatly appreciated.

The poets contributed their time and talent and often books, often for much less than any of it was worth (all too often the case with poets, alas, but there you go...) in the name of donating to the Sudan Fund. I thank them all here: Andrew Motion; Anthony Joseph; Charlie Dark; David Harsent; Don Paterson; Heather Taylor; Ian Duhig; James Byrne; John Stammers; Malika Booker; Mimi Khalvati; Pascale Petit; Patience Agbabi; Polly Clark; Roddy Lumsden; Sean O'Brien; Steve Tasane and Wendy Cope.

My wife, Sara Egan, has been a source of inspiration for my work, as always.

Introduction

The poems in this collection – which run the gamut from humorous to very serious – were gathered as a result of the Oxfam Summer Poetry Festival (July 21–August 31, 2004), which was initiated and organized by the present editor, as Poet-in-residence at Oxfam Books & Music Shop, 91 Marylebone High Street, London, with the support of the Arts Council, England. As I indicate elsewhere, this project would have been impossible without the help of many others, but especially Martin Penny.

The poems selected for this pamphlet, *Oxfam Poems For A Better Future*, were written in response to a call for new poems to be donated to Oxfam, and at the same time submitted to the poetry competition. I have drawn these poems from a far larger pool of poems submitted. If a poem is included here, consider it short-listed, and worthy of some consideration. The especially good poems which came in first, second and third, or received an honourable mention, are listed at the start of the anthology. I have let them mingle freely with the others, to create more of a flow. On a rather specific note, please accept all typographical errors as my own (we had a thrilling deadline of three days); the editor has also made some slight changes to poems, in instances where, faced with unfamiliar handwriting, there was nothing to do but go with a best guess.

Many of the poets represented in this collection participated in one or more of the many free workshops that the residency offered, and a few are published here for the first time. A critical eye or ear might be able to detect this, but it seemed worthwhile to encourage, within the structure of the competition, wherever possible. The careful reader will note the many possible meanings of "future" and "better" that the poets chose to explore (sometimes with great unease), and no doubt will be struck by how optimism and pessimism – like both sides of a child's seesaw – strain to lift or fall one way or the other but somehow maintain a straight line. Thus is a sustainable horizon achieved, between hope and despair.

The broad aim of my residency was to "airlift" an entire community of poets, with their own poetics – that is a broad spectrum, younger to established, from mainstream to performance – into a community of poetry lovers, on the high street, in the humidity (and as it turns out, monsoon season) of a late London summer, for free, and to encourage poets new and expert to explore their art and craft in the unexpected context of a busy public space. Not any space mind you: one stocked with a striking range of books (and a good poetry section) and where the money earned is aimed at alleviating suffering.

In the spirit of Oxfam's volunteerism, I required that the poets who submitted their work do so by donating it fully. Therefore, the poems now belong to Oxfam,

but the poets have permission, in perpetuity, to reprint their poems, and can rest assured they have given over something made from their toil for a very good cause. My own poem, of course, is offered as a gift outside of competition, to Oxfam. We found our festival occurring during the terrible events in Sudan. This meant that the money raised at the poetry events went to the Sudan Crisis Relief Fund. If you buy this book, not only will you enjoy some moving, and at times amusing, poetry, which may be inspirational; but you will do good by contributing to Oxfam's mission.

Congratulations to the winners; and to all who sent in work. It has meant a great deal to me to see so many younger writers emerge during this brief festival, into something like confidence. And to work with so many generous and professional leading poets in the UK. Keep writing, all of you: that way certainly leads to a better future.

Todd Swift, Poet-in-residence
Oxfam Books & Music Shop

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Letter from Ceto, London, to Mrs Dlamini, Okavongo swamps, Botswana

Pam Moolman

Dear mother, she elephant. Wise one.

This land is so strange, the people are odd,
their paths are not water, to ride on, or dream.
The sun has forgot them, their faces are white,
as bright morning sun on a Zebra's stripe

The rain shields the colours
but the swamps are not there
to hold all the fish and the ancestors' prayer.
I look around corners and carry the thorn,
but the old ones hide in the crease of my eyes
and the far off sounds of the fish eagle's cries.

