

**THE
MOUNTBATTEN
SCHOOL**

Poetry Festival

1983

The Mountbatten School Poetry Festival - 1983

Reading through dozens of poems with an eye and an ear for quality forced me to reflect upon one feature above all: poems are obstinately miscellaneous. They do not fall easily into categories or common themes. Good poems "do their own thing": they make their statement in their own self-contained, self-sufficient way. Winners, therefore, tend to select themselves: often they catch the eye by discovering something fresh to say in areas that are familiar, by making what Lawrence called "a new effort of attention". This effort is usually signalled in the voice the writer adopts. When the words on the page seem to be saying, "Look at us: we're something special" then one can be sure that the writer has avoided tired and worn-out language and responded to the subject afresh.

There was a generous measure of this vitality in the entries from all the year groups. Perhaps it was most evident in the second and fourth year poems but the range of topics and ideas everywhere was heartening. Clearly, Mountbatten writers have got the message that poems can be written about anything from dustbins to the cosmos; or, taking the first and the fifth year winners, from the rubic cube to George and the Dragon.

I am always suspicious of poems about writing poetry, particularly where a poetry festival is concerned, but Antoni Diaz's Poem made me look again at my doubts about the wisdom of asking people to write on demand. The poem is a humorous dialogue with self. Eavesdropping upon someone's thought-track immediately gives a sense of illicit pleasure and here the thoughts arrive at a subtle and convincing conclusion - poems do not arrive in a flash of inspiration, they ooze into existence. It is a sentiment (and a metaphor) that A. E. Housman and many another poet has made.

There is also a poem about teaching poetry. Protest by J. Veall is full of frustrated questioning. It makes a plea for reading as opposed to critical analysis - a view with which I have a lot of sympathy - except that I think it is too narrow to suggest that as readers we should simply rest "content with our own images". Nonetheless, if a poetry competition can produce, amidst a wealth of entries, writing that is questioning and reflecting upon the ways poems are composed and shared, then the state of the art must be healthy.

M. G. Benton

THE PUZZLE

It's made of twenty seven pieces all told,
It's something to do when it's warm or it's cold,
It has bright coloured sides that go up to six,
I twist them and turn them and get in a mix.
The twenty six cubes it has, cleverly fit,
They're loose but secure, round a large middle bit,
Give the oil can a squeeze, make it turn faster,
It's a puzzle! yet has many a master.
These puzzles are useless and take so long,
I never can solve it, it's always wrong.
Those who are experts can do it much quicker,
It's easy to cheat, swap round every sticker,
On the whites of the puzzle he signs his name,
'He's' the professor who invented the game.
It gets me frustrated as it turns, click, click.
Inventors make so much money with a trick,
Including the logical Mr. Rubik!

Emma Hawthorne 1G

SUNSET ON THE SEA-SHORE

The sun poured down onto the calm sea.
The sea was a mass of ripples like an old woman's face.
Sometimes a spray of white foamy lather
 would tip a wavetop and then
 the wave would rush forward
 and lap over the shore.
The sun was like a large egg, broken on
 a plate with its yolk swirling round.
It is just like the sun which is swirling
 down onto the calm but rippling sea.
The sun is slowly sinking like an abandoned ship.
Slowly sinking, slowly sinking.
The night wraps around me as if the
 old woman's sea face had felt the
 cold and pulled her soft black
 shawl around her shoulders.

Julie Wort 1H

WINTER THOUGHTS

I wonder if
the trees feel sad,
When they're all bare
and look so drab.

I wonder if
they long for spring,
Fresh green leaves
and birds that sing.

I wonder if
they stand and weep,
Or don't they feel
in deep winter's sleep.

Of course they feel
Just lift some bark,
There's the life
that gives it heart.

Jennifer Bartlett 1Z

Toto the Clown

No make-up on the table,
No smile in the mirror;
An empty tin of greasepaint
His only souvenir.

When he closes his eyes
He can still hear the cheers
Of the children and grown ups
Back over the years.

His friends called him Toto,
Toto the clown,
And his make up had never
Included a frown.

He'd painted a smile
All over his face,
The happiest smile
In the whole human race.

His costume was always
A baggy checked suit,
A jolly red nose
And some big floppy boots.

