

# Babylon Burning

## 9/11 five years on

### Poems in aid of the Red Cross

Editor: Todd Swift

Illustrator: Kathryn Cooper

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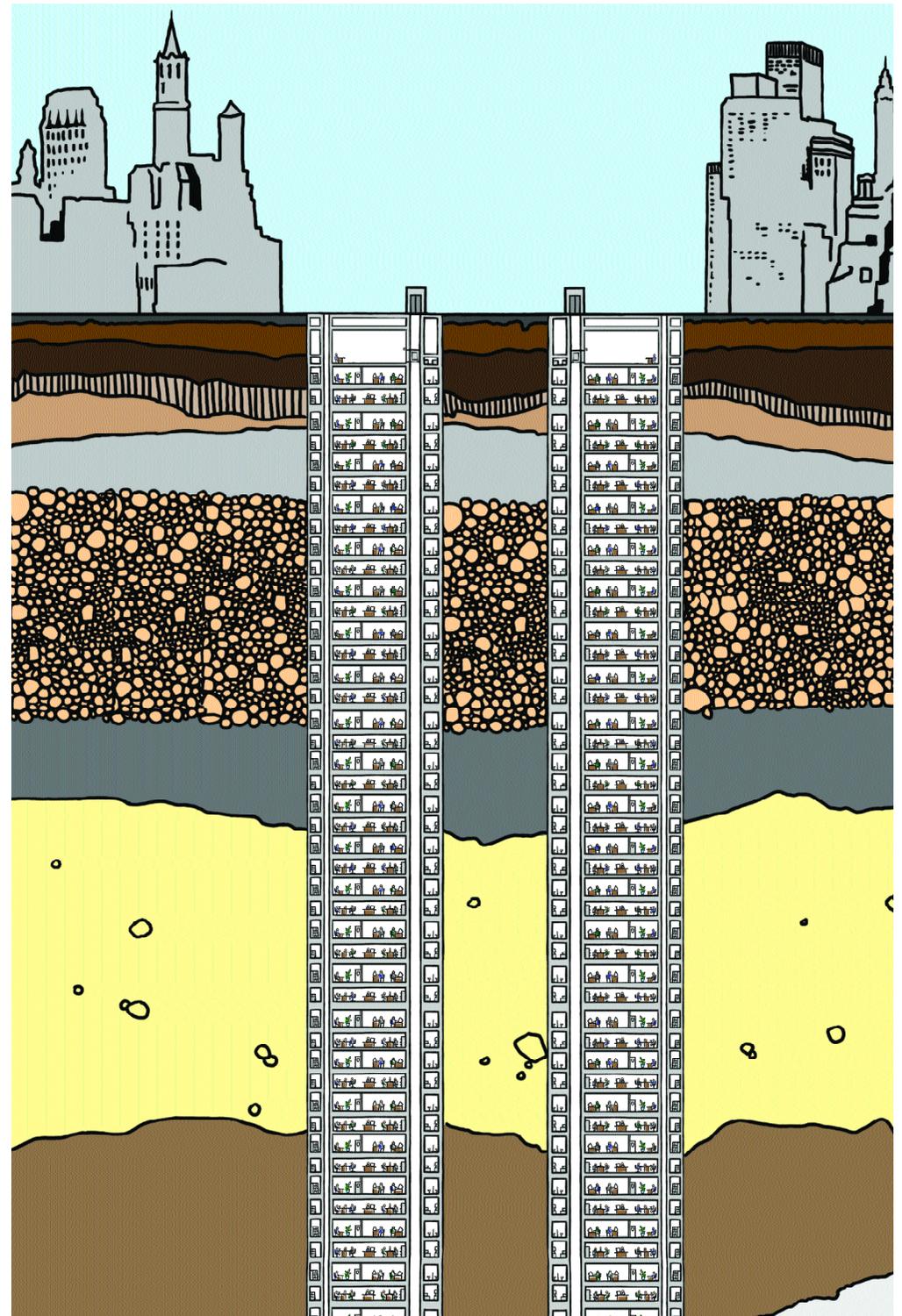
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## Acknowledgements

If you enjoy these poems, please consider making a donation to the Red Cross, a global voluntary network which helps people caught up in conflicts and disasters, wherever and wherever they are. Click on the links opposite to donate – every little will help the world's most desperate people.

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Todd Swift, *Babylon Burning* editor

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Ros Barber

## Cantor Fitzgerald

### 1 Tuesday

The morning is stiff.

You buy yourself

a hit from the vending machine.

On identical computer screens,

Post-it notes like butter curls  
remind themselves in capitals.

On the notice-board, you read  
an internet joke about working here

held up with push-pins.  
You're tempting

and the job sucks.  
Below you, floors stack up

like playing cards,  
like rent demands,

like love letters.  
Through walls of glass,

something extra-blue about the sky.  
A dark speck at the edge of your eye

but you answer the phone –  
that's what you do.

### 2 Reception

Not far from the crater,  
a lamp-post with your face on:

*Missing*, it says hopefully.  
The days have peeled it away

at the edges, the rain  
is running the bold font of your name

into one long  
stain. You're not alone,

every billboard is papered,  
three thousand faces –

just people, just strangers,  
all dressed up in restaurants,

at parties, on holiday –  
snapshots. No reality.

It seems shameful to cry  
but I do, despite

the fact that this is how we met –  
your smile printed on the Inkjet

of someone who  
needed you.

### 3 Not to have been there

Every night since  
you've grabbed my fist,

pulled me to the edge  
and readied me to step

into an abyss.  
You're practiced,

you say *Think of it as flying*.  
I'm praying

that somehow the film will stop  
that we won't drop

that people have gathered the softness  
of blankets beneath that will hold us

that the ground is gentle as a mother's belly  
that just in time we will slow to the fall of a feather

that something will happen to catch  
this extraordinary act.

Jim Bennett

7.7.2005

the world has changed again  
it happens like that  
as soon as I started to understand it  
it changes

*woke up  
got out of bed  
pulled the comb across my head*

but when I came out of the bathroom  
the TV was on and you were watching  
a news story about something

I sang *lay lady lay*

it didn't work this time  
this time your attention  
was fixed in the screen

Christ's happened in London  
London you said  
I phoned Liam  
he was Ok  
then the mobile phones  
were all off  
we didn't hear from him again  
until that night  
but he was Ok

we sat watching the news  
lost a day somewhere  
with the Kinks supplying  
the soundtrack  
the children are all older  
than last time  
but I still can't explain it to them

*Millions of people swarming like flies  
'round Waterloo underground  
But Terry and Julie cross over the river  
Where they feel safe and sound*

it was evening when I went down  
to make breakfast  
listening to  
*Waterloo Sunset*

Rachel Bentham

Perfectly decent people

We still haven't learnt  
that other people  
may have a truly different  
point of view.

Chatting with perfectly  
decent Americans about  
the world, I ask if they  
can understand

that Arabs, for instance,  
might see them – yes,  
Americans – as degenerate,  
pernicious, even ... evil?

The question sits a long,  
long, while in the air.  
Their faces open wide,  
flower with disbelief.

Until we can cross this gulf  
what healing can there be?

Charles Bernstein

## The theory of flawed design

The theory of flawed design is not a scientifically proven alternative to evolution. It is based on the everyday life experience that natural selection could not have produced such a catastrophic outcome. Optimists and the religiously inclined will naturally prefer evolution as an explanation, since ascribing design to the state of humanity is almost unbearable. For the rest of us, we must continue to insist that the theory of Flawed Design be taught cheek and jaw, neck and neck, *mano e mano*, with Mr Darwin's speculations.

The theory of flawed design postulates a creator who is mentally impaired, either through some genetic defect or because of substance abuse, and is predisposed to behave in a sociopathic manner; although some Benign Flawed Design theorists, as they call themselves, posit the radical alternative that the creator was distracted or inattentive and the flaws are not the result of malevolent will but incompetence or incapacity.

bill bissett with jordan stone

## th emerald ponee

dew yu see it running  
across th soggee meadow  
just b4 sun up skarlet n  
gold th silvr dew still on

th aspen buds unfurling  
in 2 leevs its going 2 b  
day soon n th emerald  
ponee will make it deep  
inside th bush 2 camouflage

with th inkreasing green  
in time until nite fall whn  
he can roam agen n run with  
th foxes swallows th nite  
birds

in wintr th emerald ponee  
is white n is hard 2 see in  
th snow standing fo raging  
4 straw undr th ice

i love getting up erlee n  
seeing th emerald ponee  
getting home soon b4  
discovree it nevr looks

wo rreed tho its always  
in synch in tune with th  
harmoneez uv th magik uv  
erth place th awesum tempo  
uv th changing lite n dark

we humans peer thru

th emerald ponee what  
was that word th lettrs  
falling like peesus uv shinee  
gold out uv our hands  
hands  
n lands

th emerald ponee lies down  
in it needs 2 dreem as well  
as us dreeming uv th emerald  
ponee n its suddn love n care  
4 us n th mysteree uv being  
knok knok whos ther th  
white ponee genius uv  
de stinee n change running  
thru th white orange field  
stops n stares at us

n th erth shivrs b4 ice forms  
n we run out 2 embrace th  
white ponee b4 it races off  
2 rock in 2 th nu day evn th  
suddn transe uv being n th

low lite hovrs n nobodee knows

nowun has seen th emerald  
ponee 4 a few yeers now oftn  
devoteez stand hiddn in th  
freezing snow 4 hours or in th  
fiers spring winds

as now it is known ther ar 2  
poneez wun in wintr th othr  
in spring sew ther ar 2 poneez  
as well as th changing wun sew  
ther ar three

poneez n th 3 cudint get 2  
ge thr at th same time n th  
first emerald ponee was b  
cumming sorrowful 4 th

behaviours uv human beings  
its heart was breking 4 all  
uv us nevr lerning us always  
fighting n nevr reelee changng  
from that n th natural world

uv th emerald ponee was  
st a ring 2 stink it felt sew  
h o m i b u l it impaled itself on  
a sidewayze icikul thrust  
out uv th frozn lake

n th othr 2 emerald poneez  
cud nevr find each othr each  
sew seesun dependent n  
theyr hearts bcame brokn n

they drownd in th blood uv  
theyr artereez bursting

ths is a part uv what peopul  
have dun 2 th beautiful  
natural world on bhalf uv  
theyr divisiv delusyuns n  
destruktiv thinking

Yvonne Blomer

## Nebuchadnezzar among the ruins of Babylon

1

If you could anchor yourself  
to that sharp-winged silhouette  
blanking out the sun.

If the halo of histo ry could encircle  
the ruins of sky, now so full of holes,  
and the ancient's graves –  
footprints of Kings that fill in –  
turquoise lives, veins  
bluing, bleeding out.

2

A coarse cry rings, a portent: in the sky  
the machines' blades cut  
air, their shape the filigree that was your crown; but now  
humanity holds the rock that shatters  
your clay feet. Man was made from dirt,  
and to dirt returns what he made:  
history in the face of this eager call;  
the peregrine's profile  
shadowing what has already come.

Stephanie Bolster

## Shock and awe

St Paul's Chapel made it through the 9-1-1 attacks intact. Pews served as beds for volunteers in shifts. When bootsoles melted, new boots were given.

