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THE WAR POETS

The War Poets

*An Anthology of the War Poetry
of the 20th Century*

Edited with an Introduction by

Oscar Williams

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Introduction

This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them.

Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War.

Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.

My subject is War, and the pity of War.

The Poetry is in the pity.

Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.

—WILFRED OWEN

*(in a preface to the book
he never had time to pre-
pare for publication)*

If it were the privilege of an editor to dedicate an anthology this collection of verse would be dedicated to Wilfred Owen, who was the greatest war poet of World War I. His influence upon contemporary poets has been marked and his own poems are as true a commentary upon World War II as upon the war in which he gave his own life. His lesson that “the Poetry is in the pity” has been well learnt by poets of a later generation even though that lesson has been ignored today, as in his day, by those in power editorially as well as politically.

The true modern poets are poets of compassion. The pity that Owen so deeply felt for the soldier in the trenches has been extended by them into compassion for all who suffer everywhere, not only in combat, but from the evils of poverty and social pressures intolerable to human beings. Long before 1939 the poets were writing poetry of warning, foreseeing the battles, the falling of bombs, the abysses of cruelty. That poetry is familiar to many who will read this anthology.

But I do not address this introduction to those who are well-

acquainted with the best contemporary poetry. I address it to those for whom this may be the first large collection of good contemporary verse brought to their attention.

There are many who, because they are unfamiliar with the publications in which good modern verse is likely to appear, believe that World War II has not produced fine war poems. Often, in the popular press, the cry is raised "Where are the war poets?" The war poets of this war have been writing since 1929; the trouble is that the popular press is not "where" real poetry is to be found. The general run of periodical editors fears to print anything but sentimental versifying on the premise that good poetry is over the heads of their readers. Book publishers succumb to the same temptations of gross circulation as do editors; therefore we have the situation in America that, while Rupert Brooke is always in print, the work of Wilfred Owen is unobtainable at the present writing. Resistance to good poetry in general is intensified when it has war or the problems of war as its subject matter.

This resistance to true poetry at the time that it is still contemporary is often blamed upon the technical innovations of creative poets, upon their departure from traditional forms, or upon their "private" language. Actually the important contemporary poetry adheres much more closely to the great English poetic tradition than does sentimental versification (such as the countless empty and bombastic imitations of Whitman), not only in craftsmanship, perception, and subject matter, but in form as well. Technical improvements and experiments have always been characteristic of poetic greatness. Further, the best living poets, far from being more private in language than poetasters, fully use speech-terms and images drawn from daily contemporary life, whereas the poetasters luxuriate in obsolete language (and now pretentious sentiments) copied from the poets of past times, surely much more of a private academic lingo than the normal vocabulary of daily life.

The unpopularity of the true poem and, conversely, the popularity of the false poem, could be much better explained in psychological terms. In the case of war poems, patriotic bombast generally confirms the reader who likes it in a false concept either of himself or of social circumstances, or both. It eases him of responsibility and guilt in the matter of acquiescing in sending young men to death to protect himself. This kind of "escape" is also given by certain popular poetry which is accepted as "good." For instance, lines like Rupert Brooke's

*"If I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed . . ."*

divert the attention of the reader from any mental image of the soldier's mangled body to the concept of the soldier's placid acceptance of being a bit of soil "for ever England"; Alan Seeger's "I have a rendezvous with Death" conjures up a picture of the soldier's easy death in a cloud of noble ecstasies, which effectually prevents the death rattle from being mentally heard. (The poet who gives his life in battle most certainly has the privilege of writing such verse. But has the civilian reader exactly the same right to confine his thoughts of war to such sentiments? Rather, I think such a reader is accepting an intellectual and emotional sacrifice of the soldier, as well as his physical sacrifice. It is much as if a soldier wrote home to his mother that he was safely behind the lines when he was really in action, in order to save her from worry. But published poetry does not have the same latitude as a private letter; it is always better when it is strictly truthful.)

In definitely bad patriotic versification (usually written by civilians) this characteristic of giving the reader's conscience and humanitarianism a rest is much more pronounced. A close inspection of today's magazine "war poetry" leads one to believe that both writer and reader, while deeply concerned over ravaged towns in Belgium or Czechoslovakia, are peculiarly callous about what the neighbor's boy is going through on the beachhead. I should not like to believe that they are really callous. But most people do not have the courage to face honestly the facts of others' intense suffering. It is easier to have the attention diverted, conscience soothed, and the guilt of responsibility converted into a conviction that the suffering is justified since it is in a noble cause.