The end of this story's
Not really so bad,
For a new little Toto
Has replaced his dad;
Who sits on the sidelines
And watches his son
Carry on the tradition
Of Toto the Clown.

Joanne Moore 2J

The Fight

I walk into a crowd,
I see a fight,
I stand back for a while,
But then I feel sorry for the little kid,
Because that's all he was, a kid.
I move in on them,
Eyes glaring at me,
All around me Eyes,
Burning me up.
I pull the boys apart;
One of them hits me.
I feel anger brewing up inside me.
I lash out, knocking him to the floor.
He crawls away,
And the crowd disperses.

Andrew French 2G

THE AQUARIUM

The crab scurried over the stoney sea-bed,
Its yellow-green ghost-like body
Scampering across the colourful sandscape,
Malevolent, dominating.
Trapping a drifting piece of seaweed
In a powerful jaw-like claw.

The anemone,
Stuck fast to a smoothed stone,
Splays a hundred arms into the murky water,
Reaching desperately,
Searching for a tiny morsel of food,
Strange beauty hidden in the depths.

The snail,
Soft, mud-coloured flesh
Protruding from a squashed spiralling shell,
Slides patiently
Across the stone scattered plane,
Going nowhere.

Roy Biddle 3Q

SKY

Sky is like a mirror, sometimes bright, sometimes
dull,
You're wide and open like the wings of a flying
gull.
Twinkling, sparkling way up there,
Passing shadows everywhere.

At night you glisten like a peacock feather,
Your changing moods can transform the weather.
Silver-white moon covering the world with a
veil of light,
Waiting for the gaze of morning like a candle
flickering bright.

But at times you riot and rave,
Like sea of crashing waves.
Lightning flashes splitting you in two
While thunder clashes between the storm
clouds.

You soon subdue, calm descending,
Only breaks in the clouds like the lines on a palm.

Leanne Denney 3H.

OPTIONS

'O' Level, 'A' Level, College degree,
What sort of job is suited for me?
Spend all my school years sitting at a bench,
Studying English, Science, Maths and French,
If you don't get 'A' Level, college degree,
Who'll have you as an employee?
So all you pupils sitting at the bench,
Swot your English, Science and French.

Policeman, dustman, accountant, clerk,
Choosing a job is such a lark,
Banker, artist, hairdresser, teacher,
Workman, salesman, footballer, preacher,
Zoo keeper, Scuba diver, brick layer, porter,
Doctor, nurse, farmer, reporter,
Brain Surgeon, lawyer, which will it be,
Which sort of job is suited for me?

Samuel Pead 3W

In Battle

Wind whistles through the twisted wreck,
Only the faded blue undercarriage shows
Another aircraft lost in the war,
Lost needlessly, in battle.

Grey clouds fill the sky,
A remembrance of those mournful days
When planes flew low across the sea
To meet their enemy face to face
In battle.

Dreadful thoughts go through the pilot's mind
As the plane plunges to the ground
Leaving a black trail of smoke behind
And someone's memory of a tragic death
In battle.

Children play in the rusted wreck
Happily unaware of its deathly background.
To them it is just a harmless playground
But it held no joy for those who shared its fate
In battle.

Steven Moore 3W

VALENTINE'S DAY

'I love you'
The timeless legend.
At first,
Inscribed by lovers,
With knife on wood,
And then, by any
Who, with paint, crayon, spray can or pencil,
Abuse the meaning,
The true feeling,
Behind a private message
As old as man.
I, too, could add my message,
But, amongst the graffiti of years,
What good would it do?
No one would know,
That my message is true.

Christopher Burrows 4K

War Is Peace

"We want peace!" they said,
"Ban the bomb!"
They would not cease, carrying on and on.
"We want peace, war is wrong!"

Those screaming protests disrupted my sleep,
They disfigured the papers, polluted our speech,
The politicians' arguments never would cease,
I burst out, "Give Me some peace!"

Now the papers are burned, the politicians all dead,
Now I have peace,
Their protests in vain.
The Bomb came.

Angus Bewick 4Q

POEM

"Write a poem" says the teacher.
Simple isn't it? "Write a poem."
So I tuck myself away in a corner
Ready to write a poem.

What about? Who knows?
I'll think of something,
Something I feel strongly about.
Now, what do I feel strongly about?

