

The Book of Hopes and Dreams - Ed. Dee Rimbaud
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This August marked the fifth anniversary of bluechrome. The past five years having seen them grow from a small family firm into a renowned publishing house. This success rooted in their commitment to printing high quality poetry, a label *The Book of Hopes and Dreams* deserves.

Drawing together such heavyweights as Simon Armitage, Anne Stevenson and Edwin Morgan, along with many small press luminaries, *The Book of Hopes and Dreams* is a substantial anthology and well worth the money. Especially considering its sale supports Spirit Aid, a charity working to improve the medical care available to the 500,000 residents of the Baglan Province of North East Afghanistan.

Almost every hope for the world is a hope for peace, for the end of violence and bloodshed. There are some poignant contributions in this vein, notably Moniza Alvi's 'War and Peace on Earth':

The enemy grabbed all the masks and disguised himself
as anything he liked.
The lovely day, the harvest, a bunch of roses
suddenly went mad, exploded, bit you to death.
So many of us died that the crowds thronged below the earth
rather than above it

[...]

But one day people whispered to each other
Peace has come.
And that seemed so strange they no longer recognized
their own voices.
Then the murmur repeated itself over and over,
beating the air awkwardly
like dove's wings flapping.

As Wordsworth in 'Man is Dear to Man' observed; 'we have all of us one common heart'. It is no surprise in an anthology about hope that themes recur. However no two poems treat their topic identically, a testament to Rimbaud's thorough editing. For example, Mimi Khalvati's 'The Children' is a painfully sombre piece, reminding the reader how blessed those in the 'First World' are:

The children are not ours
but the child they might have been
is in their eyes.
The children live in camps
but the freedom they have seen
is in their eyes.

[...]

I stand within a hand's-breadth
and the world that lies between
is in their eyes.

In contrast Magi Gibson's 'I want' focuses on the nostalgia for childhood we all feel. Balancing it against the hope future generations may savour the same happy experiences:

I remember as a child stroking the golden hair
of an ear of barley[...]
clambering up earthbanks, the damp peaty smell,
the dirt beneath my fingernails[...]

I want to feel the earth again [...]

I want the warm comfort of flannelette pyjamas,
the cool cotton of sheets, the weight
of woollen blankets and candlewick
I want my mother's hands tucking me in.

But more than this, I want my children
and their children too to stroke the golden hair
of an ear of barley[...]

Personally I found David Hill's 'Interim Conclusions' one of the most accomplished pieces, flipping unexpectedly from pessimism to sheer elation:

Do not expect too much.
Do not expect too little.
Do not expect at all.

The only point of making plans
Is the pleasure of watching them go wrong.

Life is too amazing
To ever be perfect.

Such heartening tones pervade the anthology, although overt optimism is not always the cause. For example Penelope Shuttle in her piece 'Fear', deals with our mortality, the inevitable passing of time a depressing yet liberating realisation. Shuttle's poem inspires the reader to take action and pursue their dreams before time runs out.

The attraction of anthologies is in discovering new voices. I was particularly impressed by Micheal Henry's wry 'Dream Catcher' and Anne Mc Crady's 'Having Invited Him into My Kitchen':

*How do you know
what is enough?
the boy asks me
as I offer him a cup
of water while his father works
in my garden,
[...]
I hold my breath
as he picks up a plate,
measures its mass,
glances at a stack of them.
When he sets it down
on the edge of my world
he tells me how strange it is*

that I have so many
when I can only use one
at a time.

The boy's question is particularly apt. How do we know what is enough? In the context of this collection, it will be when the isolated villages of Afghanistan have sufficient medical care. Ultimately it will be when there is no need to dream of a better world. This point is not yet, but projects such as *The Book of Hopes and Dreams* are trying to bring it closer and deserve wholehearted support.