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## 100 poets against the war

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Thank you.

## Hyperbole for a large number

### Stephen Brockwell

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

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

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

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

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

## The Virtual Total Information Awareness Office

### Allen Cohen

*After Sting and Santa Claus*

The Virtual Total Information Awareness Office

is watching you

virtually wherever you are.

It knows what you are buying.

It knows where you are living.

It knows where you are working.

Every step you take

every move you make

the Total Information Awareness Office

is watching you.

It sees you on the street

on the train and in the buses.

It knows your diseases

and measures every drug you take.

It knows who your lover is

and keeps track of your divorces.

It wants to put a chip in your head

and give you a number like 666.

It counts debts and can collect.

It can steal your identity and make you dead

The admiral is keeping a data base

and he's checking it twice

in the total information awareness office.

Every step you take

every move you make

the admiral will be watching you.

## Editor's introduction

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

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

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

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

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

Peace.

### Todd Swift

Editor, *100 Poets Against The War* series

Paris, February 10, 2003

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

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

somewhere in the bad lands.

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

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

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

promised land lemonade stand.  
auction block stew pot.

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

topographic economic  
industry and war.

a box of longing  
with fifty drawers.

## United States of America

### Jennifer Benka

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

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

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

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

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

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

## My collaboration with George Bush

### Robert Adamson

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

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

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

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

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

## Collateral damage

### Jackie Sheeler

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

## Other barbarians will come along

### Mahmoud Darwish

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

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

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

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

*Translated by Sarah Maguire with Sabry Hafez*

\*

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

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

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

### Katerina Fretwell

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

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

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

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

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

engulfed in blood. Our blood. Never yours.

## Calm autumn

Peter Robinson

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

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

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

\*

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

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

## Are there children

Robert Priest

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

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

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

## Regime change begins at home

### Sue Littleton

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

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

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

## Hot milk

### Patrick Chapman

Your father would hardly speak to me.

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

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

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

## Architecture (Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal)

### Michael Redhill

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

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

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

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

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

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

the rushing traffic in the window.

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

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

## In praise of salt

### Sinead Morrissey

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

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

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

## killer

### Marcus Moore

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

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

### Hel en Thomas

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

**Beirut, August 1982****Ghassan Zaqtan**

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

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

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

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

*Translated by Sarah Maguire with Kate Daniels*

**Living in bull's eye****Daniela Gioseffi***For Arundhati Roy of India*

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

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

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

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

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

## We go in procession against war

**Chin Yin**

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

## A natural history of armed conflict

**Pat Boran**

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

## At home, at war

**Tony-Lewis Jones**

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

*Bristol 20.1.03*

## Notwithstanding

**Harriet Zinnes**

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

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

Ah yes, stopping weapons proliferation  
 Notwithstanding  
 and so forth

## Waiting for the Marines

Fadel R Jabr

*Translated from the Arabic original by the poet*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## All set

Charles Bernstein

*For Gerrit Lansing at 75*

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

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

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

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

told the teller...

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

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

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

And sent no explanation for the delay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Mark the day

### John Asfour

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Mark Rudman

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

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

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

**For the birds****Bob Holman**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The day after****Seán Street**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Rania****Curtis Doebbler**

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

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

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

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

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

**To Miklós Radnóti****Yerra Sugarman**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Can we have some peace and quiet please?

Eliot Katz

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

## To a veteran of the last wrong war

Susan Ludvigson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Press conference

