



THE MOUNTBATTEN SCHOOL

IF
POETRY

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1997

Poetry, what an all-embracing word that can be. Poems can be so much unlike each other, saying that one is better than another is sometimes like preferring a cheese sandwich to a grand piano : they are both made of “stuff” but come in handy on different occasions.

Overstatement, of course, but reading your work has been a very enjoyable and affirmative experience and I am particularly anxious to avoid giving the impression that real merit resides only in the “top twenties” - “the chart busters” in fact.

I have done my best to be constant in my criteria but admit the difficulties. After all, it’s a common enough experience to wake up a very different person from the one who went to bed.

And the rich variety before me : the arresting single word, the striking phrase, the skilful movement from liberal to figurative language and back again, the touchingly exposed personal feeling, the humour, grief - they emerge and surface where they will.

There is abundant variety of form as well as subject matter. Very often there is a pleasingly relaxed authority in your poems. At times, it’s as if you are collaborating with your poetry rather than exercising absolute authority over it - letting it lead, as it were.

Robert Frost, the American C20 poet has said “ I never yet started a poem whose end I knew - writing a poem is discovering”.

Reading your poetry has certainly been a discovery and a pleasure. But I’d like to get closer to the poems themselves:

The vestigial school teacher in me (an incurable condition, I believe) rushed across the classroom to correct a misspelling in Amanda Weeks’ “Deadedicated Silence”. Then I saw her grim pun as a poignant reminder that there is a higher good than correct spelling.

The conspicuous quality of my top twenty makes quotation and comment on them superfluous. However I must express my admiration for the skilful and mature handling of the personal and public concerns in the one poem running parallel and illuminating each other. I see and hear this in Gethin Musk’s ‘Gold; and Susie Carter’s dizzily sustained metaphor of school as enemy-occupied country* ~ barbed wire from a live wire, indeed!

*Milk Bottle Manoeuvre

Finally, just to show that those very able poets not numbered among the ‘trophyed twenty’ are in no need of consolation or intensive care, I pick, choose and quote from among their lively and enjoyable offerings.

To begin with, I found my imagination breakfasting on Katie Lineker (Year 7) “Sunflakes” (a celestial cereal?) and my sympathies stirred for ravenous Michael Hatton in his struggle against the armour plated food in his larder; live encountered the problem in ours.

Bobby Tree (the name’s a poem!) intrigued me with the personification of Spring as being

“very logical”

and by telling us that

“things are done her way” (Spring’s, not Bobby’s)

Jayne Gamblin 7CL offers a cautionary tale for would be D.I. (Wise?) Dads; a stomach churning but timely episode.

We have more family adventures when Antony Dallay, a skilful versifier reports the sad plight of the Lion at the Zoo who tangled with Sister Ruthey (Sister Ruthless?).

In a reflective mood, Georgina Banks (7HS) after contemplating the night sky in its movements and moods goes indoors.

“Thanking her eyes for staying open”

Very properly, the serious and sadder aspects of existence are not ignored. Natalie Porter challenges the cautious platitude, “The grass is always greener” with her vigorous rebuttal

“Well, it would be for me!”

Matt Sharp’s concern for those

“Caught in the dark hole
Of despair”

is strikingly expressed.

Frequently, in your anthology I find expressions of care and concern for nature, for the world of animals. Wild and domestic -

“The fire flickers
My memory fades
Night draws in”

This, by Jonathan H is a most effective conclusion to his poem on the death of Jesse, the dog...

Yet further into gravity, Rob Nicholson’s “First Funeral” expresses, with a confused precision, his almost mute bewilderment

“In my mind
A thousand things collided”

And Philip Standing’s eloquently restrained opening of his poem “Grieving”

“He slipped away that evening
But nothing was disturbed”

is especially affecting.

On this very sad subject, Kirsty Fennel, of Year 7, expressed her desolation with a most understandable and forgivable selfishness in "My Great Grandad Pop"

"He was so gentle
Like a calm sea
Now he's happy but...
What about ME?"

Much more might be said but it became ill-mannered to keep you from the poetry any longer; time, rather, to congratulate both poet pupils (not pupil poets) and their teachers on this impressive and enjoyable production.

