

MALALA

Poems for Malala Yousafzai

This PDF includes the Foreword for the Good Works anthology to be published by nonprofit independent publisher FutureCycle Press on October 9, 2013, the one-year anniversary of the attempt on Malala Yousafzai's life by the Taliban; also, more info about FutureCycle Press.

A GOOD WORKS PROJECT

All proceeds from the sale of this book are donated
to the Malala Fund (www.malalafund.org)

MALALA
Poems for Malala Yousafzai

Edited by
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FUTURECYCLE PRESS

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all for Malala

Foreword

Late on Tuesday, October 9, 2012, I read the news that a group of Taliban gunmen wearing masks had stormed onto a bus in Pakistan and shot a 15-year-old girl in the head, wounding two others as well. The targeted victim was Malala Yousafzai, who had outraged the Taliban by taking to the blogosphere to advocate for the rights of women, especially for the right of girls in her region to an education. She had been speaking out since the age of 11, and the fundamentalists had decided it was time to silence her. *The New York Times* reported that a bullet was lodged in Malala's brain, and it was unclear if she would survive—or, if she survived, what her quality of life might be going forward.

Like most people, I was heart-sickened by the Taliban's act, and being a poet I had no choice but to get my reaction down in words. But the small poem that flowed onto my notebook page surprised me: Instead of anguish or raw dismay, it expressed admiration for Malala's courage and a conviction that her example would survive, even if she herself might not. I decided to post my poem on my blog without changing a word, less as an example of great poetry than as a cry in the dark.

When I logged on to my computer to post the poem, a notice popped up that a fellow blogger, the Canadian poet and critic Conrad DiDiodato (an early riser), had already posted a poetic response to the news about Malala in the form of a haiku. I read it and liked it so much that I decided to tinker slightly with my poem so that, like his, it directly addressed Malala. Then I posted my poem and a snippet from and a link to *The New York Times* article, pointed my readers to Conrad's poem on his blog, and ended the post with this offhand remark: "Perhaps we need a worldwide garland of poems beginning with 'Malala...'"

Within the hour I received an email from Diane Kistner, Director of FutureCycle Press, offering to produce an anthology of poems

honoring the life and vision of Malala Yousafzai with all of the proceeds donated to an appropriate charitable organization in Malala's name. The anthology would become one of the press's Good Works projects, "issue-oriented anthologies of work designed to increase awareness and help make our world a better place." After a few weeks of hectic discussion and planning, Diane tapped me and poet/editor Andrea L. Watson to edit the collection.

As word got out about the project, submissions began to come in from poets all over the world. Many more heartfelt poems were submitted to us than we could possibly include in the anthology, but we read every one of them. Many poets included letters of support for Malala, expressing a sense of deep concern, connection, and love—yes, love—for her. Clearly, this brave young woman had stirred the voices in all of us to rise up and be heard.

Now, a fast-paced year later, *Malala: Poems for Malala Yousafzai* is complete. It begins with the two "seed poems" from which it grew—Conrad's and my own—and spirals out in beautiful and unexpected ways to touch, through the imaginations of scores of poets, on the meaning of Malala's message. It is first, of course, a message of suffering and survival; but more, it is a message of courage, commitment, and freedom of the mind and spirit.

Anyone who saw Malala speak before the United Nations on her sixteenth birthday—July 12, 2013, declared by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations as "Malala Day"—knows how powerful and inspiring her message is. "Dear sisters and brothers," she addressed us all, and the world found it impossible not to listen to her clear, determined voice. Rather than lament the evil that had been done to her, Malala expressed confidence in the justice of her goals and focused her gaze firmly on a future in which governments "ensure freedom and equality for women so that they can flourish." Simply and elegantly, Malala expressed what all of us know but too easily forget: "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world."

Is it possible, too, that one poet, one pen, and one poem can change the world? Has not history already answered that question for us? In a cultural sense, poets have traditionally been “first responders,” although the current bias in the West is against poetry that speaks from an ideologically engaged position. In fact, cultural arbiters—academia, arts organizations, grant-making foundations, and the vast majority of publishers—prefer to foster the careers of poets who adopt strictly personal and/or theoretical stances in their work.

These arbiters especially devalue public poetry. Hence the outrage when, in 1968, Robert Bly not only won the National Book Award for his deeply political *The Light Around the Body* but publicly turned over his award money to an activist group opposed to the Vietnam War. And when Sam Hamill edited and published an anthology of poems against the Second Gulf War, the collection was widely condemned by reviewers, many of whom declared poetry unsuitable for political expression. In the past few years, poets called upon to write public poems for presidential inaugurations have been widely mocked—often not for writing poorly, but for attempting to address public concerns at all.

Why should poets be denied the kind of intimate public address we heard from Malala? Why should poets not be free to respond to events outside the narrow confines of their own neighborhoods and their customary poetics?

This anthology is evidence that some poets still dare to respond to what’s happening in the larger world, and we believe they are making a significant contribution in doing so. They demonstrate that poetry can have a real-world effect—that writing poems need not be just an academic exercise or a means of advancing one’s “literary career.” With *Malala*, poets are helping to raise awareness about the oppression of women. Perhaps they can also raise some money to help educate girls and relegate their oppression to the past.

Of course, nobody thinks that poetry alone can end oppression any more than it has ever ended a war, but it can push readers to think

beyond their personal concerns. Maybe, in the process, it can help them understand that the cause of a child crying out for intellectual freedom in a foreign country is their own cause, too.