### Ana Doina

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

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

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

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

## From Peace walk & rally, San Francisco

### Stephen Vincent

If You Are Not Outraged  
You Are Not Paying Attention

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

Bush on Crack  
Don't Attack Iraq

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

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

War Is A Tragedy  
Not A Strategy

War Orphans Make  
Great Terrorists

Homeland Insecurity

*January 18, 2003*

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

## January meadow

**Sandra M Gilbert**

January meadow,

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

## un-UN inspected

**Tony Hillier**

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

## Filofax

**David Harsent**

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

## The field

**George Murray**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Dear lady, fear no poetry

**Rebecca Sellars**

Dear lady, fear no poetry

Those you revere so highly  
Twain,  
Whitman,  
Hughes

Even your beloved Emily  
Wrote beyond  
Bees and blades of grass

They wrote the human condition

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

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

And consider the reflection  
poetry  
all poetry  
evokes

not to remain silent  
but to provoke thought  
to provoke question

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

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

## The land of hope

Ethan Gilsdorf

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

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

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

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

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

### *Excerpt from little dead things*

Maggie Helwig

the small bones of birds  
meaning: death from the air

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

## Other demands

Colin Morton

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

## Nets at Gennesaret

David Morley

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

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

## The palace of art

### George Szirtes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Bigger than time

### Dawna Rae Hicks

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

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

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

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

## Psychotic sea

Sonja A Skarstedt

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

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

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

## Georgie Porgie Rochelle Ratner

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

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

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

And the oil, of course.

When even Tony Blair  
 Turns against him,  
 He pouts.

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

## the war is on the kitchen table

### Myrna Garanis

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

## The flying flag

### Eric Paul Shaffer

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

But none of us love one long.

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

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

The flying flag follows the wind.

## From How it's been

### Elmaz Abinader

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

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

\*

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

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

\*

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

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

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

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

**Easy****Sampurna Chattarji**

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

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

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

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

*January 2003, Mumbai, India.*

**King Rat****Edwin Torres**

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

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

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

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

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

**We accept****Vicki Hudspith**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Untitled****d.m.**

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

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

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

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

**Divine haiku for the New Patriotism****ryk mcintyre**

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

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

## Good morning middle age

Robin Lim

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

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

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

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

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

## Ballad

Sean O'Brien

*1 February 2003. With apologies to William Empson.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Treasured ghost****T Anders Carson**

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

**pEACE iCON 21c****rYAN kAMSTRA**

The red g-tar is larger  
than hysteria.

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

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

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

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

**Sim Shalom****Susan Freeman**

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

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

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

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

## No war then

Fred Johnston

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

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

A gasometer gloomed on the garden,  
Blood-rust coloured; we were near  
The sea, and we halredew friends,–

Innocent wasdrus, wasleaves falliong –  
Weknow beteternowT70.9(oo grownh fo )JTJT\*[Our ownhgloo,o waris everyw here.

Thse bhaldays In tink ( fo 335.(gioveme),)JTJ0:-1.2222 TDThat ist culd berno0 pssiblhe innlowT70.9(oe)0(feel ylou breaoth inmy breaoT.)JTJT\*In suchlre warm, quiet roo.n

e.

t speakt of“ wa” (hthough we lledo)n,

ton tis soft-footmed oe: his emptye hnd,

Mway the gar birot lou twoghneasbeaos unfculed–  
fo twognLighs that lastmedwasllongasn tis wear



**'Christendom'****Graywyvern**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

three hundred years  
 till Spain produced anything good again

**Harvest****Barbara Berman**

*For Amos Oz and David Grossman*

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

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

**Untitled****Tom Bell**

Dearest Angel,

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

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

Love,  
 Grampa

## The servant

### Mimi Khalvati

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

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

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

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

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

## The border

### Grace Schulman

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

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

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

## What did Adorno say?

### Jeffrey Mackie

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

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

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

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

## The Garden of Eden

### Ruth Fainlight

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

\*

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

\*

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

## The good prospects

### George Bowering

Curious  
this dream of  
pure glass  
buildings

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

Because  
there may be  
half erected  
superstructures

left unfinished  
done  
with ash  
falling on them.