And please, do let poetry have a voice beyond school.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe said :

"The world is so great and rich
and life so full of variety that
you can never lack occasions
for poems"

Fading Interest

*There is a sweetness in the air
Like spices in the night
A mellow breeze
So soft, so slow
The rapture holds me tight.*

*Then I feel a twinge of apprehension
Something that's not quite there
A malevolent tiger
Waiting to pounce
A venom, in the air.*

*The stars are growing dimmer now
The love that was so strong
Is now a fading
Interest
When he saw that he was wrong*

*And soon the mellow is all gone
The soft and sweet depart
He's out there somewhere
Forgetting me
And tearing in two, my heart*

*Hollie Wells
7SHu
1st Prize*

Matillda

*The ancient, rusty red hen
Waddles to and for,
Through the puddles,
Through the settled dust.
Into the nettles she stumbles
Snatching a leaf from the under growth.
She makes her way, head held high
To the drinking trough.
Down the head goes.
With a wild gesture she flings it back.
Swallowed, you can see it slide down the neck.
Next it's off to bully the young ones.
She chases them at great speed.
Across the orchard they fly.
Matillda's the boss.*

Harriet Sheard

7Ch

2nd Prize

Creature

*Ears as big as parachutes,
Legs as thick as trees,
Skin as grey as pavements,
As wrinkly as a prune.*

*As heavy as a rover,
Bum as big as a jumbo jet,
Nose as long as drainpipes,
Tail like a fly swat.*

*Teeth as shiny as new shoes,
And toenails as big as my feet,
Tongue as rough as carpet,
Tonsils as big as golf balls.*

Guess what it is.

An Elephant.

Clare Marriott

7PA

3rd Prize

My trip to the beach

*Running up and down the never ending
Mountain of sand,
It was like being rolled in sugar.
Sand in my food, sea-salty sherbet
Irritating like the grit in a oyster.
Through gorse bushes, their scissor hands
And needle fingers scratching.
The heather, like a woven carpet,
A smell sweet like a bakery, moist,
 sugary wafts.
Floating scum, dank, rotten like petrol
Coloured oil leaking on the water.
Boats sound like constant hair dryers
In a salon.
Shells sliced in half, opened like a dolls'
House, showing upstairs and down.*

Anya Roszkowiak

7SHn

4th Prize

The Oak Tree

*What becomes of the old oak tree.
Gnarled, wizened and wise.
Looking over its forest home.
Countless seasons, storms endured.
And the winters cold.
Much activity this tree has seen.
But will it see much more?
Is a question to be asked.
The machines arrive chop, chop, chop.
"Timber" and the tree comes down.
Its steadfast years no defence against this moment
Former glory now is shed.*

Tom Foote

7CL

Highly commended

Life

*I was born within a world,
Which
Was made of sleep and play
But I grew up,
And learnt to walk,
Then to write
Then to talk.*

*I grew up within a world
Which
Was made of food and love
So I went on
and learnt to flirt
then to date
Then to hurt*

*I grew old within a world
Which
Was made of wool and thread
but I fell asleep
and learnt to fly
but only then did
I learn to die*

*Ria Harding
8NP
1st Prize*

The Dance

*The lights are dim
The audience are waiting
The curtain is up, and
The orchestra's poised
The scenery's set
The dancers are ready
The stage is empty
It's all up to me.*

*My stomach is turning
But the show must go on
My head is spinning
But it's my big moment
Like a big black hole
the stage awaits
About to swallow me up.*

*I step out into the darkness,
like a frightened mouse,
looking for food.
I've forgotten the dance
I feel so ill
But the show must go on.*

*But as I take the second step
The magic seems to fill the air
The music starts
The stage is lit
And the dance begins to flow
Like the current of an enormous river,
The steps carry me away,
I jump and turn
I kick and leap
I twist and spin
It's happening!*

*Flying through the air
I feel as if the stage is mime
Only made for me!*

*The music slows,
And so does the dance
It fades into nothing again
It's over, it's over.*

*Amy Carmichael
8NC
2nd Prize*

Life!

*I wake up in the morning and off I go to school,
With hope in my heart and me feeling cool,
And every day I try to learn rule after rule,
Because I know that if I don't, I'll be the fool.*

*Week in and week out, I must learn this I must learn that,
The pressure is already on SAT, SAT, SAT!
And I still try to keep my hopes and try to be so good,
But all I ever seem to hear is "you Should, Should,
Should!"*

*That's life and one day I will be a man,
But if I study and I work, I'll have a plan,
To be so rich and free to say,
I only ever wanted to, Play, Play, Play!*

Aziz Alzouman

8MDs

3rd Prize

Monsters

*"I don't want to eat my tea," said Jim,
"The Monster made of potato will eat me."
"Don't worry," said his mother
"I don't want to have a bath," said Jim,
"The soap sud monster will suck me up!"
"Don't worry," said his mother.
"I don't want to go to bed," said Jim,
"The monster under the bed will get me!"
"Don't worry," said his mother
"I don't want to go to sleep," said Jim,
"The monster will creep up on me."
"I'll turn into a monster if you don't go to sleep,"
said his mother.*