The stars sometimes whisper, but forget how to sing;
the people don't laugh or swing out their hips,
their houses don't breathe or hum with the wind.
Instead of on dugouts they travel in tin,
shiny bright boxes, as fast as a lion,
on paths that are wide and made of dead earth
with white lines dividing and coloured lights shining.

Dear Ma, they walk with eyes fixed and glazed
and seem so alone that they talk to themselves
in small boxes they hold
to their ears' and their chins;
and boxes shout out with pictures of dreams.
The people don't sing but their boxes make sounds.
I answer politely, but nobody hears.
They eat with odd spears
on boxes and stools.

They like boxes here.
 They like tin.
 It's eaten their water and sucked out their souls.
 They walk round like Titsi when the tokolosh came.

But Mother, I forgot.
 I saw a child smile and my heart was all moist.
 Two lovers kissed and I thought of the bush.
 Dear Ma, that melted the tin round my heart.

The Loft

Maureen Weldon

All morning I sorted out the years -
 Dusty memories.

My proud father in 8th Army uniform,
 Just a boy,
 When I did not know him.

My mother's boots almost lost in papers
 Seas of papers.
 Both patents kept me shod.

Now the trunks are empty
 Wiped with water,
 Except for one.

All afternoon I sorted out the future,
 With a second strength.
 I will hold a burning sword,

To cut the cake,
 And row into new waters.

Just

Jan Harris

Just
 one child
 with a dream
 that her house rose
 from the ash, that her
 mother remembered how
 to smile and her father's arms
 grew back long enough to hold her,
 just one day with enough food,
 with breath to run and climb
 without fear. Just one
 child with a dream
 of peace in
 one just
 world.

Alchemy

Jules Webster

The fair weather clouds are being formed
 by the gentle currents of rising air -
 warmed by the heated land.

Like raindrops - when the time is right
 and we are big enough - we'll fall
 through that current of air,

capturing – as we plummet –
cloud droplets on our forward cuff –
growing bigger.

And when the sun – shining brightly –
is less than forty-two degrees
over the horizon,

a rainbow will appear: the result
of a single inner reflection
by each drop of rain.

Jump Start The Bandwagon

Kate Dempsey

Imagine you smile a genuine smile
at five strangers, ten, twenty.
Imagine you ask how someone is
and listen to the answer.
You give up your seat, get home on time,
appreciate why it's called home.
Imagine you give credit where credit's due,
ask someone's opinion, take it in to account,
write that letter, donate that money, help out, join in,
commit, apologise, thank, propose, accept,
try, fail, try again.
Would the world end
or would it start afresh?
Imagine you made a difference today
don't be the last
be the first.

Becoming

Roisin Tierney

On finding that first imprint of the Ur-feather
in the lithographic limestone strata
of Solnhofen, central Bavaria,
those quarry workers and stonemasons
did not think of the Late Jurassic
but saw the hundred and fifty
million year old solitary feather
as 'the remains of an angel'.

As they continued to split the slate
a sport of nature was disinterred,
intermediate between the avian and the reptile,
a sort of dino-bird, with scales *and* feathers
which brought about unheard of
revolutions in the field of Palaeontology
and proved without a doubt
that birds are dinosaurs.

And what of angels? Turning I sit
and meet your eyes, and contemplate
your true beginnings, when you clambered from
the primal soup, with your light covering
of primitive fluff, your vacant face
and upward stare, those feather-barbs
drooping where your wings had sat,
your bewildered cry.

As surely as any German quarryman
cracks stone from stone in Solnhofen,
Bavaria, your nature's split
right from the off; that sulphurous whiff,
those salt lagoons and reddish haze
which surface only in your dreams,
your tendency towards fight or flight
when under pressure.

Perhaps an intermediate species we
 are still *becoming* something – what?
 I don't know, but an angel would have cried
 to smile like you do, and today
 swallows swoop in Bavaria
 as Archæopteryx never could.
 And look, as if by chance, looking at us –
 that robin's lizard glance.