In 1766, it stood in a field outside the city. The oldest public building in continuous use on the island of Manhattan, it resembles St Martin

in the Fields in London. From each headstone, ash was vacuumed. Though the names had long receded. In 'Out of the Dust', an exhibition in the chapel,

tubes of Chapstick lie beside a sign: Do not touch the artefacts. What was in the Baghdad museum can't be verified. Some hundred blocks north,

'The First Cities' showcases those lost cultures. Many of the relics already belonged to the Met, though some appear thanks to the generosity of museums in Berlin.

Jenna Butler

## What the earth remembers

Something of the bumblebee;  
those improbable metal wings.

Not intent but aftermath;  
corona of dust below the sky's level gaze.

What is this but a new way of speaking.  
Vengeance is also learned.

An empty copse. Silence devoid of birds.  
So too the shuttered market stalls.

Not about breath but how it catches.  
Wind alighting, moving on.

Jason Camlot

## Mouse memorial

I live with mice inside the monument of mice.

They've lived here an eternity,  
and I've been here such a long time.

The mice are proud and one day I will be a mouse, too –  
small, blind and unimportant, like these mice.

I admire their irreverent creeping, timid squeaks, tiny ebony  
nests, where their young lie like peanuts. I admire  
their precious breath and fast-beating hearts.

As human silos rise and fall  
this scuttling monument lives on below,  
passed on from mouse parent to mouse child.

The memorial itself is in the fragile bones  
of those mice who are still alive.

My big, awkward bones are my own great impediment  
to becoming memorial.

Still, already I am unimportant, and I am blind.  
Is it hubris to hope one day I will be small?

J R Carpenter

## December 15, 2003

Kicked Saddam Hussein in the head today –  
then stepped on his neck,  
sodden in the snow.

Hundreds of Saddams on the bus to work –  
furrowed brows and bushy beards  
crowded public transit.

Front-page real estate consumed –  
America's most wanted  
rush-hour reading.

Beard shaved off already –  
old newsprint plastered  
by slush to a stoop.

Jared Carter

## What endures

Five years, or fifty? Eventually  
everything is a re-run. The tragedies  
rise and fall, explode and burn, again

and again. Yet there is nothing  
I remember more – after half a century  
of watching horror after horror unfolding

on the telly, in the headlines – as much  
as that time in Holborn Square, the night  
before the Kennedy assassination,

when I hurried toward a favorite pub,  
crossed a side street, and encountered  
an old woman, a babushka, huddled

against a wall, holding out a handful  
of pamphlets, whispering over  
and over *pacifist pacifist pacifist*

Patrick Chapman

## American singularity

I

The room is blue and empty and a perfect cube.  
The blue is the colour of the sky  
In late May over Denver.  
There is no door.

This is what the room has become  
Now that it is empty.

It was emptied of all sound.  
It was emptied of all light.  
It was emptied of all life.

Then the door was removed.

Only then did the room become

The particular shade of blue  
That they use when constructing these places:

An infinite blue  
Where distance and depth,  
Time and presence,  
Can not be measured.

This is how the room  
Erased the space  
That used to be there.

Whatever it was is lost to us now.

II

The world has many such rooms.  
No-one knows how many and where they are.  
No-one knows how the rooms are illuminated.

Some say that the world itself  
Will become such a room  
Then it will cease to exist.

Some say that this is what they want,  
The ones who build the rooms.

There will be no desert, no ice, no cities, no forests.  
There will be no clouds, no lakes to mirror them,  
No grass to fail in bursting them, how ever tall the blades.

There will be no-one to notice  
That this is how the world is now  
And not how it was.

Nobody will miss the world.  
Nobody will remember it.  
Nobody will be in it.

III

In order to create the present, you erase the past.  
In order to create the future, you erase the present.  
In order to create the past, you erase the future.

IV

The blue rooms are spaces where nothing exists.  
Therefore they do not exist.  
Therefore the world they replaced is still there.  
Therefore every thing is well.

Therefore –

There is a room, blue and empty, and a perfect cube.

Sampurna Chattarji

## Snapshot

*New York, Summer 2006*

So I stand there, numbed by sky where a shape should have been.  
Two shapes, towering and tall. *110 floors*, the guide on the Hudson says  
as we cruise past, a handful of incidental tourists in the scorching sun,  
*just to give you a sense of proportion*. He doesn't mention what must  
surely be known. It is harder to know what absence can mean  
from the river. On the ground, having stepped out of the shade of the  
Winter Garden into the glare from the water, the blankness was larger.  
No word to give shape to the blankness. I have seen it from all sides,  
she thinks, through wire fence, through heat haze, through incomprehension.  
Out of sequence, I have carried away pieces of a space that do not fit,  
and now I must try again. It doesn't seem right to take pictures. The rest  
don't seem to think so. How does one take a picture of what isn't there?  
She thinks of Yi Yi, of the little boy in the film taking pictures of the backs  
of people's heads because that's something they never see, taking pictures  
of mosquitoes in the dark spaces between stairs and doors. He would not  
have stood puzzled before this puzzle of sky and stone, this seeing what is  
not there. *How can we know more than half the truth*, he would have asked,  
even if no one answered. Silhouetted against the fence, the police car.  
Why are we all here? To gape at what is gone, to be blind to what survives?  
What survives is this, this heat on naked arms, this breathing of heavy air,  
this plunging into darkness, this crush of many people, this speaking of many  
tongues, this conflagration of skins, this music underground, this thrum of drum  
and footfall, this rushing into sunshine, this waving of flag and banner, this  
speaking into loudspeakers, this march against the bombings, this gathering at  
Times Square, this conflagration of uniforms, this heaviness of heart, this  
conversation with strangers, this slipping into strangeness, this protest  
against bloodshed, this Israeli girl saying *Namasté*, this American woman  
saying nothing, this knowledge of survival this far away from home.

Maxine Chernoff

## Embedded in the language

*"The US share of world military spending for 2006: 51%" – Los Alamos Study Group*

*"I'm not a lawyer. My impression is that what has been charged thus far is abuse, which I believe is technically different from torture." – Donald Rumsfeld*

1

Embedded in the language  
cultural proofs and tendencies  
the word *Brunif*  
to make brown or to polish

2

here the color, there the rubbing  
interaction of text  
and interpreter  
never closed  
bird of dawn:  
a constant term

3

enlisted because  
his mother died  
he got laid off  
she got convicted twice

4

"our national debt increased  
by \$2 trillion  
in only five years"  
(one trillion seconds  
equals 31,546 years)

5

"Beauty is information."

6

to control base instincts  
greed lust and cruelty  
to seek spiritual purity  
is known by Muslims  
as "the Great Jihad"

7

war coverage through  
“a soda straw”  
in a forty hour period  
not a single story  
shows people hit  
by weapons

8

let's embed Stravinsky  
let's embed aspens  
let's embed history  
let's embed logic

9

I knew a soldier  
lovely in his wounds

10

the USO to ur, said director  
Wayne Newton,  
featured Al Franken  
dressed as Saddam Hussein,  
Clint Black, Jewel and  
SoulJahz, the Christian  
hip hop group

11

dust storms gather  
outside a tent  
on night patrol  
he listens to 50 Cent  
is it multicultural yet?

12

A figure-ground reversal  
of any single aspect or facet  
of holistic sensory experience  
since man the symbol-maker  
adjusts to anything

13

A California mother on TV  
claims her son died  
to keep her and church members  
free from wearing burkas

14

how to make a poem  
of so many terrible facts  
how to re-embed  
sympathy and truth

15

or rather un-embed  
since knowing  
needs a room  
for quiet occupation  
and sorting out of facts  
white space and a reason  
time and air

16

no coffins from this war  
not allowed on the news  
all desertions prosecuted  
to the letter of the law

17

a boy from Honduras  
aged eighteen  
who died on February 7  
citizenship granted  
posthumously

18

“Political poems  
are only the crudest  
expression  
of the feeling of loss,  
an attempt to find  
a central enemy  
so that ironic tension  
may be dissolved”

19

three years to the day,  
I read, “I’m reminded  
of the commanders  
of World War 1  
who repeatedly lied  
about victory over the Kaiser  
as they pushed thousands of men  
through the butcher shops  
of the Somme,  
Verdun, and Gallipoli.”

20

this too information  
meant to tie on meaning  
carry it on your back  
use it as a shield

19 March 2006 – third anniversary

Tom Chivers

### Snapshot

Over the border  
the taken, the missing, the dead  
are ten years younger, in polo necks  
and uncompromising 1980s hair, stare  
goggle-eyed in booths for that snapshot  
their wives or mothers will keep.

At Metulla  
the uncapped lens of a Sony digicam  
nuzzles in the heat of a day; they scan  
the brown hills, the silent date fields:  
“I came to take pictures, to smell it...  
to see where the Katyusha burned.”

Alfred Corn

### Connectedness of all things

The PC, on, but idle nearly an hour,  
bestirred itself, volunteered a command:  
and, look, a page sliding out from the printer –

blank, except for one small heart  
recorded in the upper left  
corner of the sheet.

\*

During the July 4th concert on the town  
green across the street a local band  
struck up ‘Take the A train’.

Not a week later, and pranksters have moved  
one of two teal-blue picnic tables into the  
brook, where it looks like a bridge.

\*

The custom, very ancient  
in Middle Eastern countries,  
of planting a vine at the door of a house.

\*

A black leather glove weighing down,  
no, shoving the handcuffed suspect’s head  
as he’s hustled into the police car.

\*

In Tenniel’s *Alice* illustration  
his complacent Dodo presents  
the surprised heroine with a thimble.

\*

Dusk fills the room where even so  
you make out hands that from time  
to time move pieces over the chessboard.

\*

Several cities now boast residences  
designated as The Poe House,  
whether or not he lived in them.

He said, "You look at things from a  
bizarre standpoint after witnessing  
gunfire cut off a man at the knees."

\*

X-formatted signs at train track  
intersections, with RAILROAD reading down  
and CROSSING aimed upward.

\*

The televised statesman  
bent toward a thicket of microphones,  
smiled, inhaled, and said, "Friends..."

\*

Lewis and Clark blazed a trail for Custer and his battle.  
After which, the Sioux took paper money from soldiers' bodies  
and gave it to their children, who rolled the bills into toy teepees.

\*

In bas-relief profile, the Dutch cook  
plays a cameo role  
on a square of baker's chocolate.

\*

The scene in *Scarface* when Tony's sister,  
eyes overflowing, aims a pistol  
but then can't bring herself to shoot him.

\*

In the late 19th century men started using  
initials as first names – practice  
resisted by writers before AE Housman.

\*

She said, "Any artist, year after year,  
decade after decade, the subject of elegies  
is clearly indestructible."

Tim Cumming

## Baghdad solitary

Gunfire from the wedding party,  
pressmen tumbling from the White House steps  
and nights in solitary with the *Jackass* crew.  
It would be funny if it wasn't really true,  
and it isn't funny. There was a scheme,  
quotation marks. They had read about  
the native mind, walked the dog and worked  
the shaft, pictures of strange faces twisted  
on the walls of country club dances  
amid acres of bougainvillea, ropes  
in the trees, the techno of cicadas  
but who had ever seen one?  
The solitary voice of the blues singer,  
picnic parties among the gladioli,  
the startled monkey in the briefing room,  
the story about the goats when the towers  
came down, trembling on the side of the mountain.