Unilateral disarmament?
I don't even know what it means.
Soccer violence?
We've heard it all before.
In fact I don't feel strongly about anything much.

Except homework.
I hate homework.
But who wants to hear a poem
About homework?
I don't.

So what can I write about?
I'll think of something.
I shall sit here, in my corner,
Until I get a bright idea.

I don't get bright ideas very often,
Not where poems are concerned, anyway.
And they never come suddenly, as they should.
They ooze.
There is no oozing yet.

Antoni Diaz 4Q

Protest

Why do we have to do it?
The blotched, printed sheet provides no clue,
The "work of art" lies staring at you,
In smudged, blue banda ink.
What is wrong with just reading a poem?
Being able to see that it is beautiful,
Or not, as the case may be.
Why have to see the author's point of view.
When we are content with our own images?
Why murder poetry?

J. Veall 4H

GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

Set in slumber,
Soft hide rhythmically rising,
Warm, moist breath echoing sleep,
Vison of power and beauty welded,
Curled in heavy lidded retreat.

Trotting through fragrent cedar grove,
Fearless knight on sculptured stead,
Lances of sunlight piercing armour,
Hungry sword edge craving to feed.

Between the dreams fears are burning,
And memories of days long passed,
Senses awakened! Tucked wings stretching!
Faceted eyes peep from lids of brass.

Heart leaps! Grey eyes shielded!
Shady cedars become searing light,
Valour vanquished, doubts succeeding,
Swish of tail troubles his sight.

Arching upward, dragon rises
On gold leaf haunches, with bronze lace wings,
Proclaiming proudly his thunderous message,
A golden masthead to all living things.

Burnt sunlight bleeding over meadows,
Scorched hair and skin scenting the night,
Bullying breezes buffeting wing span,
As torn and weary they continue to fight.

Jane Stone 5Y

THE SILENT TWILIGHT

The sun sets as I sit here alone
On the edge of a motionless lake.
There are no ripples to be seen,
Under the carpet of golden leaves.

Autumn has finally reached here,
Most of the trees surrounding me are totally bare,
The season has taken them by surprise,
Taking their colourful coats with it.

The sun is setting slowly on the horizon,
Leaving a golden-red glow in the cloudless sky.
I am just able to make out its reflection in the water,
Between the matted masses of floating leaves.

It is so silent here,
And nothing to break that silence,
Except the whispering of the wind through the stripped branches,
As they hang limply on the pillar-like trees.

Far in the background are the hills.
I can only just visualise them as they are so distant,
They seem so solitary, so alone,
I know what they feel like.

Frustration

Long queues and chilly waiting rooms,
And politics and petrol fumes,
The rain, the rates, the railway tea,
Canned laughter nightly on T.V.

Red traffic lights and yellow lines,
The "Warning!" and the "Danger!" signs,
The constable with his black book,
The magistrate with filthy look.

The office cleaners, fouling cats,
Pollution, neighbours, strikes and rats,
The scandals, vandals, thieves and thugs,
The murder, mayhem, booze and drugs.

These things above we swear we hate
Because they irk and irritate.

June Whittaker 5Y

LIFE ON A BOOKSHELF

The book opens
And a worm begins the slow crawl through the library of life,
At first the pictures explain the words,
Soon the words will describe the picture,
Possibility has no ceiling,
The child's vivid mind is full of dreams and fascination,
The nursery rhymes are perfect poetry,
The fairy tales unrivalled prose.
But the words and tales are as short as life so far,
This is only the preface.
As the bookworm grows with every eaten page,
The child grows in knowledge and understanding
And leaves the world of fantasy.

The thoughts of childhood mature in this next chapter.
Now the knowledge from previous reading is required,
Everyone continues but reads from different leaves,
For the wind blows them in many directions.
Whether beauty or beast, prince or pauper, man or woman,
Everyone one day faces the realities of life,
For the fictional world of fear, romance and murder,
Is often very true.
And it is in these pages
That parenthood provides the bible for a new biography.