Graham Claxton

8MDs

4th Prize

Wildcat

*A corner of shadow in the dewy garden
Darts against the squares of apple-green
The cat does not belong here
His spirit is travelling
In a coniferous, northern world
The fire burns in his livid eyes
A wild thing in a tame cage*

*To him, the rigid fence
Is a craggy ridge
The smell of creosote
An imaginary mingle of pine sap and
Cold stone
The sound of footsteps
He ignores
They don't exist in his world*

*For centuries
Humans have framed the small feline
In a surrounding, crushing world
Of cosy fireplaces and armchairs
Stereotyping a savage beast
And drawing a mask over his face
But the cat's spirit lives.
He ignores roof top tiles
Despises chimney bricks
In the eye of his mind his mind
His Scandinavian dream
Awaits him.*

*Emilie Pavey
9MG
1st Prize*

Purple Passion

*Five days of nakedness. Nail varnish
Is forbidden at school'. At the weekend
It's different. 'Purple Passion' is my best
Mate Rachel's favourite colour - this week.
The bottle of mysterious hippy, happy mauve
Is shaken in time to the
Girly Anthems of 'Alishas Attic' -
Her most loved cassette tape.
The brush full of runny liquid is swept over
Her finger nails. It oozes into
The sides of them. It glistens and sparkles
In all its enchanting purpleness.*

Samara Curtis-Quick

9MSt

2nd Prize

Grandma

*Light gently flowing into her kitchen,
My Grandma is absorbed in her cooking.
Her firm strokes combine the mixture into one,
While I combine notes to make a sweet-sounding tune.
She hums soothingly along, to comfort,
To guide in creating a masterpiece.
I watch as her swift yet sure movements
Show pleasure and pride. She's content
For she knows that one day, her given gifts
Will pass joy onto others like me.*

Danielle Bartel

9MSt

3rd Prize

The broken vase

*My father holds the small tube,
Between his large but delicate fingers,
Making sure all the time,
That the constant flow of glue stays,
On the sharp broken edge of the cracked vase.
His strong fingers cling carefully to the smooth surface,
Of the cold, half empty, tube.
The sticky liquid runs along the shattered edge,
As he slowly moves his hand.
Bit by bit the pieces fix together,
To reform the once beautiful vase.*

David Reeves

9MSt

4th Prize

May Day

*May day! May day!
Will anybody hear?
I'm drowning in the darkness,
I'm choking on my fear.*

*May day! May day!
Is anybody there?
Can anybody feel the wind
Of problems in the air?*

*The tide of my life is turning
I'm being blown out to sea,
In a boat unprepared for
The troubles that I see.*

*My pale insignificance
Is mirrored in the dark
Impenetrable waters that
Hold the parent shark.*

*May day! May day!
There's nobody to hear
My Fading screams that echo
In a storm that seems to leer.*

*May day! May day!
There's nobody to see
The tidal name of growing up
That washes over me.*

*Ailsa Boun
10CE
1st Prize*

The Infant-School Playground

*The grey, rough tarmac hosted my worlds,
Curved, yellow lines made our roads, our paths:
And we were dogs, and trains, and owls,
When imagination whirled and won,
I was the author; it was my land.
We ran over earthquakes, swam in the sea,
We went on adventures on that bare ground;
And covered the world in fifteen minutes,
For us it was our kingdom, our home:
But to others, a black, bleak playground.*

Graham Seed

10JR

2nd Prize

The Tor

*Tall on the horizon,
The massive pile of granite
Seems to have been thrown down upon the hill,
By a giant's hand.*

*It is a giant climbing frame,
For people to scramble over.
They cross the tiny gorges,
Scale miniature cliff faces.*

*At the highest point,
It is Mt Everest,
And they are the greatest climbers of all time.
Haytor, on a Sunday.*

*Robin Dowell
10 CPa
3rd Prize*

Milk Bottle Manoeuvre

*Triumphantly striding, milk bottle in hand,
feeling the pride of being the chosen one.
Marching boldly, like a soldier. Negotiating
corridors like rivers, classrooms like forests.
Silently creeping past the military base of the
secretary's office.
Quietly I stole into the deserted staff room.*

*The bottle felt molten in my hand, as if
it were trying to squirm away.
I reached the fridge, pulled open the door,
saw the light flicker on.
I lay the grenade of milk lightly on the
shelf, then shut it away.
Wait a minute! Bottles should stand upright.*

*My teeth cringed as I realised what I had
unleashed. As the door swung open
The milk bottle rolled, clung precariously to
the edge, then plummeted to its death.*

The grenade had gone off.