For example, Edna St. Vincent Millay, in her "Thanksgiving, 1942" (*New York Times*, November 22, 1942) says, "*Give thanks: that men well-clothed, men well commanded, / Well-fed . . . Now take the avenging path . . .*" which slurs over the real sufferings of the men with the soothing, but irrelevant, idea that the men are well-clothed, well commanded and well-fed and, by the use of the bombastic "take the avenging path," obscures the meaning of the sentence which is that we are to give thanks that our men are fighting in dangerous combat. Neither Miss Millay nor her readers could

probably stomach the plain statement. Further on she says, "*Let us give thanks that we/Although surrounded by so many hands enslaved, are free. . .*" which in plain language would read "Let us give thanks that we are so much better off than the other fellow" an attitude quite divergent from an honest "There, save for the grace of God, go I. . ."

Now that is a sentimental piece of verse written by an American civilian, designed to be read by American civilians, people themselves out of danger because they are protected by a wall of living young flesh, much of which will be mangled. I very much doubt if any serviceman who has seen combat would enjoy reading it. I very much doubt if any close relative of such a serviceman would enjoy it. (Although I have called sentimental verse "popular" it reaches the general masses no more than does true poetry since the majority of the American public avoids reading anything at all that looks like verse. I sometimes wonder if this avoidance of "poetry" could not be blamed upon the very fact that sentimental verse, rather than the reality of poetry, is published in the popular press, and its falsity is instinctively felt by those who sample it, thereby giving them a distaste for the form.) Those interested in making a complete analysis of "Thanksgiving, 1942" will, when reading the complete poem, see that the above quoted lines do not improve in meaning when given in full context. And this "poem" is typical of hundreds that are widely published. A sham patriotism cloaks the real statement which amounts to either acquiescence or rejoicing in the fact of war. But with true poets the poetry is in the pity and the statement is in the honesty with which the poet explores his own heart.

As a contrast to the poem examined above, I ask the reader to study closely a war poem peculiarly fitted to illustrate my present thesis. It is also written by a woman, a civilian. "In Distrust of Merits," by Marianne Moore, is the direct communication of honest feeling by one ready to search her own heart to discover the causes of war and accept her full share of responsibility for its effects. Those able to read and experience such a poem expand their own capacities for compassion.

A true poem is always an honest poem. The honesty contributes to that precision and unity which are characteristic of poetry that will live. And, in order to understand such a poem, the reader must be equipped with a like honesty. He must seek neither an anodyne for the ache of conscience nor escape from full responsibility. It is

a social as well as a moral misfortune that, as Robinson Jeffers says, "*Truly men hate the truth, they'd liefer/Meet a tiger on the road.*"

When the poets warned of the approach of war, before its outbreak, they were most strongly accused of using "private" language. But, after the event, what could seem clearer than these lines from W. H. Auden's "Spain":

*"Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
And the miraculous cure at the fountain;
Yesterday the Sabbath of witches; but to-day the struggle.*

*Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines,
The construction of railways in the colonial desert;
Yesterday the classic lecture
On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle."*

or George Barker's statement in his "Munich Elegy No. 1":

*"The tragedy is Time foreshadowing its climax.
Thus in the stage of time the minor moth is small
But prophesies the Fokker with marvellous wings
Mottled with my sun's gold and your son's blood."*

or John Peale Bishop's philosophy in "The Return" written in Germany in 1932:

*"We did not know the end was coming: nor why
It came; only that long before the end
Were many wanted to die. Then vultures starved
And sailed more slowly in the sky."*

Yeats, too, in "The Second Coming" wrote even earlier of the war to come:

*"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned . . ."*

Such language was as open as the catastrophe to come was public. The critics who called it "private" were themselves so blinded by their private concerns that they could not sight the event of which the poets warned. Even since Pearl Harbor the false writers have remained blind, ignoring the changes of now which must be faced if the problems of peace are to be rightly solved.

I have included in this collection only such poems as seem to me written with an emotional comprehension of all that war implies. There are no sham patriotics; there are poems of sensitive patriotism, such as that of Gervase Stewart who offered his life willingly for an England which he wished to be better than the old, while he yet honestly expressed his fear that the desired social changes might not come to pass.

In the first part I have placed poetry written during or about World War I. All of the poets except Hardy and Yeats were in uniform during that war and four were killed in action. I consider the work in this section contemporary for a number of reasons. World War I was the opening phase of World War II. Wilfred Owen's book, written in the midst of battle, was not published until 1920 and his great influence has been upon poets now alive. Others whose poems appear in this section are still actively at work: E. E. Cummings, Robert Graves, and others. I have reprinted Rupert Brooke's "The Great Lover," partly because it helped to establish him as one of the important poets of that war, partly to show the difference between his handling of the theme of love and the more realistic and sensitive approach to the subject of the poets in Part Two.