1964

## The pomegranates of Kandahar

Sarah Maguire

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

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

A mirrored shawl  
splits  
and dozens tumble down –

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## let us step around this time

Lisa Pasold

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

**The tooth****Robert Minhinnick***(Amiriya, Baghdad)*

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

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

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

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

**All those home spun places****David Plumb**

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

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

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

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

## I dream of war

**James Cervantes**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of bloodless hands, a clap that starts the song.

## A quiet place

**Nancy Fitz-Gerald Uiens**

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

## Haunted house, October 2002

Sherry Chandler

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

## Peace poem

Charles Potts

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

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

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

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

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

Intellect and moral integrity are under assault and must survive.

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

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

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

Peace is the way you live your life.

## Candle, flame, stained glass and prayer for peace

John Kinsella

*For Veronica Brady*

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

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

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

## The paloma's lament

Rebecca Villarreal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## What you call it

### Tony Brown

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

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

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

## News theatre

### John Hartley Williams

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

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

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

Just wait.

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

Meanwhile Mouse,

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

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

## Imminent

**Fred Marchant**

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

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

wants only to fall apart,  
 give way in relief

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

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

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

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

1/23/03

## The hawk who became a dove

**Hal Sirowitz**

Most people start off supporting

their country's war efforts,

Father said, but as soon as someone

close to them gets drafted,

they suddenly change their tune

& begin to question their government.

Your friend's father was a hawk.

When his son received a draft notice

he became a dove. Instead of swooping down

on anyone opposed to the war he

started to do lots of cooing. He's

easier to listen to now, because he

isn't always ruffling someone's feathers.

It's a shame that he needed the possibility

of his son's death to improve his personality.

## After the anti-war march

### Minnie Bruce Pratt

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

## Brainstorm

### Bruce A Jacobs

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

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

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

## Letter to Hayden Carruth

**Marilyn Hacker**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Against the war

**Susan McMaster**

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

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

*Ottawa, 24 January 2003*

## We believe

### Kasandra Larsen

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

WE BELIEVE

in Democracy.

But without evidence, we will still proclaim you Guilty.

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

as we avoid our own disclosures or Transparency.

We fully support the concept of Liberty

(with exceptions for those with whom we Disagree).

We prefer to call it War and not Brutality.

We strive to promote human Dignity

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

We have smart bombs but will risk civilian Casualties.

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

Let us avoid discussing our Economy,  
ensure oil for our mighty S.U.V.s.

How dare anyone question our Authority,  
our blatantly impatient, greedy Policies?

One nation under our own Divinity,  
we hold that might makes right

and not Diplomacy. Prepared to march, we will ignore  
all calls for Peace.

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

We are America. We believe in Democracy.

there's literate debate in the newspapers).  
The English language is my mother  
tongue, but it travels. Asylum, exile?

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

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

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

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

Tuesday, a dawn flight to California.

## This sky of lost miles

### Ranjit Hoskote

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

## Dubya Anabasis

### Richard Peabody

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

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

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

## blood in the snow

### 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 keens the world kills.

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

## Unleashed

**Kate Evans**

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

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

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

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

## Crossing Kurdistan

**Nadine McLinnis**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

had their fill.

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

**Kevin Higgins**

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

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

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

## Priests' skulls

**Michael R Brown**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*\*John Chrysostum*

**Bubble Girl Song****Wednesday Kennedy**

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Who's gonna die for my SUV*

**war is gud 4 bizness in th 19th centur****bill bissett**

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

or is it th wepons sales by evree  
 countree 2 evree countree n th  
 kontinualee shifting 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  
 kleerlee fiscal irresponsibilitee  
 munee 4 health 4 th environment  
 not as gud as munee 4 big bizness

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

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

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

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

mor intricate generous refind nevr

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

## Leavening

### Kate Newman

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

## Gulf War – aftermath

### Mary Trafford

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

One decade down this hazardous way  
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.

## A light

### Anita Govan

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

## An untitled place

### Suzy Morgan

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

**the killing fields****Di Brandt**

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

**A dark little psalm against war****John B Lee**

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

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

## Even

### Nathalie Handal

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

## Still true?

### Clive Matson

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

everything went.

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

nothing happened.

## This is the war that George fought

### E Russell Smith

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