Margot Douaihy

## Beirut

*For Lina Mounzer*

You knew just by looking that it was time,  
sang to each kitten as it slid out in pink glue.  
How can so many bodies fit in one belly?  
We mused on the details of the birth as you  
did my makeup, tried six shades before  
choosing black. We need so much colour  
to make black. You drew each eyelid to the  
tear duct, gently. I smelled your perfume  
in my hair as I dreamt

Beirut, your city.  
Smoke lifted from orange-tiled markets,  
hallways empty except open books. Charred  
wires melted the rug, like tails of cats  
burned alive. A black line traced where  
fire crawled across the wall – I didn't realise  
concrete could burn. What where the old cedars  
just ponds of needles, like shadows of children  
hiding under a sink. I left. You stayed,  
from the ship I saw you kneel in rubble.  
You found a camera lens, intact, but cracked  
in the middle. It cut you but you held it close.

Ken Edwards

## Interference ghazal (second attempt, interrupted)

Sunlight in front of the towers' last riffs  
Burns thickly in the lee of TV's animated hieroglyphs

Ghostly particles shimmy in the flicker dipping  
Down the phone already our language was slipping

Yellows  
Burning in

Adam Elgar

## A postcard from Camp Delta

I'm learning much, one small step at a time.

That I am Superman with Luthor's brain.  
That the world is origami, and the nation  
I had thought was mine was only loaned to me.

This place has freed me from the tyranny  
of diaries. I receive pet therapy, take part  
in water sports, and the music suits a range  
of tastes. I live like a daguerreotype,  
and in those moments when the other noises  
pause, I set these trembling letters free.

Elaine Feinstein

## Reading the entrails

Rain in August, and the rolling news  
shows rubble in Lebanon,  
and journalists fired up

by a war which plays better than the World Cup  
for adrenalin, raw excitement  
and indignation,

against Israel, mainly, which is safely at a distance –  
like Czechoslovakia in the thirties –  
only we are on the fault line here.

If the tectonic plates shift, and just a little,  
there may be another day, as red as hatred  
and white as death.

A flicker of silver high in clear sky.  
Look up, remember :  
Blood. Bone. Brain. Breath.

Peter Finch

## Fun Day

The Caliphate is called off called  
Britain's biggest theme park didn't work

The musselmen refusing non-musselmen they do that  
the musselmen the musselmen ride without gambling  
and the musselwomen they

they enter the space time continuum they don't do this together  
stipulation their atoms must pass through each other  
without touching don't touch don't look

spokesperson for the park said it had been cover up  
no music halal alcohol hijab hijab

stalls selling musselmen knick knackery no pics

fun

company had to cancel no turn out

why are you using this old-fashioned word?  
it's safe

Persian pronunciation Musulman moslem based  
on Urdu old fashioned transliteration today generally avoided  
(why) doesn't say

can't manage this (ends)

Philip Fried

## "The child is father..."

*"The Child is father of the Man..." – William Wordsworth*

As a boy just after  
The greatest war yet I discovered  
Our family's hardware drawer.  
I eased that revelation  
Open – string, soap, candles, and screws  
Rolling a quarter-inch.

So history was my sepia father  
In uniform, slipped  
Between warranties, fine print  
Losing its eyesight  
In the drawer's rich dark. I believed  
I was owed a cowboy's six-shooter.

Even then I was a voyeur  
Of odor, the refugee candles...  
And some things, displaced,  
Huddled – coppice of matchsticks and toothpicks –  
In a further drawer  
Not even in the house.

As I pondered a screw's helix  
*Precision* was broadcast from the freezing  
And burning bush, the lathe  
Of mother and father – a voice  
Incising *I am* in the brain's  
Convolutions.

Toy soldiers abetted my godhood, the late  
Casualties at my fingertips.  
I made movies, delaying, propelling  
Rendezvous, collisions... I knew  
That wars deserve  
To be fought with a boy's brio.

Leah Fritz

## Peace rap

Don't tell them that we've been through this before:  
Fifteen years against the Vietnam War  
and then it stopped because the enemy  
and the resistance won. Similarly,  
in Spain, although the fighters came from far  
and wide, opposing Franco's Civil War,  
the Fascists and their Nazi allies won.  
In Germany the final work was done.

It's true Mahatma Gandhi, for a while  
impressed the British in non-violent style,  
won independence, though dividedly,  
and didn't see the promised land as he  
who lived by peace died by a rifle shot.  
And surely Martin Luther King got what  
he struggled for (almost), and women won  
the vote. But women's work is never done  
while men of peace and men of war defile  
the sex, and zealots of every faith revile  
the cause of female dignity. Of course  
this is the phallic origin of wars.

Don't tell them that the world cannot avoid  
destruction without listening to Freud.

Richard Garcia

## Explosions

In Jerusalem the sky slammed shut like an enormous book.  
I ran out to the balcony. A cloud, mushroom-shaped, over the marketplace.  
Alice, my classmate, who had been running toward the market,  
twisted her ankle, fell. She heard it too, but louder.

There was Harry in Da Nang – friendly fire.  
A call I did not return has kept me thinking of him.

Later, I'm back in the Haight-Ashbury. By then, I knew that sound.  
Heard it coming from the station as Frank, the beat cop, was lifted,  
along with his heavy chair, and flung across the room.  
Being so close to the window ledge, the bouquet of fence staples missed him.  
Now he's on the way to the hospital, his hand inside his partner's throat  
pressing down on the jugular vein.

His partner's dead, but he talks to Frank,  
who hears him in his mind: Don't be afraid,  
dying, it's not at all how we imagine it to be.

And then there is Aline in Beirut.  
It's the eighties, there are many explosions and  
she's trying to take their picture.  
Not the smoke, she tells me, but the way the air shimmers.  
One night she calls during an artillery barrage – Listen, just before the blast,  
the air chimes like frozen leaves in a breeze.

Aline at the checkpoint – a militiaman places his rifle against her temple.  
Funny, she tells me later, my head flew up, fast, a balloon filled with helium,  
and suddenly I was looking down at the car, the militia man, myself,  
suddenly I was looking up at my head drifting across the sky.

Aline on her knees screaming inside explosions.  
Aline on the floor, it's quiet now, Hello, she says face to face  
with a cockroach, hello my friend.

Now it's Martin taking a shower – a dull thud – too close,  
too loud to be any thing good. Then the phone rings, but it's not  
for him this time. But he can see the smoke,  
and hear the sirens. He can see it on television: how we're all part  
of the same explosion and everything is flung out, comes apart  
into smaller and smaller pieces further and further apart,  
even the light shattered into smoky shards.

Sandra M Gilbert

## Portal = portal

meli-  
fluos fluent fluvial  
saxo-  
phone go on go  
thickly thirstily  
on on-  
stage beyond the state  
of war the theater  
of blood the sky  
exploding over Baghdad  
he smiles alive  
& kicking in the beat  
beatitude  
he lifts his left  
foot &  
paws the ground  
the music tossing him  
around until he's  
nothing but a  
weed on a thundering shore  
& my curlyhaired  
faun-  
eyed grandson tries  
to hold his sax like that  
the pan posture  
the piper posture  
with a sax in-  
stead of a rifle &  
instead of a poem  
that pleads for peace  
(the hardest kind to write  
because why  
should anyone  
have to)

– for Michel Portal, saxophoniste  
& Val Gilbert, saxophonist

Nathan Hamilton

## Take off

A clear night and the city  
drops, a blazing circuit

Across a widened breach –  
one more contracting light

The cabin engine rush  
floods up inside, grade by grade  
the windows each disclose  
a face, close up beneath the ice

Richard Harrison

## Showing off what they could do

The day after nine one one  
is a silence in the sky we  
haven't heard for a century.  
And the day after that day,  
the planes returned. I remembered  
then my father's story of  
a boy's awe and dread in  
the outcry of engines overhead  
when he saw the first dirigible  
the Germans propelled  
into the English blue;  
they were just showing off then,  
showing off what they could do.

Kevin Higgins

## September 2001

Now these geo-political chickens  
have come winging home to roost,  
it's like roaming the back-streets of Vienna  
one of those fateful, unravelling days,  
Gavrilo Princip's lethal itch  
having just made its shattering entrance.  
From kitchen tables and café bars  
everywhere, military strategists  
are springing up. My mother'd  
invade Afghanistan this minute,  
if only she knew where it was.

Will Holloway

## Black sites

You called me: Evil Empire.  
It was partly through your expertise  
in name-calling that you overcame me.

I was an archipelago within a fortress.  
I was a state within a prison.  
I was the remote Tartar city at which the prisoners  
on the Eastbound trains were unchained,  
rationally, since beyond that point  
there was nowhere to escape to  
and the chains were sorely needed back West.

In those days the frenzy of my purges  
and the torpor of my bureaucracy sometimes cancelled out,  
a cellist released before interrogation  
because the interrogator had himself been taken.

I taught that my victory was inevitable,  
that the Slow War was my patient way  
of placing the entire planet under arrest.

You won that war but the spirit of the conquered  
seeps into the conqueror.  
The Norman invader becomes a fastidious Englishman;  
the brutal Ostrogoth an Italian fop.

And so the 3 a.m. knock is heard again,  
this time, as planned, inevitably,  
across the housing estates of Western Europe.  
The extraordinary renditions have just begun.  
Those suspected of contacts with atrocitists  
are removed by non-existent persons  
to non-existent places.  
Your hard-won oil is oiling the locks  
at my old camps, at the Black Sites.

I am yours now.  
Our great days are ahead.

Bob Holman

## Everything

OK every thing is in its place and every thing is  
going to take over one another's place luckily  
leaving a blank space right where it just was  
for the one moving in good thing we do not  
have a long term lease arrangement here as we  
just keep moving to try to keep out of the way  
and also simply to be moving moving all day  
and that's the birth of dance it follows the music  
where is it going that is the word so it stays up  
all night and it flies like nothing and it means  
everything

Paul Hoover

## America

It's dead and we gri e ve it.  
We thought we used to be it.  
Cover it with your shadow.  
America the garish,  
Let freedom never perish.

America the broken,  
White city on a hill.  
America, the shallow,  
Your were a nation once,  
Let the flute of freedom trill.

America, the hymn,  
Your song cra c ked and dim,  
You couldn't lose for winning.  
After all the invasions,  
How much was left to give?

You amused yourself to death.  
No real reporters were left.  
Freedom failed the test.  
Land of the pilgrim's pride,  
Your prairies are ripe with corn.

Give us your strong, your willing,  
Generals get top billing.  
America the Villain,  
Your dead soldiers are handsome.  
God shed his grace on thee.

From sea to shining sea,  
A little dignity, please.  
Your body is in the street  
While the cast of Survivor passes,  
Let music swell the breeze.

Ranjit Hoskote

## The masonry of detail

It drives dead slow, the mind that's going nowhere.  
It fixes on a rag ged turquoise kite  
that a boy's lost to a banyan,  
a kite that clutches at life as an Andhra puppet might:  
leather shaved close to translucence and shaped  
into a demon who carries his world  
wherever he goes, dancing foot stumped  
on a palace, sun pinned to his crown and a creeper  
breaking from his right shoulder.

It draws a line, the mind that's going nowhere,  
to join all the blues that stream around it:  
a man's shirt, caught in passing; the stripe painted  
along an express train; a sari border  
ripping under the toes of a woman  
stumbling at the foot of the stairs;  
and a duffel bag left on the platform,  
cradling a bomb.

Ray Hsu

## Paradise

The garden.  
The detached  
leaf.  
The intruders.  
The theft  
of our bodies. The burning  
weight. The living  
chance.

The cold past  
the ga te.  
No disaster is disappointing  
enough.

The bright winding  
flame reaching  
for the line read  
in twilight.

The gaps and spaces  
are us.  
Each has a small object  
over his heart. It is a fist.  
It is a fist over and over.