“Listen up girls, it's pumpkin time”

Emma Phillips

Listen up girls, it's pumpkin time.
 This is the future calling and you'd
 better not put me on hold. Generation
 X marks the spot where you touch type
 A for alteration needed. Your handsome
 prince is a no show and glass slippers sell
 on e-bay. Message pending: it is time for
 change, for a better ending.
 If you go down to the woods today
 you'll find Hansel and Gretel picking litter.
 Ladies, abandon the beanstalk.
 Take on the giant in corporate clothes
 grown fat on fast food and cheap labour.
 Gather your sisters, put a twist in the tale
 or the big, bad wolf will feed off your fears.
 Let your voices be heard, loud, from the
 castles to the shores of never-never land.
 You've been your own wicked stepmother
 for far too long. Move on.
 Wake up your sleeping duty to
 tomorrow. Your three wishes are up
 so grant them yourselves before
 it's too late to create a better after.

A Voids Officer Achieves the Tree Pose

Annie Freud

At times she thinks that what she really
 ought to be doing with her life
 is somehow the decision of the ether;
 she'll make a film about an early time
 before thought or cloth, or pity or desire,
 when all was flabby, all obscure, half-baked
 until the moment when a silk-worm sank its jaws
 into the fibres of a mulberry leaf.

As a delaying tactic, she bangs another Frenchman.
 They meet in a bar so crowded, that after shouting
 for half an hour at one another, they take a taxi
 to his place. She has had to repress her dismay
 at his jacket and when at last it's off and she touches him,
 she recalls the final parting with her therapist –
 Someone who'd wear a shade of lipstick that repellent
 must lack the judgment to be worth the fees.

Choice-based letting's just a phrase
 to make you think that things have changed;
 this is a life lived in a lunch break when
 all your desires have been pushed away,
 and something – a word or thought – suggests
 a whole new set of possibilities
 and standing on one leg she knows
 her real deficiencies have yet to flower.

For Better, For Worse

Helen Chapman

In Camden Town there's a man who,
Through the palm of my hand,
Claims to see life, love, and happiness abound.
But when pressed to divulge
How exactly the story will unfold,
Merely shrugs his shoulders
And wistfully pronounces:
It is for you to see the colour of your days,
And for me to guide your hand
Around the outline of life known and foretold.
For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,
The future is as the future will be.

This morning

Sarah James

Dressed in your multi-coloured cardi
and boldly balanced on my knees,
your fifteen-month fingers fumble
at the keys in the lock,
looking for freedom.
You try to turn cold metal.
It doesn't move.
You screw up your face like a hanky and scream,
then try again.
This time it twists a touch.
My eyes water at the certainty of it.
But I hug the future
and smile.

The Master and the Future

Katy Evans-Bush

"Large and full and high the future still opens... It is now indeed that I may do the work of my life." – Henry James in his notebook, 1895

Large and full and high the future still opens
And I will look radiantly forward, protected
By the great proscenium arch of the heavens.
Standing directly under its blue velvet curtain
I am separated from the past and all its broken
Props, which will now be stored backstage
And never, if I can determine it, glued together.

The future still opens full and high, and large
Like a book, the one great book you can never
Hope to stop writing in, because the one great hope
Is that one may face the future openly and without fear,
Without fear of the past, which continues to beckon,
And what it or the mooted reality of it may mean.
I have my head, thank God, full of visions.
The screen is behind me and the past is behind the screen.

Standing under the gold fringe which fringes
The blue velvet curtain, cusp of present and future,
I gaze into the faces of my as-yet-unborn audience
And meeting their vacant eyes I see only myself,
Which is good; which means they are there for me to invent,
Beautiful as they are, and grandly as I may call to them
And however painfully they may choose to answer.

Large and high the future exquisitely opens
 Over chestnut trees in full flower along a promenade
 Where the park widens out to a horseshoe shape, courting
 Sly clouds that dawdle over scampering puppies,
 And over a certain interesting girl on a young man's arm,
 That roll like hoops alongside great waves of what is possible;
 Opens into the chance to breathe afresh again, as if
 One had never breathed the old torpid air full of mistakes,
 Clicks, in fact, open like an ivory fan.
 It is now indeed that I may do the work of my life.