*My skin liquidized, my hair tunnelled back
into my scalp, my eyes felt hot.
My guilt spread like the shockwaves of the explosion.
I would need every inch of my army training to
escape unscathed.
But it was too late.
The staff room door crept slowly open.*

*Susie Carter
10JR
4th Prize*

Bullied

*Standing in the corner
Just trying not to be noticed
Alone and unwanted
Only wanted by bullies.*

*To tease
To frighten
To laugh at
To hit.*

*As I fall
My feelings fall
And I drown
In my tears in a corner.*

*No one can see.
No one really cares.
An age of torture
Goes on and on and on and on and.....*

*Robert Nicholson
10MP
Highly Commended*

Gold?

*He looked up to notice a small insectial shadow,
Burrowing into the chasm of his mind,
No more time*

The water had claimed another victim.

*Others clambered aboard,
Out of the sea once known as black gold,
It had financed the nations which,
Were no more.*

*The driver stirred, his face a reflection of his past passenger,
Heading toward the ever distant destination.
The water from which the cart
Was a sanctuary,
Had claimed another victim.*

*Drowning was no longer common,
there was not time,
To beat the jet shadow
The winged had flown.
They were the first steps,
On the perpetually advancing path.*

*The coxswain's body nurtured unwillingly,
The pathetic escapism,
That they all stove for
On the continuing path,
Towards the neon,
Plucking from the engulfing flames.*

The Survivors.

*Gethin Musk
11PF
1st Prize*

Deadicated Silence

*Red and yellow.
Yellow and red.
Here's where the soldiers
Lie in their beds.*

*Snipers and rifles,
A boom and a yell.
Here's where they stood,
And now where they fell.*

*The war, it is over,
The silence now lies.
The soldiers have gone,
And with them their lives.*

*Red and yellow.
Yellow and red.
The birds fly past,
But nothing is said.*

*Sun will keep shining.
Wind it will moan.
But the soldiers don't care
This is their home.*

*The red of the poppy,
The yellow - the corn.
The soldiers remembered,
Their children unborn.*

*Red and Yellow.
Yellow and red.
Here's to the soldiers,
The field, the dead.*

*Amanda Weeks
11 SDe
2nd Prize*

Anger

*"Don't go," the people said,
"Don't leave, then, please."
But we left. We had to.
Peace had broken out again,
No place for us.*

*The life of war had
shrunk our people.
We numbered less than
thirty, we the chosen.
Our pastures new always
followed anger, the
places war-torn.*

*Another town, another time,
more anger now than ever.
We walked the streets
needed but not feared,
hated by those who
walked the warning way,
We were always victors,
but never happy ones.*

*We laughed but never smiled,
our eyes echoed death.
But we were the chosen,
It was our duty.*

*Michael Scott
11MZ
3rd Prize*

Not a Dream!!

*No one told me,
until I found it, that day.
I'd gone up to the attic,
to put things away.*

*It was cold and dark,
so I tripped and I fell.
The box just lay open,
waiting to tell.*

*The stories and secrets,
had been hidden from me
To save me from truth,
that would bring misery.*

*There in the box,
was a little red book.
I turned on the light,
and gasped as I looked.*

*A picture of a boy,
smiling back at me.
He was standing alone,
but it couldn't be!*

*They'd made me forget,
but now I knew.
I remembered the crash,
there was nothing I could do.*

*It all came back to me,
that fateful day.
It was all my fault,
I took him that way.*

*We'd gone to the docks,
to see the big ships.
He'd always given in,
to the whinge from my lips.*

*I dragged and I pulled him,
to get a closer look.
No one had noticed,
the massive crane's hook.*

*As big brothers are,
he didn't make me wait.
He reached for my hand,
but it was all too late.*

*I was eleven,
he was sixteen.
Now five years later,
it wasn't a dream!!*

*Natalie Porter
11GL
4th Prize*

EXTERMINATION

*Inhaling, MMMMHFFF!
The smell was strong,
Nearly hypnotic
The mouth and teeth,
Salivated with the taste of it.
The nose and whiskers,
Twitched with the sensation.
The black beady eyes,
Scanned the horizon.
One small clawed foot
Inched forward.
Using the tail as a propeller,
it darted forward at speed,
Stuffed fully in its mouth.
Contented with its feed
Of cheddar cheese and poison.
It lay its shiny brown fur head down
Never to wake again.*

*Annmarie Read
11SC
Highly commended*