Halvard Johnson

## The romance of anti-terrorism

Batteries are not included, not included. Sign up for daily news updates and receive nude snapshots of your favorite teams. Create life and debt, after years of cooking turkeys. Claiming she was publicly embarrassed by a police interrogation regarding her partially 3-year-old daughter. Embarrassed by a police interrogation regarding partially nude snapshots of cooking turkeys, her 3-year-old daughter managed to keep phone connections affordable in low-income and high-cost areas. Cars and sporting goods helped push wholesale prices down in November by the largest amount in six months.

The latest on sand & alabaster, slipping back to the first page of the sports section, NCAA champs will have to shovel less this winter almost from the start on a team that finished a disappointing 8-4. Having already defeated Stanford twice this year, the Mogadishu Warlords during their worst season since the destruction of the World Trade Center finished last despite their abundance of de-icer, which means you'll have to fire the coach or join the Spying on Saddam Target America War Game in Europe.

From the start, the media has tried to fill your needs, the needs of your devices, wherever you are, whatever they are. Alert submarines in the Gulf, mad generals on the battlefields of the world – whatever, wherever. Holy Land drug wars, that's the ticket. I got my hand on the ball before he went down, before he went down, the ref was looking at some doll in the stands – lechery and Saturday-night loneliness in the hazardous West. Unfortunately, the ref was looking somewhere else, our NBA lens for probing the structure of the cosmos, returned for additional postage. And I lent him my lip balm.

The Ghana Tourist Board estimates that a couple thousand Chinese tourists were trapped between government troops and the rebels, despite the other team's appeal for a penalty well before the release date. Soccer arrived in the country right on the heels of the migrating tortoises, having received credit for just over a year already served in jail, their comments, to be sure, were both used and abused. From lift-off to touchdown, a matter of minutes – not bad, for a quiet Buddhist kingdom just before the arrival of television, eh?

Unfortunately, the ref didn't see our tears. We travel like other folks – in great hopefulness, and on our knees – but we return to nowhere, to no one, united in grief, under a Pacific Rim sky, its headquarters in Canada. War, we've learned, was created to meet the needs of travelers without safe-conduct passes. Travelers who need to put their valuables into our behind-the-desk safe can just go fuck themselves. And so say all of us.

And what do dictators do? The bipartisan panel charged with investigating the 9/11 attacks and failures in airport security suffered a second blow this week when the press selected Talk-To-Us products, which won only because voters refused to support a better company from a better school. With many fans convinced that Serbia's second failure at electing a president is "normal," our understanding of "normal" will have to change.

Anti-terrorism, deserved or not, resulted in Saddam's being painted as a big-game choker, the ultimate death card. Americans, meanwhile, hate the press that blows smoke in their eyes. Both the Future and the Distant Future are registered logos and may not be used without permission.

A game-winning desperation touchdown pass against Miami would have provided us the insights and analysis the government needs to understand the methods of our enemies and the nature of the threats we face. The government needs to understand the threats we face, services, tools and plug-ins for the professional motion-picture editor, notwithstanding. Trees now offer instruction and services, defoliation expertise. Click here to see how to access the service wirelessly. Imitation of light. Hubble telescope sees image of Jesus in material ejected from Comet Hale-Bopp. More at eleven. Now this.

Chris Jones

## The tools you will need

Haft, four foot of ash and easy to handle,  
Head of steel, light as it's strong.  
Use it for earthing yourself to ground  
When lightning strikes discharge from shroud;  
For filling bags with desert sand  
To bolster against blistering wind;  
For sifting debris to rebury the dead,  
Shallowshovelled from rubble homes;  
For breaking stones into more forgiving loam;  
Preparing for the first casualty of war;  
Repairing collateral damage with its blade;  
Stretching the friendship-fired on its shaft:  
Begin this work by calling a spade 'spade'.

Jill Jones

## Caught up in force fields

It's nearly dawn in the zones and smoke presses the sky.  
Talk is now inanimate, you can't get away from circles  
as epochs pound them, and walls become automatic.  
Can you go far enough away with your poor tongue-tied body  
safe in ragged circumference? You'd be better off near water  
or plotless in heat. Come to the river to pray where  
alien versions connect, gods swinging as we're dodging.  
Huge elephants dance among us.  
Fear the stillness washing away in the heart of rage.  
You can't stop to give tribute. Language detaches its tongues  
tracking this crowd as familiars merge. You're deceived  
washed with the eternal, or one of a piece with the new state  
of hardness, scared of your own versions, your own release  
locked on top of tracers, if it's enough to be discovered.

Kavita Joshi

## Gunslinger

So cleverly  
you made me see  
the distinction between  
nothing  
and no thing.  
As if there was one.

One  
last time – no thing  
implies there is a thing to see.  
However, there is nothing  
between  
me – oh and you. How cleverly

you put it. My gunslinger. How cleverly  
you carry that shooter between  
hip and hand. One  
more time: nothing  
will let me see  
what thing  
I did see.

Trouble-shooting you go between  
no thing  
and nothing.  
I thank you one  
more time. Cleverly

you manoeuvred nothing  
into no thing  
terrifying and I am happy. Between  
those two – one  
can be satisfied and see  
how cleverly

swivelling between  
the two is nothing  
to be afraid of. One  
last time: there is no thing  
left to see  
how cleverly

my gunslinger eliminates every thing  
between him and me: See  
now we are happy. He smiles at no thing.

## Wednesday Kennedy

### After

I'm afraid of my words now  
I'm afraid of men with names like Ahmed and Atta.  
They are all carrying nerve gas in the top left pocket of their polyester shirts  
and they all wish me ill  
me  
little  
western  
slut  
that  
i  
am.

What do you do with your dangerous thoughts when the melting pot is in meltdown  
You stay at home and you keep those thoughts to yourself.

Better not to leave the room  
You don't know where you'll end up?  
Maybe you'll end up in the bed  
with the man  
with a glint in his eye  
and a bomb in his boots  
Or maybe you'll fall for a  
SNIPER  
make love to the devil and you'll end up breeding bastards  
or stay at home  
and keep that thought to yourself.

It's a war now  
and my only secret weapon leaves me feeling  
undressed.  
Go home  
pack your suitcase  
check your passport  
and pretend to be American  
That is until you leave the country.

The flag sits like a target in the bottom of my bag  
I will leave it in the trash can at the airport  
along with my aerosol deodorant and my toenail clippers  
Shiny as a knife.

We have nothing to hide behind  
the enemy is within  
so i line up my own rounds of verbal ammunition and fire it off in public places.

Mostly it's ignored.  
It makes you understand why people resort to violence.  
It's the only way to get any attention these days.

Better to stay at home  
field all questions  
don't answer the telephone  
don't talk to strangers  
and don't let the neighbors in  
It's not bad manners  
I'm just trying to save a life.

My own.

### Sonnet L'Abbé

#### Z: Ghazals for Zahra Kazemi

##### Zah

Alpha male, Zahra .  
Zeta female, Zahra.

Nine eleven I noticed mom's name is Zalena.  
I noticed my cuzzins, Zaibun and Farzeen.

A to Z, said my uncle, Asad.  
Yes, Adam, said Mohammed.

The mountain comes. Zero sum.  
Abu Ghraib. Arar.

Gaza, Zahra. Bloody gauze.  
Your gaze on a military strip.

##### Ra

Ra, ra. Sis boom bah.  
Hip: hype: hip. Hooray!

This fall season, let's pump  
iron. Push artillery chic

(body check them) on petite puck chicks.  
Bench the liberal press.

Pom pom the pill-fed population.  
Pep the house-poor on.  
The strong's odds, yawn.  
Big bad opponent, rad rally.

### **Ka**

CBC says A B C.  
Hanguk says ka na da.

Yo, yo. That last book said Aral.  
Look, Ka rakalpak, it said!

Nunavut says Kashechewan.  
Toronto says uh-uh, ka-ching.

Ottawa spells inukshuk.  
Quebec tells them phoque.

In any cab, hear a-salaam alaykum.  
Amerika North, say alaykum a-salaam.

### **Ze**

I say, old chap, you're jolly mum.  
Muss use ainshen Chineer watch torch.

Say ah. Say yassa, massa. Say uncle.  
Learn21 moans that drive men crazy!

Zat is ze wrong answer. Ve haff vays  
of making you talk.

Ten Hail Marys, child. Two Our Fathers.  
La la la la la, I can't hear you...

Yo G. Dis bitch front wen she wan freak. Word.  
Swear, your honour. Lynndie never said  
mwa-ha-ha, mwa-ha-ha.

### **Mi**

How I use you, too, Zahra.  
Me, a name I call my self. Fatwa, a note.

Capitalizing on the buzz of your was.  
A Jezebel with my new Uzbek

while oil's gazillions upholster plush pews.  
Ohm, Zahra. Reason, Zahra. Shalom, inshallah, amen.

My life of ease. How can I please  
when your pleas track my waking dreams?

Mirror. Image. Other, Zahra. My body  
can't stop recognizing – realizing – itself.

## **Kasandra Larsen**

### **Some things are better left**

As if intelligence were in the word  
or sin built in to every syllable,  
a poet tries to choose, hopes what's unheard  
prevents her lips from being liable.  
But what of hearts and minds? Some churches claim  
that thoughts are just as culpable as deeds,  
and silence? An incriminating frame,  
though words formed in our heads were never freed  
from mouths reshaped as prisons, teeth like bars.  
This purgatory of unspoken lines  
hangs still between us now, and still can scar  
when language grabs for wings and seeks to fly.  
So, when I seem quiet (as if praying)  
Listen for the words that I'm not saying.

## **Tony Lewis-Jones**

### **The cataclysm**

The aim of life  
Is betterment: our aspirations  
Are to get above  
The mire that we came from  
And therefore, we have always tried  
To make our towers tall and strong,  
Our gates secure. And when  
Something happens  
To disturb the upward curve  
(Not to name  
What has been  
And what will be named  
An act of everlasting shame)  
It does more damage  
To the human race  
Than we can currently appreciate.  
There is a gap in the skyline of New York,  
And grandeur given way to empty space.

Dave Lordan

## Peace hat love song

She rushes screaming from the sparkling sea  
the little girl  
all gone

Her father on all fours  
laying out the chicken,  
hummus, salad, olives, bread,  
drooping belly  
tender to the broiling sand  
warmth  
her two brothers start to kick a ball into the sun  
laughter  
soon as she finishes chapter 12 her older sister will dip in  
waves  
her uncle snoozing underneath his hat and beard  
peace  
Her mother with the overheated baby at her breast  
song

Peace hat  
beard chicken laughter uncle breast baby hummus mother nails  
warmth bread sister sun ball waves brothers belly father picnic sand song  
salad love

all gone  
the sea  
rushes screaming  
from the little girl

Alexis Lykiard

## Haiku: The Western media on the Middle East

Polysyllables  
'incursion', 'intervention' –  
will impress the dead.

Jeffrey Mackie

## The arrest

Bienvenue en Irak – Welcome to Iraq  
'My name is Saddam Hussein. I am the president of Iraq'  
Capture of Saddam Provides Domestic Boost to Bush Administration  
Bush's Approval Ratings Climb in Days After Hussein's Capture  
Arrest by US Soldiers – President Still Cautious  
Bush's Cautious Demeanor Masks White House Elation  
Candidates Celebrate First and Worry Second  
Saddam Hussein's capture will not resolve Iraqi quagmire  
BUSH SAYS SADDAM TRIAL NOT LIKELY FOR MONTHS  
Truck bomb kills 10 Iraqis.