The second part, the largest in the book, is devoted to poems by poets in the armed services, American and British. I have included what I consider the best of a great deal of good work that came to me from all parts of the world. It may well be that I have missed the most important poet of World War II; his work may not yet be written, or, if written, it may not have come to my attention. But extraordinary talents are here represented, such as those of Roy Fuller, Julian Symons, F. T. Prince, Henry Treece, Karl Shapiro, Dunstan Thompson, Randall Jarrell, all of whom show fine accomplishment as well as great promise. John Manifold, an Australian, has a lyrical brilliance and rich solidity of greater value than the works of Rupert Brooke and Alan Seeger combined. It is to be regretted that we shall have no fulfillment of maturity from Timothy Corsellis, Alun Lewis, Sidney Keyes, Bertram Warr, Gervase Stewart, and others, whose splendid promise died with their bodies killed in action.

In the first and third parts I have limited the subject matter to themes directly or indirectly related to war, but when the poets were in the armed services I allowed a wider range, including poems of love, parting, social consciousness and local legend, since

the poems were written while the poet was directly pressed upon by the exigencies of war. It is interesting to note that there are fewer poems of apprehension and guilt (and more of freedom) in the second than in the third part. This may be due to the fact that much of the work written by civilians was produced before the final flare-up of the war, or to the more objective life of men in uniform, or, perhaps, because those in the services are so busy facing the facts with their bodies that they have to let "all the duties of their souls go unperformed," as one of them says. I have not been too strictly critical of every poem in this section; perhaps some of them, if taken out of the context of 1945 and placed in the Golden Age of Literature or the Westminster Abbey of Perfection would seem thin. But today they are poems for us. Even an irrelevant spiritual remark by one who has pledged his life is of import. Each has been included not because he is a soldier, sailor or airman, but because he is a poet who happens to be in uniform. That all of these men have managed to write in spite of full hours of regimentation, active duty and risk is our good fortune.

The third part is made up of the work of important contemporary poets who are not in uniform. It might have been fairer to the English civilian poets to have included them in the services' section since they have endured as much danger and engaged in almost as much defensive battle action as the military, but some kind of arbitrary division was necessary.

This civilian section contains those poems which I believe most certain to communicate the realities of this war to the generations to come. It includes those remarkable poems which began to appear in 1929, warning of the imminence of war and revealing the social situations that must inevitably bring war upon us. We are deeply indebted to W. H. Auden for much of this human recording. His "Spain," "August for These Islands" and "September 1, 1939" are such great documents of the fact of war that they alone would make him the major war poet of the first half of the century. Indeed, the poetry of George Barker, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, Herbert Read and other British poets, and of E. E. Cummings, Wallace Stevens, Robinson Jeffers and Marianne Moore among the Americans, combine in perhaps the best documentation of the approach of war that any literary period has produced. When we realize that these same poets have continued, and are continuing, in the production of poetry of like major quality dealing with the human essentials of the catastrophe and again warning

us of the dangers and necessities of the coming peace, we realize our indebtedness to them individually and as a group.

This book makes no pretense of presenting the best work ever written by the poets included, but only those poems which can be considered war poems since they are written either about the causes of war, the approach of war, the particularities of the poet's situation in war and like subjects. It is only in the part devoted to work by men in uniform, as I have said before, that I have allowed the poet full range of poetic matter, whether related to war or not. All of the poets included are poets of compassion, therefore I have called them *THE WAR POETS*, for only those who feel the tragedy of the occasion show the full meaning of war and thus deserve the title. Too, I have confined my choices to poems written in English although there is much excellent war poetry in other languages. But proper representation of World War poetry in all tongues would have required so long a time for compilation and presented such difficulties of translation and choice, that it was out of the question.

Immediately following is a symposium of commentary upon poetry and war, written by the poets themselves. Not all, or even half, of the poets have contributed. Some who were queried felt they could add nothing to the subject that was not already said in their poems; some felt that, as civilians, they should leave such comments to the poets in the armed forces; others could not be reached in time for publication. But on the whole it is an indicative cross-section of what poets think of poetry and war and how they reconcile man's noblest thought with his worst action. The comments available are so various and illuminating that they may be taken as representative.