Untitled

Emma Katono

Sometimes I feel this world will never change
 Could we really rid the world of its pain?
 At times I feel we could rearrange
 Bring happiness and release the strain
 Better future in this age, existence
 This thought I think is totally naïve
 Can't be achieved even with persistence
 A thought that I find stupid to believe
 Pessimistic this attitude might be
 But to better the world is ambitious
 'Cause this is merely reality
 With our leaders it is ridiculous
 The thought of trying will bring much pleasure
 But to bring a better a future, never.

Wars make parks the place of angels

Andrew Youngson

there are angels in the park
 those wings are too brittle and heavy
 to lift them from the earth
 so they wait
 with grumpy faces
 and pray men will not always be
 such clumsy angel-makers

The Straight Lady from Clapham

Philip Burton

Straight bananas, Luv?
 They're as straight as I can get 'em
 straight from Covent Garden.
 You mean, is it a racket?
 Probably is, Mrs Arden
 I'm selling a banana. I don't clip it.
 I don't ship it. I don't pack it.
 And you buy a bargain
 know what I mean?
 My hands are clean.
 We've all got piggy on our back
 to pay, right? And a living to make
 and when push comes to shove
 there's the overheads
 the perks and sweeteners
 the multinational fat cats, luv,
 harbour fees, security
 (valuable things bananas).
 They've all got a wedge
 of banana gateau, ain't they,

all them partners? Except
 the sower and the grower.
 They don't get a pay day.
 Not what you or I would call
 a reason to get out of bed
 anyway. Traidcraft stall
 was here last week and said,
 howz about a fairer trade?
 I said, no shopper's going
 to dig for extra bread
 to pay for straight bananas.
 So here's Traidcraft fruit.
 I've made a pile of 'em
 to give me regulars a hoot.
 Five pence Aunty-Vera-
 blooming-dearer. I can't ask
 my customer to pay that. Ha!
 Oh, you'll take what? The lot?
 Well, thank you very kindly, dear.

Permission to a child

Aisling Byrne

I believe in you, my dear
 it can be your purpose
 as different as each ice flake
 that ever was and ever will
 ideology kills, so live freedom and wishes
 let your spirit fly, in the back
 of the lorry, bumping to Isfahan

and I'll always be there
 with you, chasing the sun
 your hair will fly, with knots and satin
 exposed grey in your wake
 your bright eyes, smiling sad tears
 and the hot baking heat of pleasure

the sparks and shadows and swish of stars
 that you leave in your trail as you fly
 are seeds for me, for us
 you'll be taking us with you
 helping us fly.

Tikki Olum*

Jude Rosen

The olive trees' grey crunkly bark
 is weathered by the elements
 but resilient, sacred trees intact
 for hundreds of years,
 their silver green leaves half opened
 half asleep, alert when in fruit.

When Rabbi Ascherman
 helped Palestinians in Ain Abbus
 collect the olive harvest,
 three settlers with black hats,
 their faces set grim, taut with hate,
 came down the mountains
 with baseball bats as long as swords
 and beat him up.

Fawzi Hussain cried "This is my land,
it's the end of the world."
Fares Ahmed: "my father and grandfather
planted them and I find them cut"
as he choked back tears:
"I condemn everything."

We saw a truck crammed
with mature olive trees dug up
on their way to be sold
to orchards in Haifa.

* *to repair the world through one just act*

On Having Enough Hope

Helen Moore

What little beings we feel we are!
Mere grains of sand on the Earth's shores,
it's true we are in numbers;
so many millions caught in personal sorrow,
in private fears about tomorrow,
and yet,
how easily we forget
that mind can move matter;
that united, our hearts can reach across borders;
can join in solidarity;
can call for peace;
can together resist;
can tear down iron bars
and free all souls
from those who themselves had hoped
always to have control.