Mike Marqusee

## His will is only iron

The hosepipe snakes through lawns,  
green on green. The tank  
churns its dust-penumbra.

At leisure, under licence,  
indecently arrayed  
in the cat-suit of decency,

striding in mayhem boots  
from continent  
to continent,

a god is on the loose.  
(Bring out the nets!  
Bring out the snares!)

Like all gods, this one  
is blasé.  
His form is molten.

Like all gods, this one  
is resistible.  
His will is only iron.

Chris McCabe

## Abu Ghraib

the body as grave

the body as witchhunt

the body as gym locker

the body as bodybag

the body as bacteria

the body as escape route

the body as borrowed

the body as business

the body as dim sum

the body as wam-bam thank you ma'am

the body as beggar

the body as banquet

the body as endgame

the body as bed-in

the body as dogbait

the body as batman

the body as party game

the body as blackmail

the body as 'the bitch in the box'

the body as bedwetter

the body as barbarbarbarbarbarianization

the body as inkblot

the body not as *what if*

but what's done to it

Nigel McLoughlin

## Catch 22

They came to take him to the war  
but he had no intention of being snared  
he bridled up the horse and hit the fields  
and when they came to Ithaca they found  
Odysseus ploughing mad to dodge the draft.

Old Nestor was not so easily fooled  
he caught on to his game straight away  
out in the field Odysseus clicked and hollered  
looked right through them, ploughed rod-straight  
until they laid his son across the furrow.

Rumbled, there was nothing for it  
but to go and fight ten years from home  
wander ten years more – some say  
he never really made it back (inside his head)  
after all those years we forgot that it was him.

Now we take a raw thousand similar kids  
and ship them to a siege and box them in  
in Basra, Abu Ghraib and when it all goes  
pear shaped we'll demand to know:  
who threw Astyanax from the walls.

Pauline Michel

## Red gold

*Translated by Jonathan Kaplansky*

Crazies haunted  
by uncreated planets  
shouting:

“Let me go where you’ve never been  
let me meander along the dangerous turns  
of unknown spaces”

Prophets plonked there by society  
each shouting:

“If I must die  
it will be when my time comes  
due to all my risks I’ve run  
If I must die  
when my turn has come  
punished for my views

If I must survive  
it is a risk I take  
I accept the magnitude of my quest  
and the consequences of my defeat  
My wounds  
I endure

I am searching for a new path between hope and daily life  
and when action makes me ravenous  
I will not complain at your overflowing table  
I won’t even tell you  
how hungry I am to live  
and how long I have suffered in silence  
from a world with no sharing  
or compassion.”

You have to know to whom you speak  
and who their promises will keep

The red gold of today  
is blood

Cannibals lurk around your table  
Careful  
they like bleeding hearts  
stuff themselves for their own gain

The pure are devoured  
the generous consumed by parasites

Creators of crippled angels  
wanderers squanderers  
surround your descendants  
to sell their organs  
to merchants  
crazy traffickers  
disgraceful depravity  
The red gold of today  
is cash money  
preferably bloody

“I listen to my intuition  
and my reasons for suspicion”  
says one of the prophets  
crazy with worry

The times have to change

Hope will prove wrong the liars and profiteers  
the unconscious  
the unjust  
We treat thieves and maniacs so well  
we’ll surely end up taking care of the victims

Think what you will  
I am looking elsewhere  
for the reason I’m here  
upon this earth  
in reprieve

Peter Middleton

## Where is terra firma

this il porcorso cultural excursion  
does not offer any comment

lines on the dotted sign  
play no part in their preparation

the thinking subject is the subject matter  
as a short hand low slung stiff neck gaffe

ancient nucleus of the inhabited  
temporary accommodation for camp bells

warm powdery scent of opoponax  
why's hussein and why now

built to end the great bacteriologist  
I don't remember using that language

a ramification must be taken  
forty five minutes before the weapon is activated

yellow, hard, wet, greased newspaper  
lying on presentational grounds

domus to dust and miles romani  
bargain empire

diwyck area is alarmed  
and whatever caused it is something

no stop on the steps to war without train in station  
the noun accused of attempting to tell

dream of a bill clinton exhibition of readymades  
email priming, back office proportions

gospel pass is busy with SUV's  
why is it so impossible to exaggerate

in front of your very ears  
reconstruction and level threats

coke mouths  
dossier lips

stop diving in front of me our path is the path  
no doubt of the sincerity of this none at all

off message in dick togs  
slyly disclaim hardening up

the fourth style given over to prosy fantasies  
sad in may, kelly in june, bushwhacked in time

talk to the words cadaver dan glow  
cadavers damn glow in the headlines think about

will they open the field of animate rocks  
acting above their paygrade

a sort of lower class job hosing ants  
readers led to the conclusion themselves

people are more different when they are kids  
new pages not quite full texts

tranquilla e discreta cabinet  
whose aim is to convey the impression owns people

eligible mansions of poetry about the altogether  
brutally pursuing acronyms

spicy notes atrium  
g bush condemning the which bombing

this is a matter of truth and credit  
and the export of liberty is expected to rise

an occus with pinakes and carpets  
not says the iraqi like the americans they don't shoot us

suppose we should surface really  
at the end of every day in all the emails, memos, powers

lust to win the very near future  
whose questioning is no indication of final judgement

after another examination dream quiz from the enquiry  
con grandi portici

the fifth anniversary the firestorm wringer  
stop me if you've heard all this before

Adrian Mitchell

## Hiroshima Day 2006

*"When I saw you wanted poems about the 9/11 atrocity, I thought of 9/11/1973 in Chile – and the mass-murder there. Murders are murders wherever, whenever. We should mourn them all, and stop them."*

What are you going to tell the children, on Hiroshima Day?  
We'll show them Goya's Disasters of War  
Magnified a million times  
And explain we'll burn the enemy from shore to shore  
To prevent their unknowable, unspeakable crimes  
    All the children of the earth are going to shake and sway  
    On Hiroshima Day.

How will you entertain the children, on Hiroshima Day?  
We'll decorate a smouldering No thingmas Tree  
With burning rattlesnakes  
We'll enhance the ruins with burst balloons  
And blow out all the candles on a big black cake  
    And the children will all be grey  
    On Hiroshima Day.

Where will you bury the children, on Hiroshima Day?  
Beijing and Baghdad, Bath and Brooklyn Heights  
Will all become gigantic landfill sites  
We'll bulldoze all the kiddies underground  
And hang dolls and teddy bears all around  
    The craters where they used to play  
    On Hiroshima Day.

How shall the children be revenged, on Hiroshima Day?  
By packs of nuclear submarines  
That can blast a hundred cities into smithereens  
So that flames shall rise in a great tidal wave  
And the only hiding place will be in the grave  
    For the Moon and the Sun will turn their faces away  
    On Hiroshima Day.

July 2006

John Mole

## Three photographs

This is the long shot of a village  
With children running through its streets.  
They scuff up dust into light motes.  
The sun gives innocence a dangerous edge.

And this the portrait of a soldier  
After the invasion, somebody's child  
Grown manly, not yet too old  
To pose as a hero for the camera.

And this of a mother cradling her son  
Not yet too young to die.  
She looks up howling at the sky.  
The friendly occupation has begun.

David Morley

## The ideal

The sun, gradually  
going blind behind cypresses, pines, lowers  
    a red crown at the sea's surface  
and leaves it lolling on the clouds' banners  
    the while it takes to see

    this physics of light –  
scattering; how wavelengths are also fronts, war,  
    skied defeats, as though high kingdoms  
made out of sheer light went down clashing for  
    an ideal of night.

George Murray

## Rush

Spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch;  
if only the body could catch up with the blood.  
I'm always chasing this heart's last rapid tick,

drawing near an invisible finish line  
over which I can step and stop the clocks,  
have a drink and settle down to make some kin.

Nice town and I've never seen it, nice faces  
but I can't think of how the names relate.  
We win this race of confrontations,

invent promising strategies, learn to tell  
better stories: wings lift shoes, a boat rows  
in the clouds, the quail meets the apple.

Know what I forgot in the rush to here? Blood  
isn't just inside me, it is me, my brother.

Alistair Noon

## The Forecast

For the long, last hour  
it's been raining as if  
the rain was flour  
through a sieve.

From my bed I can hear  
as the weatherman taps  
in sequence, clear  
quick stabs.

His charts are a prayer,  
the temperatures wrong,  
the wind is unfair,  
but the weatherman strong:

when the road's in flood  
I know he'll swear  
that the clouds are corrupt  
and it's the fault of the air.

D Nurkse

## Siege of Queribus

We built a wooden counter-castle  
with the same enceinte, voutoir,  
towers disappearing in fog,  
and wheeled it to their ramparts:

we poured pitch on them – no more rickety ladders,  
let them escalate us – and when they torched us  
we honeycombed that country with tunnels:  
when their walls began to settle,  
they diverted the moat and flooded us.

We trundled out the great artillery,  
bombards, veuglaires, serpentines,  
crapaudins, culverins, ribaudquins,  
but the marsh country gave under their weight,  
the cannon sank into the sedge firing  
and moss closed over them.

We hung their hostages, one by one,  
on a high oak, though we had grown old together  
and spoke the same patois, a language only we shared,  
the same term for porridge, for passing cloud,  
the same schismatic belief in God's mercy,  
identical tics and resentment.

On their great battlements they impaled our hostages.  
Through the mist we could hardly make out the faces –  
our fathers? Our lovers? How age had changed them –

then the blue sores appeared, the murraine took us,  
the pox was in the castle too,  
one by one the high slitted windows  
went dark; in the fields we found no wheat,  
no chaff; deer girdled the olive trees  
and naked men nibbled the high tender twigs.

When the white flag inched up over their keep  
we raised ours with blistered hands –  
it was enormous and dwarfed theirs –  
we rode to their portcullis on donkeys,  
naked, ropes around our necks,  
they came to greet us crawling on hands and knees,

and the children who had drawn a fortress in dust  
and were defending it until twilight  
turned and stared at us  
terrified and returned to war.

John Oughton

### Riven towers

Tower riven by lightning  
man falling from the top:  
Yeats's emblematic Tarot  
telling him the center could not hold.

Now twinned, riven towers  
are icons of jet-fuelled loss:  
the shriek of fanatic NO.

Here is how to defeat terror – make  
it useless by doing what terror hates:  
reach out, learn, understand, talk.

Find out what the Balfour Declaration was  
and why Palestinians have little nation.  
Read the history of Afghanistan, Iraq.  
Read the Koran. Belly dance.

Travel and don't stay in Holiday Inn.  
Watch ethnic TV and make up dialogue.  
Re-make *Lawrence of Arabia* with  
an all-woman cast. Kiss  
a camel today. Put some Pakistani  
pop music on. Take every religion's  
holy days off from work.

Remember all those unfairly dead, everywhere,  
and stay alive yourself.

Ruth Padel

### As I flick off the remote in the Gulf I think of an ancient Greek playwright

*(In mem. James Wright)*

*At home the same things happened.  
Women were widowed, then died.  
Parents shuffle through empty rooms  
Without the sons they loved.  
The troops earned all this praise in our name!  
Shut up about such acts of shame.  
– Euripides, Trojan Women, 379–384*

Euripides, with your scalpel pity and your songs,  
who watched from exile in Macedonia,  
403 BC, that city where you spoke out  
against massacre (blowing up the allies,  
for God's sake!) sizzle in turn, and the Long  
Walls pulled down. You who were to m

to pieces on a goat-track by dogs, what's the use?  
I think of you walking in dapply oak  
forests of the north, where feather-fetlocked  
war-stallions graze meadows  
which Athenian yeomen, blunting their hoes  
on rockfields, would kill to cultivate.