—Joseph Hutchison

My parents believed that everything was possible for their daughter.

Hold your head up high and walk into the future.

At a women's college, whose strong liberal arts curriculum stressed intellect, profession, and community, I quickly came to appreciate the camaraderie of like minds learning and living together. Years later, teaching at St. Mary's Academy, in Colorado, one of the oldest college preparatory high schools for young women in the United States, how wonderful it was to once again find and foster that same vision—women attaining their power through education.

Somehow, I took that endless horizon of choices—in education, family, and career—for granted. If everything were possible for women in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, would it not be so across pockets of distant valleys, pathways leading to schoolrooms, lights burning in houses where someone else's daughter, late at night, was reading and dreaming about her future?

The tragic events of October 9, 2012—another “shot heard 'round the world”—clearly were a clarion call to generations of women, and men, who recognized that the concept of education and living out one's dream is incredibly fragile. When Taliban assassins in the Swat Valley of Pakistan entered a school bus and targeted, and then shot, a young activist for women's education, each bullet was a message: Resistance to lives of power for women, even in this twenty-first century, is terrifyingly real.

The world watched and waited for news of that 15-year-old girl, Malala Yousafzai of Mingora in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who had been sentenced to death by extremists for writing a diary about life under the Taliban for BBC Urdu. We came to know her parents, Toorpekai and Ziauddin Yousafzai, who had so presciently named her after the Pashtun poetess and warrior, Malalai of Maiwand. They had held hopes for their only daughter's future. They too had wanted everything possible for her.

Through the months, we commiserated and prayed along with them for Malala's recovery in a British hospital. We heard the poignant words of her father: "When she fell, Pakistan stood." And it was with such gladness that her admirers learned of Malala's painstaking but hopeful recovery from her gunshot wounds.

Later, how extraordinary to see Malala walk through the halls of the United Nations, the scarf of Benazir Bhutto, assassinated leader of Pakistan, worn about her shoulders. To hear her wise words: "I raise up my voice—not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard." In recognizing Malala's humility, courage, and wisdom, who could not be inspired by such a young woman?

Thus, I was honored to be asked to co-edit, with Joseph Hutchison, this anthology of poems dedicated to the work of Malala Yousafzai, who continues to be brave and smart and stubborn in her belief that, with education, the world is limitless for women.

Throughout the months after FutureCycle Press placed its Call for Submissions, poems flooded in daily. At first, they were poems of outrage, then sadness, then hope, then finally joy—poems from across this continent and around the world. Motifs evolved as Joe and I read hundreds of responses: land, sky, flight, flowers, daughters, dreams, mothers, rituals. While we ultimately selected poems with an emphasis on the central themes of the life and aspirations of Malala, we chose not to print poems that contained rants or invective. We admired poems that were heartfelt while demonstrating form or craft; poems with fresh viewpoints; poems that spoke to us—and even sang to us. The anthology came together while Malala healed, while the words we read helped us to heal too.

Today, as we appreciate the poems within, let this book be a global appeal for all children to expect the right to an education and to freedom of thought. One voice speaking out for so many others is really

one hundred thousand voices—those pens and books and papers and poems—ennobling us all.

Malala, hold your head up high. Walk into the future.

—Andrea L. Watson

“One child, one teacher, one book and one pen
can change the world.”

—MALALA YOUSAFZAI

“Malala Day” speech to the United Nations
July 12, 2013

[Download ARC for full anthology content; please be patient]

About FutureCycle Press

FutureCycle Press is dedicated to publishing lasting English-language poetry and flash fiction books, chapbooks, and anthologies in both print-on-demand and ebook formats. Founded in 2007 by long-time independent editor/publishers and partners Diane Kistner and Robert S. King, the press incorporated as a nonprofit in 2012. A number of our editors are distinguished poets and writers in their own right, and we have been involved in the small press movement going back to the early seventies.

The FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize and honorarium is awarded annually for the best full-length volume of poetry we publish in a calendar year. Introduced in 2013, our Good Works projects are devoted to issues of global significance, with all proceeds donated to a related worthy cause. We are dedicated to giving all authors we publish the care their work deserves, making our catalog of titles the most distinguished it can be, and paying forward any earnings to fund more great books.

We've learned a few things about independent publishing over the years. We've also evolved a unique, resilient publishing model that allows us to focus mainly on vetting and preserving for posterity the most books of exceptional quality without becoming overwhelmed with bookkeeping and mailing, fundraising, or taxing editorial and production "bubbles." To find out more about what we are doing, come see us at www.futurecycle.org.

FutureCycle Good Works

Good Works projects are issue-oriented anthologies of work designed to increase awareness and help make our world a better place. These projects provide an organized way for poets and writers to contribute to causes they write, and care, about. Each anthology is published on our website in PDF format for free download and sharing; paperback and Kindle ebook editions go on sale globally to benefit a related worthy cause.

Sales of the anthology *American Society: What Poets See*, edited by David Chorlton and Robert S. King, help fund the core Good Works operations. Specific project sales are designated for donation to a cause related to the theme of the project. (For example, our first Good Works project, *Malala: Poems for Malala Yousafzai*, benefits the Malala Fund.) Open projects and submission link/deadlines are listed on the Good Works tab at www.futurecycle.org, along with links to the PDFs when published.