Men Dressed as Saviours

Frank Dullaghan

I was looking for someone to save –
to feel good about myself, in those days,
I needed to be a hero –
when I found her in a coffee bar,
perched high on a stool,
sipping at a latte, a book open on the counter.
Her eyes were sad. She looked troubled.
When I helped her down, her skirt rose
and her thighs flashing like lightning in a storm.
I took her to an island
where wild strawberries grew,
where the sea muttered prayers unceasingly
and the sun kept its place in the sky
so that we always stood over our shadows.
I told her she was happy,
that all of her bad days were behind her.
But life needs variety to stay interesting,
brightness needs the dark,
safety, the threat of harm. Love needs pain.
So in small ways we began to hurt each other,
to lie, to steal
the look of contentment from each others faces,
to absent ourselves, lock ourselves away in our heads.
Then one day the sea roiled up,
the sun trembled and our shadows grew large.
Weariness sat in her eyes.
She stood in her nakedness and said she'd been used,
that all she'd ever wanted
was the small escape of coffee,
a slow book on the counter
and that the world would be well rid
of men who come dressed as saviours.

For a Better World

Matt Bryden

Getting in the shower before the muscles seize up.
 Less TV.
 To instruct a charge I admire, reflect on her attitude.
 Meteor showers through clear skies.
 Female attention to style.
 Post.
 Non-aggression, non-vested interest.
 Teaching to learn, learning to teach.
 Totally great albums, not nearly great.
 Caught glances.
 Her bag that matches her sandy-coloured hair and shoes.
 That “difficult three hours” that passes like a breeze.
 Multiculture.
 Less phones in the hands.

Karaoke at The West, Normal, Illinois

Carrie Etter

Flush with the cheap and tawdry, flush with ease and effortless inclusion,
 I push my hands into my jean pockets, I push all my criteria to the seams.
 If you'd smirk at Mike's belt buckle, five inches high, six across, the
 doors are wide open this humid month. Three or four times over the night's
 course, a voice, messianic, surges, now one, now another. This is not about
 the colour of my hair, city black. This is about location: behind the bar a
 town sprawls, Wal-Mart and Steak 'n' Shake; at its face lie fields of corn
 and soybean, the groan of eighteen-wheelers on the interstate highway. If
 it's never my turn, there are moments I'd believe almost anything.

Fair And Square

Philip Wilson

After the Indian meal not far from a dock
 where the dead cargo was chucked and what remained
 got shipped to the New World tightly packed,
 we eat slivers of transparent fruit
 packaged with the only logo that matters.

It's small. It's a trick in the art of doing.
 It tastes good. It's a local project.
 It's vacuum-packed. Only an object.
 We tip in accordance with the art of dining,
 move out to cold waves attacking a dock.

Healing Service, Iona Abbey

Robert Davidson

Although the month is June there is no great warmth
 in here. Even our numbers don't help, and we are
 about a hundred. The thick grey slate of the floor is chill.
 The stone walls will not give way. There is a cool breeze
 from the door that puckers the skin of my hands.
 Now the minister lifts her arms and calls us into Community.

I have chosen to be part of this, dipping my head in prayer
 Forcibly drawing my faith away from its natural home
 into the supernatural. How far can I commit?
 Cancer, anorexia, infertility, she names these things.
 None of us has yet accepted the unacceptable.
 One by one we go forward for the laying on of hands.

The unbearable has forced its way through our bliss.
 This life is all we can be sure of. We want to go on.
 Heaven and hell are where we have always lived.
 There has been much talk of miracles in this place.
 Much talk of a thin veil between this world and the next.
 We have a great sense of togetherness, of something shared.

Rain sweeps against the windows. Candle flames shiver
 in the breeze but don't go out. Human sympathy exists.
 In the course of a life we all rise from the dead many times.
 I know I am not who I was, who I was, who I was.
 No one walks on water. Everyone walks through fire.
 Once again my time has arrived. I go forward and kneel.

Gene Genie

Emily Hinshelwood

When you're cutting up the genes in a set of DNA
 and you're so engrossed in progress that you can't hear people say
 "just be careful what you're splicing or you'll ruin nature's way"
 have a think about the price that the world will have to pay.

*Roses that glow when you water them well
 onions that grow with a beautiful smell
 oysters with bracelets of pearls in their shell
 hair that will shape without oodles of gel.*

When you claim you're making miracles to feed the starving poor
 and you think the world will never see a famine anymore
 are you sure about the motives of the boss you're working for?
 as it's money makes the world go round and opens nature's door.