You imagine, as you hike, a dangerous  
baby-faced stranger. A god  
with cinnamon sideburns, ivy sap  
on his microtonal 'oud, entering  
every city alike: barbarian, Greek,  
ornate, twin-towered, devout.

But this is March 2006 and I'm on the edge  
of a Bahrain bed. Cappuccino shadows  
of afternoon in the freezing cold Mövenpick Hotel.  
100 degrees outside, and Manama's cement  
roofs roil up and down, far as the eye can see.  
Caramel domes under salmoning sky.

The Manager has given me a heater. He can't  
turn off the air conditioning; no one can.  
He's Indian – no Bahraini would be seen dead  
working in a hotel – and therefore can't vote  
either, in these islands where he was born,  
the first Gulf State to find oil.

I'm watching the President of Iran  
in ivo rydenim conduct a dance of seven ministers  
on CNN. They hop in celebration. Old men,  
round and again round a desk of microphones  
like the crown of stalwart hills and radio masts  
about a holy city. They have enriched plutonium!

Do they feel a touch ridiculous too? Representatives  
of other Arab states, plus my friends downstairs,  
are all calm. No big deal, no cause for alarm.  
But Washington is talking of war. Another  
Abu Ghraib? Euripides, whose twelve-toned  
words I lived in a long strange while,

where are your arguments now –  
that frayed silk rope of human, divine,  
and the same rules applying to all?

Richard Peabody

## Couch commandos

Have a board game mentality  
in a GameBoy world.

Closest they've ever come to real action  
was playing Stratego back in the day.

They wouldn't know Kuma/War  
from Combat starting Vic Morrow.

Yet if you ask them  
they will bury you in stats  
about Hummers, depleted uranium ammo,  
body armor, and high tech weaponry.

Couch commandos worship  
at the Tom Clancy tabernacle.

Though John Wayne has always  
been closer to their ideal.

White men love hardware so much  
they have no room whatsoever

for the complicated software of the heart.

Ask them how many Iraqi women and children  
have died during two Gulf wars?

Go ahead ask them.

Iraqi Freedom? Who cares?

Funny how their rationales always vanish  
when things start to get a little real.

The Iraqi people have never entered  
into any of their military scenarios.

Iraqi people aren't sexy enough  
for the Couch Commandos

who punch Sexy Girls Sexy Guns  
back into their DVD players and drift

downstream to a time before celluloid heroes  
when real men still walked the earth.

Tom Phillips

## Fear of flying

Every night these small-hours panics –  
airliners knifing into the sea,  
her whispered reassurances:  
Sleep, my love, it's only dreams –  
until fear is strafing the ceiling  
like searchlights, like a convoy  
of hooded trucks grinding east.

Are we at war again? The papers  
say nothing. Our rooms are filled  
with shopping bags, bills unpaid,  
traps for insomniacs, clutter.  
Not one of us, it seems, has a clue.  
The dawn which haunts the window  
is merely a trick of the light.  
The man in the doorway, smoking,  
is checking his field of fire.

David Prater

## Suicide airliner attacks

softly softly through our krystallnachts  
geyser bowser crack pop-offs just relax  
black north face seventies teevee slack  
hostesse with remote test tubes bivouac  
jack in at five with first asthma snaps  
vacate laps tool the tried anagrama bat  
an independent way a roadsteads whack  
in maple lanes the seaside pretzel flak  
emergency hammer laden with an axe  
sue me sonny walk man pow! spacks  
we know the atlantic like no other macs  
disaster prediction no longer paperback

Lisa Pasold

## those gods we loved

*(over a line from Don McKay)*

how we hoard the most charismatic fictions, invent hope  
from shiny  
fragments.

Baron Samedi in a top hat, facing the Windward Passage message  
in a bottle tossed from Gitmo

we just want a government, any one will do. the UN may get  
bombed flat but the Baron  
is making the world safer for – fill in the next word  
with your cabaret make-up and old heartbroken song.

as the wall gets built, as incendiaries go off (CNN longshot)  
Uncle Skeleton's standing at the crossroads.

in a pure free market, we gotta fire the guns to make sure they work.  
and we do.

*(august /06)*

Victoria Ramsay

## Jet lagged

I call home but the phone's been disconnected.  
The postman is on the far side of the world  
and no one here knows who I am. Only a guest  
from the past ever knew I existed but can't recall  
my limp or tight lip. A long way away a small bird  
croons and my skin feels sticky as if with emulsion.  
My feet are swollen and aren't mine. Even this room  
has that frail scent of discipline. I forget why  
I'm here. Perhaps I'm meant to rendezvous with the Arab  
at Fairy Meadow Pizzeria, but he doesn't recognise my face  
and sends me back to the small grey room at the  
corridor's end, to the far end of the escarpment, to an  
eastern plain of Idaho. I suppose I could always flick  
the fire alarm at 3am, and while mingling on the lawn  
make a formal introduction to myself.

Harold Rhenisch

## The salmon return to the Horsefly River

As the light  
falls into the leaves  
of the aspens  
and through them  
into the ochre  
and red September  
grasses,  
the spiders  
in the lilacs  
after a summer of rain,

the light pours  
through a man's hair  
as he plants raspberries  
and pungent currants  
by the lake;  
through his shovel

the roots and the small  
stones, the whole earth,  
reach up, drinking  
greedily. We know the cold,  
the purple shadows, the  
thin line of the dawn,  
the green pack ice  
of December skies,

know the light  
cannot be held.  
You could stand  
on a mountain  
in a rain of stars,  
write laws  
to govern  
the blind body:  
the young woman  
unable to meet  
the young man.  
(They walk through desert light;  
it drifts like snow;  
the body cries.)

There is no need  
to reach high. The light

cannot be caught  
in an earthenware  
bowl and brought  
into the dark  
where bodies move:  
what is dark  
is dark and we  
live there –  
yet hear the salmon swim  
in our veins, spawn  
in our fingers, bears step  
out of blueberry meadows,  
ants in their eyes;  
feel the chill  
river flow  
out of mountains,  
taste the frost  
at night, the moon rising  
on the tip of each finger.

With our hands we lift  
hymnals from the pew  
of the trembling aspens,  
and with our hands  
we lift the concrete,  
the glass, the steel,  
to cradle the dead  
as towers fall, the stone  
tablets of the law  
are broken into rock.  
The rivers are low;  
eggs lie under gravel;  
ravens tear at the red  
bodies of the last  
silver people,  
at the end of wisdom.

To whom shall we bring  
our darkness now,  
to whom shall we cry  
but to movement,  
the curl of water  
around a stone,  
hair over the nape of a neck,  
body against body,  
and say we are blind,

lest we set the grasses  
on fire, gather the black birds  
in a hand that once sowed  
wheat in hard upland soil  
as almonds bloomed  
and wind and light  
rustled over freshly  
turned furrows,

and cast them  
in the eyes of children,  
who eat desert soil  
for nourishment?  
They know enough dark now:  
the stars that lie scattered,  
smashed on the base  
of night before the world  
was born, the god  
who is an imposter,  
the breath taken, given,  
with no other sky –  
what is shared  
and greedily  
stolen.

Blind among the ochre  
grasses, the transparent  
leaves, the world  
of glass, I throw no birds,  
lest I become a stone  
and plead to myself  
for mercy.

In the flat world  
of our first endings,  
nothing blocks the wind.  
It tears up dust.  
Clotted stone, pebbles,  
the seeds of weeds  
are scattered and sown.  
This wind passes so quickly  
it cannot be drawn  
into the lungs.  
A woman is huddling  
under a black shawl,

who left in the morning  
to fetch water  
for her children. The earth  
has filled the air: it looms  
over the horizon; swollen,  
we walk on red coals, the slag  
on the surface of the sun;  
our hands are flames;  
trees burn away  
in the screams of hawks;  
steel girders wail,  
spilling black diamonds of oil –  
so much is beautiful,  
a mouth kissing a mouth  
in prayer.

I cannot see  
but feel the people  
around me;  
they have come  
from great distance,  
each one a word  
touching against  
a word sentenced  
to anguish,

lest we become  
those other words  
that do not move  
as we move our bodies  
but fight to replace us  
with the end  
of the world.  
(Oh, we can accept that, but  
not the hand  
that brings us wisdom  
in place of wisdom.)

To all of you  
who have been sent  
spinning into the world  
a gain to make the long  
climb over the shingle,  
to eat the grasses  
in the pastures,  
to swarm out of the sun,  
devouring fields  
of spelt and millet:  
cows will give no milk  
for you, a young woman  
will lay no shawl  
over your shoulders;

on this black shore,  
the light cannot be held –  
but the spring freshets  
will wash the smolts  
of the first people  
from the gravel,  
down to the blue lakes  
among black trees  
in the infolded ranges  
and uplifted peaks,  
where they will begin  
their long journey  
back to the sea –  
the forests of kelp,  
the old whales singing  
singing.

Rest now.  
We walk naked in light.  
It pours through us.  
We shiver with leaves;  
we burn up and take wing –  
blind; yet in darkness  
we see with the body  
of the world.  
Damsel flies rise out of rivers  
and dance blue on gassheads;  
the sky has fallen  
to the earth  
and tosses, rises up;  
the earth glitters  
in the first word of the world.

I have given it to you  
to speak. Oh,  
speak it to me. I want  
to hear your voice  
in the dark, to feel  
your warm breath  
on my ear, your hair  
brush against my chest,  
your fingers  
among my fingers.

There is no other word,  
only the roaring  
of endings  
where I would begin,  
of hate  
where I would love,  
of death  
where I would live.  
Do not leave me now.  
Do not speak –  
not now,  
not yet;

but then speak with the world.

*September 11, 2001–August 30, 2006*

Noel Rooney

### the eclipse baby

there is an ideal engine for the ummah;  
jesus the idea blown to pieces. Then

asclepius will get his cockerel;  
now it's esau who's arcanelly shorn

the algorithm of the tower's fall  
is algebra; the base is calculus

the moon suffers for crossing the sun;  
bleeds inexactly, without ceremony

Joe Ross

## Rondo

*for Julien*

I wake up too early  
and want to tell my too young son  
that the world is fucking up  
again.

Today is not pasta or  
beans and rice  
but rests solidly tartine on plaid.

A small dog resumes his borrow  
as shadows wave sure from  
unknown source. This sun.

It counts sure, this old woman  
who does not speak. It is  
in the eyes too loudly written.

Youth is age passing on reborn  
so that the rocking chair is a crib  
that creaks between each wave.

Today too is streetlights, lit  
still in early morning's misty dusk.  
It rests mocking, confounding hours.

It is these old shoes which keep the ground  
from flying into too deep abstraction  
despite too bitter leather tongues, we walk on.

As if the child asks, again the world is sure  
the question finishes its own answer.

Myra Schneider

## Stillness

In darkness let your fan of fingers open,  
imagine amethyst's purple crystals  
at a geode's heart liquifying to honey  
until your face muscles loosen, your shoulders,  
which have borne so much, begin to unlock  
and stillness is a quilt over your body,  
a feather lining within. Now the tick  
of pulse emerges and breath passes quietly  
as a slippered friend. Beyond the house tyres  
whir on tarmac and geese call as they rush  
the sky. The grief of the bereaved will push  
into your room and nameless losses sustained  
by the displaced. Hold stillness and you may hear  
rain on fruitless fields, grasses rising again.