As time disappears into the black hole,
Eaten away by the worm, the final chapter looms.
Now the wise old scholar is well-read,
The books are much more solemn,
And the worm must eat his way
Through volumes of knowledge, history and holy works.
Wills are written and epitaphs prepared,
The biography of many years is close to completion,
The holy bible is studied and devoured in earnest,
The aged pray for mercy,
As they come to the wayside halt, on the Eternal Way,
Used by mortals, not by gods.
The bookworm has had his meal,
He is ready to disappear below the surface of the land
And head for the underworld.
Now the eyes droop,
The story is concluded,
And the last page is closed.

SNOW

The stiff air is softly broken by
feather-like flakes.
They tumble carelessly to the ground,
skimming cheeks and freckling faces,
where they vanish in a twinkling of an eye,
leaving a glistening shadow.
The Birch tree lifts up her arms
to welcome the diamond-bright burdens,
long fingers greedily caressing
her ice cold burden.

Melanie Inglis 1H

Discoveries of White Fang

I have come a long way,
Since breaking the wall of light.
I have had many an adventure,
Finding new ways of life,
Finding the dangers and problems.

I have found fear,
Which has lived in me since we first met.
I have discovered curiosity,
Meeting objects like magnets,
As if I had a metal chest.

I have met water,
Which seemed a solid base on which to walk.
I was helplessly washed and pounded down stream,
The water made my eyes bulge, my throat throb.
Agonising injuries told me the mighty
Moving path was nothing to tangle with.

I have met fire,
Leaping red flames, dancing in front of my eyes,
As if asking me to play.
The gringe and tingle of raging heat,
It soon warned me off.

I have met meat,
The gush of blood, a taste of flesh.
It's what I live for.
Anything moving to attack,
Something to set my teeth into,
And feel the tide of blood on which I live.

Graham Backhurst 2G

The Snowy Owl

A cold and windy night,
Dusky shadows fill the air,
The trees surround a frosted path,
So still and cold, like the stalking deer.

A silent creature, sidles past,
Its feet tread softly like a firefly,
While the breezy wind, tells quietly
To hush and shush, and slumber deep.

But gliding through the starlit night
The greatest bird adorns the sky,
A smooth and powerful beat of wings,
The owl, it passes by.

The faintest, palest, scuffle of feet,
And the owl swoops down to strike its prey
Then with two great strokes of its wings
It glides with a mouse, that struggles in the claw
Until higher and higher, up in the air,
A black silhouette across the moon.

Marion Seaton 2Y

The following three poems were not placed, but seemed to us worthy of inclusion.

DROUGHT

For days we just sat,
Waiting.
In bored, silent, solitude,
Waiting with the heat.
For days we watched as the crops began to wilt,
and our hopes also.
For a year it seemed we waited
for the Gods to keep their promises,
But the Gods had other interests.
All that was left was faith.
We began to feel old and worn, and, with parched lips,
We watched the mud turn to dust.
For days we hid from the sun,
For weeks we prayed for water,
But, all that they gave us were winds.
Scouring winds,
Winds that stung your eyes with sand,
Sand that was from the dust,
Dust that was from the mud,
Mud that came with the rain,
But the rain didn't come.
At night we saw stars,
In the days we helplessly watched
as our flocks began to die
and our hopes also, for, with burning throats
All we could do was sympathise.
There were no greens,
The land was wearing dry brittle browns -
Dead colours
and we wished we were the same.

Emma Crates 2T

The Vixen at Night

The Vixen looks over her shoulder,
Her fubsy cubs were
Fast asleep
Looking like a sack of fox pelts
Flung on the floor.
But now the Hunter's Moon
Was riding
High in the sky.
And the Vixen feels
Mounting excitement.
Her husband looked up
Still muzzy from long sleep.
The vixen was gone,
Like a flame snuffed.
The Vixen stands,
Head erect, ears alert.
In the silver moonlight
A desolate wail is
Keened to the watching stars.
Then she is running,
No direction, no care.
She scitters, moon-crazed
Over the
Shimmering May meadows.
Her head is spinning
She runs hobgoblin-wild towards the
Evil looking woods.
She slows up suddenly,
Then picks her way cautiously.
This was different.
The choking smell of
Man.

Catherine Piper 1H

The Universe

The Universe is a never ending poem.
It tells of stars and planets,
Of strange and wonderful creatures.
It tells of past and future,
Of what has happened,
Of what will happen.
Only the Universe has seen infinity.

Nick Burrows 2H