*Apples that kill every maggot in sight
 hens that lay eggs without needing the light
 people that work every day and all night
 that have no need for sleep and eat less than a bite.*

When you sell a farmer seeds that will never reproduce
 and you patent genes of foodstuff that has been in constant use
 and you make her buy your pesticides or fine her for misuse
 you've a greater chance, among the poor, of tightening the noose.

*Salmon that swell up to five times their size
 pigs that are bred without mouths, ears or eyes
 medicine spliced into tropical flies
 cocktails of pets for the wealthier guys*

If you'd like to make designer food that runs around your plate
 and a brand new face and body that you think you'll never hate
 are you mindful of the changes that these luxuries dictate
 and the side effects and poverty they're likely to create?

*Ready-skinned lambs that you eat when they're raw
 dogs that are styled to have no bottom jaw
 cows with no legs that spray milk from the floor
 and men designed solely as fodder for war.*

So you understand the code in a set of DNA
 You've got the genie out now and you're gearing up to play
 but before you have your bit of fun, just hear what people say
 "have a think about the price that the world will have to pay".

She Begs for an Electrical Storm

Jen Hadfield

'I fell asleep in my chair
and woke up with my mouth hanging open,'

and whilst you slept your face was stern,
arms flung back on the recliner
like you were ready to raise thunder.

And you'd love that, to dangle this brat
of a day by the ankles, clear its nostrils
and administer a smack

a gust to get the metronomic cedars wagging;
 poco a poco,
andante, larrrrr-
go, light marbling the sky,
crosshatched in cottonwoods like yellow tartan,
and your hummingbirds, little copters,
arrested.

A Brighter Future

Mark Leech

He would have been with us now
if he had known how the land
would stop its war against us
weep clean water in regret
share the beasts and crops with us;

but by now he loves the war
of living too much, has found
the best bitter fight to live
on the English city's streets.

A Journey

Lorna Collins

So I leapt into a void
crept within the darkness,
waking unto questions
when time still asked me WHY??
The cold, cut, culling cauldron cried,
my weary wary whimper
screamed out for I was petrified
when it said the answer lied
not here.
GONE.
The black had tried to grasp my hide
and take me far away.
To help me stay they wired me up,
wiped my canvas clear.
The fear erased, my mast now raised,
at last the fire dwindled.
Those questions which had ripped me raw –
poisoned pricks in every pore,
leaving me so struck and sore –
blown up when they knocked me out
and zapped away the evil.
Awoken I could start again,
begin to breathe and feel alive.

From black to white so quick, you ask?
 The WHY?'s now HOW?So soon IT'S GONE?
 Not gone for I still leapt you know,
 but now this TIME is MINE.

I realised those lonesome cries,
 alone and tortured where I shied,
 were eased by life and love I found
 when people clutched me closely
 and touched my heart profusely.

I'm free so sunshine saunters
 Rays into my eyes.
 I rise, we shine, the hope beam flies,
 The amber ochre never dies.
 I look on and the future's clear,
 My path is gently open.
 The tears have dried, the fear has flown,
 A better life is blooming...

Boston Colours

Mary M Robertson

She was about 70 and well kept
 With clean white neat hair
 And dusty silvery powder on her face
 And striking bright red lipstick.
 She wore a clean white baseball cap
 And clean blue blouse
 And matching bag on the
 Grey ground next to her.
 On a brown cardboard box side
 Was black writing:
Please help, I am homeless.

Let us pretend

Jo Mazelis

That war is like winter,
 that in the spring
 peace will arrive as if
 on a swallow's wing.
 Warm and welcome
 making the dead ground
 stir. The ashes will serve
 to feed our flowers.
 In our garden, children,
 we can learn about the
 cycles of the planet -
 the seeming death
 then rebirth.
 Ask your parents
 to buy you a packet of seeds.
 Some of you can grow vegetables.

Yes, sunflowers are very nice
 but by the time they are at their best
 we will be gone.
 Now we will sing a song.
 Read the words from the blackboard
 'There is a green hill faraway'
 No, not that hill that you see through
 the window, that is Kilvey.
 This one is very far away.
 No, it isn't in Iraq.
 No, not Palestine either.
 Children, do you see how the
 Hyacinth bulb begins to sprout?
 Now it's time for Music and Movement
 Make yourself very small, like a waiting seed.
 Spring is here, so you burst once again into life.