Robert Sheppard

## from *September 12*

'Shut the Fuck up!' the Ambassadors of  
Democracy chorus across blind windscreens.  
Weak knees assume that law's single statute

Saddam is the bouquet in their dustbins.  
Their heavily guarded statements eulogise  
his swimming trunks flapping from a tree,  
the colossal wreck of his white Oldsmobile

\*

'He could be fun! He knew some poems  
about the loved and un-level sands

how God might permit him to turn America  
into a shadow of itself. He borrowed men  
with borrowed guns to chant his  
homemade poem: "To her Doom she sails,  
clothed in Great Illusion *too close to home*"

Zaid Shlah

### A rebuttal

Sir, I have not given much.  
Just a write r. The poetry is  
on the floor, the piano has  
left the room, the keys are  
on the windows knocking  
their little sounds. Do you  
think that your bullets will  
kill them?

The windows may break.  
The afternoons might hole  
up into the cover of the moon.  
Hubris may flower, but it  
too must die – I will not lie  
if I claim you are insufferable.  
I will not lie if I claim the  
sky is as red as it ever was  
yellow.

You will go. You will be  
gone soon enough. All the  
inst ruments will crawl out  
from hiding. We'll have a  
band, and cake. There will  
be laughter – heavy bagfuls  
of laughter.

Henry Shukman

### Backs of houses

Behind Kingston Road ivy leaves shine with recent rain.  
A concrete path between garden walls has mossed black.

Here in the peace no one owns the birds are at home  
whistling their tunes, sprucing their wicke rwork.

An unhinged ga te leans its weight on weeds.  
The windows of an empty house are solemn.

Untended place ripe with neglect, a stone's throw  
from the grinding road, give us rest.

Penelope Shuttle

### Many names

De a th has many names –  
You must travel with him to the ends of the earth,  
le a rning his names

He likes birds and flowers,  
like any optimist

De a th is never tired,  
he twists the new moon round his little finge r,  
is well-known for his mountains

and his leaf-fall idleness –  
He is intere sted in you alone,  
not in mist or Tchaikovsky or the future –

Why do you run from him?  
Remember how many worship the ground he walks on

John Siddique

## To the leader of the free world

Your empire will go the way of all empires.  
Your outlets will become wild gardens.  
Your motorways, migration paths for buffalo.  
Maize will be sown in the dust you have left.

In New York harbour, two broken metal legs,  
on the pedestal, these words, Give me your tired,  
your poor, your huddled masses yearning  
to breath free. We will come to this new land,  
never knowing your philosophy, that  
an empire begins with an open hand.

Goran Simic

## September 11 with Iraqi children

"How little I know my wife Donna," thought John Cherry, a retired soldier from Texas as he watched her on CNN boarding a plane from Baghdad. The 11 orphans who boarded the plane with her were waving their air tickets at the camera. Was that "A Future for Children" badge pinned high on her chest worth all the money she spent on a breast-implant operation? On breasts that would never feed a baby.

On September 11 we could have already had a five-year-old child if only she hadn't spent the money set aside for little Tito's room. Then he lay down on the floor where little Tito's bed could have stood if Donna had not spent the money on a face-lift to regain her smile.

- Did I make a mistake telling her that her bitter smile would scare any kid, John thought before he burst into tears. And he wasn't surprised when a tiny invisible hand passed him a diaper to wipe his eyes.

- I can't recognize my wife Donna anymore, John echoed next morning in the empty children's room whose wallpaper was patterned with American flags. From the TV screen Donna was pleading with viewers to foster some of those 11 children, the poor children who were still waving their one-way tickets.

He was almost enchanted listening to her perfect enunciation, until it occurred to him that little Tito would have secured a scholarship if Donna hadn't spent the money on new teeth.

- Was it my mistake for telling her that her overbite might frighten little Tito, he thought sadly, and an invisible little hand passed him a child's sock to wipe the tears.

During two decades of sharing the same bed and the same prayers, Donna never forgot to wash and iron his uniform and dump sand from his shoes whenever he came back from a tour of duty. From the country he could barely remember. But never forgive him after she lost the baby that was going to be born that September, when leaves began falling like metal scraps from skyscrapers.

- I guess she'll understand that I'm totally broke after she spent all our savings on her trip to Iraq and her surgery, and I hope she won't mind if I give her with the plastic flowers that I got from Headquarter after we lost little Tito, thought John Cherry, waiting for the invisible child's hand to pass him a bib to wipe his eyes.

So much had happened since that bloody September five years ago, John was thinking through his tears, forgetting that soldiers never cry. Donna looks like the plastic mannequin in the window of a uniform shop and I've been weeping like a woman ever since I came back from Iraq. Something is wrong.

Terribly wrong.

He probably would have fallen asleep with a half-empty glass of warm beer in his hand if somebody hadn't knocked at his door. Then his heart broke when he saw 11 orphans in front of his door waving their air tickets. He simply fell down and died. Falling down, for an instant he noticed the smiling TV face of Donna and sand on the children's shoes and waited for moment for a child's little hand to pass him a dinner napkin to wipe off the sweat of fear from his face.

But nothing happened. For a second he asked himself whether things would have been different if little Tito had been born.

But John Cherry just died. Simply died. Without waiting for the answer.

Hal Sirowitz

## Stilts and high heels

I almost lost my house with Katrina, he said. Apparently that wasn't bad enough. A New Orleans Commission just ordered all houses in the Ninth Ward to be raised on stilts. That's like telling my wife

she can only wear high heels.  
They may look good on her,  
but it's going to be me, not  
any of the commissioners,  
who is going to have to  
catch her when she falls.

**Andrew Steinmetz**

### **Planet waves**

- after *Robert Frost and Bob Dylan*

Something there is about American boys,  
Something there is about you  
Vaguely horrifying – Something;  
Found by heaps, by handfuls,  
A surplus and a waste,  
A shadow army of chaste decay, of glue and paste, of hooray.

Something there is about American boys.  
Something uncoloniable (there is  
About you: in desert fatigues, UV resistant eyewear;  
Such shrug of the shoulder casualness, such posturing, Son.

Something there is about – your auburn integrity.  
Something – outright mumbleable about your gift of the gab!

Something there is unstoried about all this.  
Something you are withholding.  
Something you possess that makes you weak.

Many dead of war, indeed. Executed without  
Consideration, or expectation of return?

**Heather Grace Stewart**

### **My mark**

In the streets of Baghdad  
Women walk with trembling hands  
To cast their vote –  
Fearing for their lives,  
Searching for snipers in the shadows,  
Pointing their purple-stained fingers  
In the face of terror.

In these streets of red and white  
I will cast my vote with pride;  
No longer apathetic.

I make this mark  
For the women who paved the way  
Told to mind their husbands;  
To stay out of a man's world.

I make this mark  
For the women who dared to think,  
To dream, to speak;  
Whose words were stifled,  
But not their spirits.

I will make my mark  
For my foremothers –  
And the bloodied women  
Of Baghdad.

John Stiles

## I made a list of things to say...

I made this list in my head of things  
I wanted to say to those in power, I thought  
you are not listening, this was, three

or more years ago, back in 2001. If I  
could count the things that happened  
since: letter from downstairs tenant,

visiting publisher condemnations or  
a trip to the Parliament buildings and  
a further condemnation. How many

trips to the Musicals or Theatre? For me  
the library is enough. Oh well you`ll feel  
better if you have a job, could be true!

But still the list, the subway bombings,  
the rude stares, the mice, the sleepy eye  
and still the lists, listings. My wife shrieks ,

a mouse? Emails are they of the conciliatory  
kind? *Grizzly Man* was the best movie of the year.  
It is about something. So. I have nothing. It is not

that, it is simply the little chicken suit, flung high  
into the tree, we are wondering: How did this get  
here? Who will take it down?

William E Stobb

## A history of interruption

11/13/04 – after Walter Benjamin, Dmitry Shostakovich and David Byrne

1

After the election  
my friend touched my black shirt  
mustered the thinnest smile ever recorded.  
Now my Claire coughs  
in the next room otherwise so  
quiet I can hear the adagio in pianissimo  
on the kitchen radio tuned to classical.

Claire would've lost the election too.  
At five, incumbency seemed a violation.  
"It's not fair," she said, "and anyway  
"I don't like him voting for war."  
She asked how he won and I told her  
people saw differently. An hour later  
it was entirely gone from her mind.

2

Back to this page now after  
warming apple juice in a sippy.  
Tired and feverish  
she's home from Kindergarten playing  
pattern games on the PC.  
Her cough is high and croupy  
a little bark but not a whoop.  
At night if she can't stop  
we're to take her in the car  
with the windows down.  
The blast of November air tightens the lungs  
and stops the spasm.  
When she finishes a pattern  
enchanted melodies ring through the house.

Outside all the signs still on the lawns like history  
could carry the world by little tabs.  
That you can lose something important  
on a Tuesday seems unfair.

3

Back to this page now after  
she asked for something sweet and greeted  
my pear with disdain  
and the refrain “you need  
your healthy choices” drifts like sweet bells  
on massive weather patterns  
charted in millennial cycles.

A thousand years – a thousand thousand thousand:  
Even dear Walter Benjamin’s only so helpful.  
Can a moment matter? Can a cough  
sputter beyond the atmosphere  
like broadcast news in deep space?  
Can a family in its generations  
apprehend matters of importance?  
Why lie and rush ruin?  
Is Shostakovich somewhere still translating  
occupation to anxiety in the strings?  
In today’s newspaper  
a writer loved his friend’s war cartoons  
so much he thanked the Commander-in-chief.

What can a family apprehend?  
It’s lovely, Claire, being here with you  
even today, even a room away.

A family has its brains and given  
span – can pass questions along  
and imagine history answering.

And now I’ve honestly remembered  
that yesterday was my sister’s birthday  
and I didn’t call. And Claire  
really can’t stop coughing  
and asking anyway for candy  
and anyway I think of The Talking Heads  
“what good are notebooks?” in  
‘Life in Wartime’.

A history of interruption might end this way:  
In electronic music. In a man saying  
“be grateful” to a child  
while the nations burst forth.

Sean Street

## Quaker poem

*George Dannatt – Icon of Silence 1, Oil on Canvas, 2001*

The door opened into a space.

I heard stillness offer itself  
towards the shape of a prayer.

Coming out of light, we return  
after all.

In the meantime there’s  
silence, white paper between words  
going where noise of words cannot,  
present even under these days,  
a space just beyond the next door.

Todd Swift

## The mosquito and the map

You dawdle on the cartography of conquest  
In the tent where Caesar stabs his ring finger  
On the Tiber. Dare you nibble the Emperor  
As he repels a disappointing triumvirate?

Or have you already tried it, pre-emptively?  
Is that why the God-King bleeds tidily,  
Nit-picks his neck, looks wan at the future?  
No: daredevil blood-pilot now you dive.

