

Will Work For Peace: New Political Poems ZeroPanik Press, 1999 Brett Axel, ed.

REVIEW BY CATHY RESMER

Near the turn of the millennium, I am often reminded of W.B. Yeats' chilling vision in his poem "The Second Coming." "Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the center cannot hold / ... The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." So often — as a writer, as an activist, as an obstinately unique individual struggling to survive the reign of ubiquitous corporate monoculture — I'm overwhelmed by the awesome power and cruelty of the society and the institutions that we in North America have created. I feel a constant buzzing in the back of my head, a quiet but insistent alarm that tells me we are losing our humanity, or worse, that we may have lost it somehow already.

The poems in *Will Work For Peace: New Political Poems* address that nagging dread. *Will Work For Peace*, an anthology of poems from writers on every continent (except Antarctica), explores a wide range of issues in as many different poetic styles. It's a fiercely compelling collection of work that is best read in snatches, best absorbed slowly and thoughtfully, though it doesn't demand that level of contemplation to be understood and appreciated.

This book is a bridge between communities, between gay and straight, between minority and majority, between performance poets and academics; it incorporates voices of different races, different classes, and different generations. The poets are united by the theme of struggle, and by the hope for some kind of better world in the aftermath of this millennium.

Steve Cannon, director of "A Gathering Of The Tribes" (a poetry cafe in New York City), writes in the introduction, "It is seldom that so many poets of our time cross boundaries of land, of sea, and of mind, to come together for any reason. In *Will Work For Peace*, they have done just that for the best of reasons:

to express their outrage over converging injustices in the world."

There are a number of well-known names — poets like Ellen Bass, Marge Piercy, Donald Hall, Marilyn Chin, W.D. Snodgrass, and Regie Cabico to name just a very few — but the work from emerging poets is equally as impressive. In fact, the contributors notes section of *Will Work For Peace* is certainly one of the most eclectic of its kind in all of English language poetics. Represented here are professors, slam poets, editors, and poets who have never before been published. It's astounding to see someone gutsy enough to put them all together in the same book, given their differing artistic approaches. But then the editor, Brett Axel, is himself the poetry liaison to the Orange County Arts Council, the editor of *Outlet Poetry Journal*, and a regular poetry slammer.

The topics the poets cover range from Chiapas to the plight of Mumia Abu-Jamal, from the devastation of AIDS to the destruction of the environment. There are poems about all kinds of discrimination and all kinds of resistance.

For example, Shotsie Gorman's "Ay Texaco" is short and spiky. In it, he accuses Texaco (the multinational oil giant) of exploiting its workers in Angola: "Your workers, ya callem Black jelly beans / Ya piss poison on the earth, and speak so obscene / Me tinks it's your hearts that are small black beans."

"Don't Destroy The World" by Ellen Bass is a more lyrical plea: "Don't destroy the world. / I've never seen a flying fish. / I'm told they are orange / and I want to see: is it like melon or / rust or the harvest moon? / I want to hear their wings spread: / are they translucent? / and their leap."

Regie Cabico's "Pocahontas Grants An Interview With Rolling Stone" uses the guise of celebrity pop culture to deliver a witty critique of the Disney movie: "WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET THE ROLE?...A stylist designed me a weave, super jet black extensions to add a dramatic effect when I ran



through the hidden pine trails of the forests. Those extensions are now patented and you could purchase extensions for all sizes and colors at Bloomingdales. Each extension is carefully hand-woven by my tribe and contains .5% of my own hair..."

The poems in this book engage on so many different levels, and they challenge the inevitability of the Yeats vision that haunts me. The prediction that the worst will be filled with "passionate intensity" seems true enough — witness any member of Congress or presidential candidate or talk radio pseudo-psychologist spouting off about the decline of morals in this country and its relation to the growing acceptance of gays, goths, pagans, and multiculturalism in college curriculums — but *Will Work For Peace* is a convincing argument against Yeats' assertion that the best will "lack all conviction." This book is so full of conviction that there's not much room for any kind of doubt about whether or not the struggle to preserve humanity continues. I've read few books that elicit as much passion, as much fury, as much hope as this one. ▼

www.together.net

Back Forward Home Reload Search Stop Mail Favorites Print

↑

Address <http://www.together.net/>



Two months' FREE Internet and FREE online holiday photos. Mice are stirring.

We at Together Networks think the best part of the holidays is creating and sharing memories with the people you care about. To help you do just that, we're making this special offer: through January 17th, mention this ad, and when you sign up for one month of Internet access you'll get two free months of Internet access. Plus, we'll develop a roll of your holiday film absolutely free. In addition to your free prints, you'll also be able to see your photos online and email them to anyone you want. So stay in touch this season with Together Networks. To sign up, just call 1-800-846-0542.



1-800-846-0542

© OneMain.com Company