Untethered

Claire Crowther

The red balloon rolls upright on the bank
of the Elbe. Collapses several times.

His scalp shines as he climbs in.
She feels like a loaf, baking.

She cools her hand on the willow sill.
The balloon's throat is torched again and again.

They rise fast to the right above us
drinking Kaffee Vis a Vis

on Europe's balcony and in the Zwinge,
tethered to Mozart by a koto zither.

Seabirds are making chains around them,
clattering white beads against the neck

of a steeple, each bead winged
to keep it high and circling.

The Statistics

Richard Tyrone Jones

Today, in Iraq, twenty-eight human beings were killed.
Oh, you want to know more? Ok,

nineteen of them were male, nine female.
They left approximately seventy dependents.
Is that getting closer? Twenty-one were in love.
Fourteen of them were killed by metal.

Their average age was thirty-three.
Six nationalities were represented.
They took from zero to fifty minutes to die.

Ok, ok, I'll stop messing with you. Most of them
were bad guys. And now the sport.

Sea

Wendy French

Words in the air, a winter smog,
railings worn from rust-eaten years.
We loop the lead of the Labrador through
bent wire. Head for the sands to the sea.
Bach's *Prelude* plays though the bandstand's
long gone. We sing the tune of the sea as it swims
to shore creating its own sounds
and in the distance behind us
blue has faded to grey.
What if one day the tides forget to turn?

Asylum Seeking Daleks

Attila the Stockbroker

They claim their planet's dying:
that soon it's going to blow
And so they're coming here – they say
they've nowhere else to go...
With their strange computer voices
and their one eye on a pole
They're moving in next door and then
They're signing on the dole...

Asylum seeking Daleks
 are landing here at noon!
 Why can't we simply send them back
 or stick them on the moon?
 It says here in the *Daily Mail*
 They're coming here to stay –
 The Loony Lefties let them in!
 The middle class will pay.....

They say that they're not terrorists:
 that doesn't wash with me!
 The last time I saw one I hid
 Weeks behind the settee...
 Good Lord – they're pink. With purple bumps!
 There's photos of them here!
 Not just extra-terrestrial...
 The bloody things are queer!

Yes! Homosexual Daleks
 And they're sponging off the State!
 With huge Arts Council grants
 to teach delinquents how to skate!
 It's all here in the paper –
 I'd better tell the wife!
 For soon they will EXTERMINATE
 Our British way of life...
 This satire on crass ignorance
 and tabloid-fostered fear
 Is at an end. Now let me give
 One message, loud and clear.
 Golf course, shop floor or fascist thug:
 Smash bigotry and hate!
 Asylum seekers – welcome here.
 You racists: emigrate!

a better future

Helên Thomas

when we all wake up
 understanding the meaning
 of the word “enough”

Oxfam Books & Music

Todd Swift

Book boxes explode
 Like flowers spreading spring
 Around as if it were money
 And they were rich.

Snow proves the dandelion a pauper
 But business improves each
 Year again. Who dies to give
 Their books away, their love?

For books and love are both
 Bound, both well-used,
 And can hold. Can open.
 In the basement. Sorting

Shelves the disarray
 Into a field of possible endings
 For the exiled treasures left
 To Oxfam: charity which may

Be another's loss. But gain
 For the one that buys the next
 Round. We share our books
 With the dead, and with broken

Lovers. How many first pages
 Are signed with birthdays,
 Wishes, promises, names?
 About half. She wrote she'd

Never leave, now find that
 Under Philosophy. The rot,
 The Byzantine disused-shed of it,
 The stale eloquence, the maverick

And the movement in one anthology
 Of dust, display, crammed abundance.
 Volunteers dirty with pencil marks,
 Laughing, or silent as bereavement,

Playing the scratched record,
 Noting the broken spine, up to
 Themselves in work and creation,
 Music and words, that, sold on, past

One will's decline, rise up new
 Borrowing's hill, to do some good
 (Just as each sun tilts at the horizon
 As if for love's first time).