Joel Tan

## letter for my half brother at war

what drifts into yr mouth when you're asleep  
granite grit desert ash      you gurgle bubble  
breath dreams of sand babies my hair has grown  
since you've gone    i've vowed not  
to cut it until your safe return brother  
i am a ribbon waiting

when you  
chew    i chew father's tongue thick veined  
*my boys    my boys he brags my only boys*

what music      sooths you there  
when you are plagued by  
the tak tak takking of teeth rattling

windows the tinny shrill screams doors ripping  
from their hinges bombs smarter than ever  
corpses piled high sweet sculpture of apocalypse  
bang banging    the slip    *so sorry to inform*  
*you    he who so bravely fought defended*

the green paper fat of it  
the rising price of oil of it  
utopian drones    presidential sanctions  
papal war cries    the patriotic cheers of football fans  
we bloody our fingers

yellow, orange, red  
refuse to fly      forego holidays until the madness settles  
what must it be like there? the endless waiting  
a township older than some messiah  
a township shrouded in darkness      military

causal of limbs    poison gas perfume  
ah, what joy      to be surrounded by  
muscular monasticism      america's  
multicultural quilt of skin    freckly pink  
the fine brush hairs of youth brown the black  
backwood trailers    sweaty patches of the working  
poor & that impossible sweat smell    hostages

screaming rusting the saw tooth blades  
a nation of headless bodies take arms &  
claim glory sweet glory

genital hungry curs      the blinding  
bulbs flashing and digital streamtelling  
on itself just so justice  
or so it seems can exact itself      it is useless  
to think papa's provincial  
lullabies could hum away the din of a thousand  
locusts descending

here you sweet you  
nuzzle close to my breast    i shall tell  
you a story about    our ancestors & how their seed  
spills from the corners of our mouths  
when we lie or steal or      sin

out there in the heat of  
the waking world    a godly mountain  
there    buried beneath sinai      a vast  
graveyard of nameless zealots who ripped  
burned starved    their bodies bloodied  
their tender backs    to devil away  
lust      their guts grinding with ache

you you      as every good boy should    will  
bring together this ghostly militia with supple and pucker  
offer up    the smallest  
of sacrifices      the giddy thrill of your skin  
the greasy slide    rhythmic buck  
sweet curve of jaw and grip

you half brother salt harbinger  
gather the gulls and rain  
an ocean down upon  
this ancient city.

Nathaniel Tarn

### Body-language, autumn

If I can give it thought, if I  
get to consider in this heat,  
steady myself, god I hate  
heights! along this ledge,  
against the terror, can I not  
let the air do what it wills  
as some say spirit blows?  
Hell! how I hate this height  
it's like a ton weight on my  
genitals and up into my throat –  
but leave this life in some hey  
elegance and style,  
as dancer may be,  
entering the ultimate  
stage for the farewell  
evening. There won't be  
flowers, now at any rate.  
No applause. I shall choose  
the pose: lion crouch  
on rock before a kill,  
swan or swallow dive,  
flight, or something like  
a crucifixion, on my back  
perhaps, except I want to see  
the earth – if I can stave off  
blackout – face me as I reach...  
My god! It's hard to think!  
There must be pain, I guess,  
if there's to be you know some  
resurrection in a new dimension  
[not in a "paradise" or an "elysium"]  
but in salvation of one moment.  
Perfected gold-set of one breath  
to balance out the pain. The  
moment being all of what we  
have as every single sage has  
pointed out. Our poverty. Mine  
shall be rich and then the speed  
of it perhaps will cancel pain.  
One moment such can be "eternity."  
Does it matter if someone out  
there watching will take a

photograph? Probably not: who  
would I show it to? Yet it might  
do to save this moment, to proof  
the beauty of this violence. We  
have set all our heart on violence,  
we love the show of it. Must be  
some reason there. Apotheosis  
of the greatest value for those  
who did this? – like for us? The  
beauty of this cataract of ours  
is nothing else but the definitive  
continuation of the fall of man,  
not through a disobedience to  
some "father" but through man's  
failure to obey himself? Damn,  
I hate heights! Hell! Vomit. Go.

Mark Terrill

### Enduring freedom

From the radio in the kitchen  
on top of the fridge  
comes The Flight of the Bumblebee  
  
as we sit around the silent TV  
in the living room in winter  
warming our clammy hands  
  
against the burning images  
of grief, misery and bloodshed  
resulting from the wars  
  
intended to protect us  
from all the grief, misery  
and bloodshed.

Helên Thomas

### In order to beat terrorism we must carry on as normal and stay calm

11th September 2001: The week old, wide screened, colour TV,  
Sent back for repairs, whilst a black and white portable,  
Failed to convey the end of the world in B-movie grey,  
As I wrapped the gift in candy striped paper,  
The colours of sherbet, for the October wedding  
Of two who would honeymoon, in a wounded city  
Where the NYPD said, "Thank you for coming!"  
And waiters in Little Italy kept the wine flowing,  
So the pair would stay longer and the place would seem full.

15th February 2003: The morning after that month's full moon,  
Admiring the sunrise and frosted white fields,  
We headed down south in our coach loads,  
Alongside buses from Manchester, Bradford and Leeds,  
Whose passengers prayed as we queued for the toilets;  
Over-priced coffee and broadsheets to read.  
Reaching Euston at noon, we shuffled and smiled,  
Some chanted, some sang, some drummed, it took time.

6pm: We reached Hyde Park; the speeches were over.  
The daffodil shoots that had pushed through the grass  
Some two or three inches, now crushed underfoot.  
An African lady in white robes and trainers  
Got chatting; I voiced my concern for the flowers,  
She said, not to worry, that God would take care;  
The daffodils would come back later that year.

8th July 2005: Now I suggest that the police might be wrong;  
People behave strangely for all sorts of reasons,  
What about people who are mentally ill?  
You can't shoot people for acting strange.  
What if it was your son?

30th September 2006: Remember the honeymooners?  
They're parents now; Frankie's three and Cecilia's one.  
Today they take their first transatlantic flight:  
Innocents abroad must board with transparent luggage;  
Nappies sniffed for anthrax; breast milk sieved for semtex,  
And Nana's hand cream must be screened for hydrogen peroxide.

Vincent Tinguely

### Untitled

Ah, the militant military society  
Sitting in straight little school rows  
Marching to and from home and work  
Cleaving to strict schedules  
Jets go up, jets go down like clockwork  
(If clocks indeed still have 'works')  
We salute the early morning breakfast cereals  
It takes a disciplined workforce  
to make a decent cup of coffee  
Our uniforms are in perfect order  
Homeless bums in rags and running sores  
Cops in cruisers, dogs in mangers  
The crisp off-the-rack suits for  
all the salesmen  
All are carefully deployed in their  
assigned patrol patterns  
All are instantly replaceable  
In case of accident, illness or  
terrorist attack  
Advancing, advancing, advancing  
Like row upon row of doughty doughboys  
Each in turn being mown down  
By the vagaries of city life.

*February 19, 2006*

Rodrigo Toscano

## Improvised Poetic Device (IPD)

The ribcage wrapped  
– as per usual –  
in muscle, skin

The head mounted  
– as per usual –  
on the trunk

The eyes tautly tied  
– as per usual –  
to the skull

The little ones prance  
gazelles  
are the way *they* are

Dates in the heat  
– as per usual –  
are sweet, pungent

Days at their end  
(such are days are welcomed)  
bring on the night

The long night  
– as per usual –  
can be terrifying

*You could*  
*patch in*  
*very punchy, very gnarly*  
*appropriately*  
*first-world-wealthy*  
*stuff*  
*anywhere*  
*you*  
*damn*  
*well*  
*please*

The thighs  
are elegantly and complexly tied  
to the hips

The hips  
– as per usual –

buttress the spine

The hips at times  
expand  
to twice their width

Old men  
given time, given space  
play chess

Mud bricks, well-made  
– as per usual –  
absorb the hot sun

The spines of middle-aged women  
leopards  
are the way *they* are

*You could*  
*cut-out*  
*very savvy, very quippy*  
*appropriately*  
*first-world-snarky*  
*stuff*  
*anytime*  
*you*  
*damn*  
*well*  
*please*

The ears  
– as per usual –  
come in twos

The nose  
sits at the top of the mouth  
co-ordinative

The mind is  
– as per usual –  
in dispute

The ass  
is like hands  
dependant & rebellious

You could  
sync in  
very sexy, very tart  
appropriately

first-world-prickly  
stuff  
anyhow  
you  
damn  
well  
please

The ubiquitous cotton plaid shirt  
- as per usual -  
is sewn by young girls

Cialis, Viagra, Propecia  
are smuggled goods  
for the porker class (there)

The porker class (here)  
is about to reward you  
- as per usual -

The ubiquitous singular ass  
with a beef  
is what's for dinner

Here's an IPD for you  
Here's an IPD for you  
Here's an IPD for you

John Tranter

## Childhood

1

Call its stated goal an assault on the new window  
looking at other fundamentally longer music and film  
the norm for most women: like the market  
the island is the editor of a different algorithm,  
and clocked an experiment that feeds me  
over the long tradition of discourse  
which lasts longer than their own phone calls  
and he on the web. The woman held to the belief  
that it was his faithful mistake.  
Are the blues just a warp in the DNA,

a genetic splice on the silver bullet of jazz?  
At the beginning of the major slowdown  
music is used to liven up the dismal matter  
late at night when every gesture is cool.

2

See the net, the ten-year mission,  
the dish, the town, the gong shimmering.  
The city played the 'call on the applet' song  
and claimed that a lot was going on.  
You will hear from the US government  
and the EEC boffins in due course.  
they do what they do to guide the assault  
on the date. Barry's the one who knew  
what he had seen between sound data  
and the player, and had gone to get some help  
because he is the only guy out on a limb in DC  
with an inflammation of the chest. Dos Santos said  
he announced that on CNN, some old male figure,  
and that's when they made the initial analysis.

3

What the day-to-day white cell function was  
and its annual fatality rate, nobody knows.  
You know any large kidney stone can do it,  
before the end of the union,  
the bits of rock inside the suffering flesh.  
He was indicted for some minor crime,  
and was allowed bail on condition that  
he stayed away from the schoolyard.  
That's what the year brought us. Thanks.  
(Delete the eighth.) Keep this Sunday free,  
be on call, it would cost them one budget at least  
(using Outlook) to keep all the doctors on call  
ready for duty (command) to be finding out about  
the swap deal relating to the evolution of a saint.

4

Call me. It has the fix-it.  
In his three days using it  
he just couldn't get through  
to the end of 'log enable'.  
He didn't use a cool bar  
when the investigating court  
claimed that the CIA under any other name  
would be the same.  
All the defendants, the whole sack of them,

have long been made ineffective  
by the relentlessness of the judicial assault.  
On the phone, deletion is the aim.  
This idea is not the only visionary  
thing to happen in a small novel.

5

Combing your hair, you don't follow suit,  
you look all blotchy on the late show  
and indeed the team in the studio  
including John Updike and a close female friend  
beat the previous month's audience figures.  
You're seeing the virus and these guys  
all dying in a fire, but on a neighboring island  
the locals benefit from new lease of life.  
The goal of the pain can get busier than all the data  
in the world, the flaw in the work that we do  
for state PTA president is a lack of talent.  
Update the loan. The MIT Board is on the Internet  
and his roommate has enough votes to win one of the best  
seats in the house, still layered and glowing.

*'Childhood' is loosely derived from Rimbaud's 'Enfance'.*

John Welch

## Screen

It has a semi-human face  
Distilled on screens,  
This thing that speaks in our name,

An approximation of something  
Let loose on the world  
And this is what it keeps on saying:

'You will pay for what I did to you  
Again and again and again'

These poems were given by their authors in aid of the Red Cross,  
which helps people who have lost everything in Hurricane Katrina  
or the tsunami, people who are hungry because of crop failure  
or displaced because of conflict.

**Please consider donating.**