**In Times of Peace**

by John Agard

That finger - index to be exact -
so used to a trigger's warmth
how will it begin to deal with skin
that threatens only to embrace?

Those feet, so at home in heavy boots
and stepping over bodies -
how will they cope with a bubble bath
when foam is all there is for ambush?

And what of hearts in times of peace?
Will war-worn hearts grow sluggish
like Valentine roses wilting
without the adrenalin of a bullet's blood-rush?

When the dust of peace has settled on a nation,
how will human arms handle the death of weapons?
And what of ears, are ears so tuned to sirens
that the closing of wings causes a tremor?

As for eyes, are eyes ready for the soft dance
of a butterfly's bootless invasion?

## Big Ask

by Carol Ann Duffy

What was it Sisyphus pushed up the hill?
I wouldn't call it a rock.
Will you solemnly swear on the Bible?I couldn't swear on a book.
With which piece did you capture the castle?
I shouldn't hazard a rook.

When did the President give you the date?
Nothing to do with Barack!
Were 1200 targets marked on a chart?
Nothing was circled in black.
On what was the prisoner stripped and stretched?
Nothing resembling a rack.

Guantanamo Bay - how many detained?
How many grains in a sack?
Extraordinary Rendition - give me some names.
How many cards in a pack?
Sexing the Dossier - name of the game?
Poker. Gin Rummy. Blackjack.

What's your understanding of 'shock' and 'awe'?
I didn't plan the attack.
Once inside the Mosque, describe what you saw.I couldn't see through the smoke.
Your estimate of the cost of the War?
I had no brief to keep track.

Where was Saddam when they found him at last?
Maybe holed under a shack.
What happened to him once they'd kicked his ass?
Maybe he swung from the neck.
The WMD ... you found the stash?
Well, maybe not in Iraq.

## Descent

by Alan Jenkins

... when suddenly out of that lake of blood
And plasma and the seepings of old sores
And indistinct stuff, rotted flesh and mud
And floatings of chemical froth, the spores
From carrion-flowers, the bandages that dressed
Deep-tissue wounds acquired in recent wars,
Moment-of-death evacuations (deliquesced),
The slippery insides of bodies cut in two,
Brain-matter, bits of muscle and the rest -
Three bubble-streams rose up; then from this stew
Appeared, slime-covered, plop plop plop, three heads,
All familiar. Each seemed about to spew
But more muck filled their open mouths, and threads
Of mucus clung and dripped from them as all
Were forced to swallow back those strange sweetbreads.
And so their words came thickly though a wall
Of vile breath and the noises that each made
In struggling to be heard: "I [burp] now callOn our great nation, and the mighty shade
Of Winston ... [awk!] Churchill [blurp] ... I mean, look ..."
"Perhaps you dickheads think" - a fierce tirade
Came now from his confrere - "that this [blurf. Flook!]
War will be some kind - of fucking - picnic -
Though we could just make out a Don! or Dick!
Among his snarls of petulant disdain
And "DON'T MISUNDERESTIMATE ME" (sic)
He shrieked, futilely fending off a rain
Of liquid shit expelled in passing by
A bony old man with a baggy stain
For underpants, long matted beard, wild eye.
"To satisfy their vanity", my guide said,
A million, two million forsaken had to die.
Now they must squabble in this place instead,
But no lies they repeat will justify
Their crimes, or earn forgiveness from the dead ... "