(continued next page)
 Which is time's only ethic:
 To see that other's have yours, too.
 In this, a book's a clock that
 Ticks the items we offer over,

As if each page a wave bouldering
 Up the shore, bold and renewable,
 The over offering the coming on afresh,
 That is the old relentlessly a new

Thing in its newer owner's stable:
 The book's a horse wild no more,
 A baby just lifted from its cradle;
 Giving *wilderness* its Ur, *born* its Or.

Grandmother's Cataracts

Valeria Melchiorretto

Her eyes stopped her from seeing the world for what it had always been
 long before the cataracts became an issue. It is hard to say what exactly

she is looking forward to. So many fanciful visions rest at the base
 of her eye sockets and words go rancid in the abyss of her throat.

If she had saved the left over umbilical cord of her many children, she
 could now weave herself a shawl for cold winter nights when she talks

to her dead husband who as usual doesn't reply. Nothing must be wasted
 or else everything else is for nothing. No babies thrown out with the bath water

no matter how cheap life might be. She thought of her children as the future,
 now she hardly sees them. The cataracts are not to blame but her children's

future is abroad. Every so often the kind neighbours call her over to answer
 short long-distance calls. The phone wire has replaced the umbilical cord.

Those wide cheekbones have faced the indispensable as it lurked daily.
 Solid corners of her face on which she hangs a sad smile to dry her tears.

Now that the house is empty she wonders how long the future will take
 as time is nothing but short spells of rain, long rain spells of rain and restlessness.

O Globo*

Kim Hastings

Here, the river's floaters are broken homes
 in carnival arrangement,
 brit art bundles of straw, cans, planks,
 Mohican reeds
 growing as if they were still
 attendants at the bank.
 Edges broken into the stream.
 The river laps its brim,
 sips the land,
 wet with appetite.
 We were tidy. English.
 Now our ducks spin-ride the water bus
 of a new monsoon.

In Mozambique, an orb of setting sun
 sinks hearts and bones into an ocean.
 Landmines shift and float,
 carried on to other land:
 seeds clustered for explosion –
 where maize once grew,
 are scatterings of hands and feet.
 Still people stand
 like reed attendants at the bank:
 edges broken into a stream.
 Then, a baby
 born in a tree
 is airlifted to safety.

Nick In Afghanistan

Valerie Clarke

Nick against a backdrop of mountains
 showing the wheelchair he's helped to build.

Yesterday he raced against victims of mines
 and guns, winning his category – "paralysed".

And

Isobel Dixon

And I was thinking in the breaking dawn,
 my fingers on my father's precious skin:
 so this is what a death is like.

And not just any death, I see that now: the good death
 of a good man. How it takes a lifetime
 to prepare for such a death.
 And a lifetime after for the rest of us, recovering.
 Trying not to botch what's left us of our own.

Donations

Anne Boyd-Carpenter

Failed attempts at learning
 Uncompleted textbooks
 Unfruitful ambitions
 Parents' disappointed hopes

Languages learnt, then gone rusty
 Courses done years ago, distant
 Unneeded phrasebooks bought
 Perhaps the travel trip didn't come!

So many things started and lost
 Almost spoilt, but not quite
 Skills nearly lost, yet not

For another child will now learn
 All these books, here and now
 Are for the schoolroom of what is

The Brompton Hospital, the Rose Ward
 To save a young brain
 God willing

About the Editor

Todd Swift was born in Montreal on Good Friday, 1966. He is the author or an editor of eight books of poetry. In 1997 he was given the Young Quebecer of the Year Award in the Arts and Education category, for his poetry projects. From 1998-2001 he was Visiting Lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. In late 2001 he moved to Paris where he lived and wrote for two years. He has been poetry editor of *nthposition.com* since 2002. In 2003 he was editorial coordinator for the global peace campaign, Poets Against The War. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in such publications as: *Agenda*, *New American Writing*, *Orbis*, *Poetry London*, *Poetry Wales*, *The Shop* and *Stand*. He lives in Marylebone, London, with his wife. In Summer 2004 he was Oxfam Poet-in-residence, supported by the Arts Council, England.