At the same time the almost unanimous opinions of the poets can be examined as a means to understanding some of the main human issues of war. It may be wondered that the poets, each without consultation with the others, should so closely agree in opinion. It is rare for any group of people, of diverse occupations, ages, countries and experience, to hold an opinion in common upon any controversial subject. In order to understand why the poets do so, we must understand the nature of a poet, that in which he differs from the rank and file of other human beings. The poet is a poet because he is blessed (or cursed) with exceptional sensitivity to the truth. A real poet is always, in some sense, a prophet or seer. And the truth would not be *the* truth unless it were a real and unchange-

able factor, at least in its own period of time. The poet has, in place of opinion, perception, clear in accordance with his degree of insight into reality. Hence each poet arrives at the same conclusion, no matter from what milieu of circumstance he may start. This collection of commentaries is a kind of Gallup poll of the soul and we receive a hint of the accuracy of the statements from the fact that the poets are in fundamental agreement. I am sure that it is a far better preface to the poems than these notes of mine.

The poet's poem has always outlived the names of battles, generals and statesmen; our war poetry as a whole is perhaps the document of our time that will outlive all the rest. It is the essential White Book of that realm, the human spirit, a statement of the case for man as an individual, the real recording of our suffering, our defeat and our victory.

—OSCAR WILLIAMS.

*New York City,
December 31, 1944.*

Comments by the Poets

E. E. CUMMINGS:

IS SOMETHING WRONG?—"Is something wrong with America's so-called creative artists? Why don't our poets and painters and composers and so forth glorify the war effort? Are they Good Americans or are they not?"

First: are they Good Americans. . . .

when I was a boy, Good Americans were—believe it or don't—adoring the Japanese and loathing the Russians; now, Good Americans are adoring the Russians and loathing the Japanese. Furthermore (in case you were born yesterday) yesterday Good Americans were adoring the Finns; today Good Americans are either loathing the Finns or completely forgetting that Finland exists. Not even the fact that twice during my lifetime Good Americans have succeeded in disliking the Germans can convince me that any human being (such as an artist) is a Good American.

Second: why don't they glorify. . . .

when you confuse art with propaganda, you confuse an act of God with something which can be turned on and off like the hot water faucet. If "God" means nothing to you (or less than nothing) I'll cheerfully substitute one of your own favorite words, "freedom." You confuse freedom—the only freedom—with absolute tyranny. Let me, incidentally, opine that absolute tyranny is what most of you are really after; that your so-called ideal isn't America at all and never was America at all: that you'll never be satisfied until what Father Abraham called "a new nation, conceived in liberty" becomes just another subhuman superstate (like the "great freedom-loving democracy" of Comrade Stalin) where an artist—or any other human being—either does as he's told or turns into fertilizer.

Third: is something wrong. . . .

all over a so-called world, hundreds of millions of servile and insolent inhuman unbeings are busily rolling and unrolling in the enlightenment of propaganda. So what? There are still a few erect

human beings in the so-called world. Proudly and humbly, I say to these human beings:

“O my fellow citizens, many an honest man believes a lie. Though you are as honest as the day, fear and hate the liar. Fear and hate him when he should be feared and hated: now. Fear and hate him where he should be feared and hated: in yourselves.

“Do not hate and fear the artist in yourselves, my fellow citizens. Honour him and love him. Love him truly—do not try to possess him. Trust him as nobly as you trust tomorrow.

“Only the artist in yourselves is more truthful than the night.”

GEOFFREY GRIGSON:

WAR—You ask about war: one must be self-deluded, if one simplifies something so muddled as a 20th century complete war into causes, either good or bad. The only clear thing that I can see is that humanity has walked into a mess: the only clear duty is to endeavour to regard the mess as clearly as possible, and to endeavour to be as honest and as unmessy as one's powers allow. Nothing new has happened in this war. Men have been tortured, women have been murdered, explosives have exploded; and I am in debt to a letter of Rilke's in which he said that the whole possibility of human suffering has already been, and is always being, experienced. It is the quantity, not the quality or depth of suffering, which has been increased by this war. That helps one, not to be indifferent, which is impossible, but not to be taken in by surprise and by the lewd rhetoric of a war, and to keep at least that degree of sanity one had before Chamberlain's voice announced over the air that England was fighting with Germany.

Should one's poems before have been about roses, and now about blood? Or shouldn't the blood and roses, the mortality and life, have been mixed, as they always have been, at the times when a writer was most deeply possessed by life?

In this country, the Black Militia of the Pen ask where the war poets are; and they only mean, where are the thumps on the tub, the morale poems. They don't mean, where is Goya saying “I saw this,” or Whitman recording a fight under the eternity of the moon, or Wilfred Owen saying “Red lips are not so red.” If one moves among the dying and bewildered as Goya did, or Owen, or Whitman, one may write about those direct experiences or draw

them. If a war pushes one into a civilian job (as it has pushed me), one is still in the midst of life. A war may numb you, as Rilke was numbed, or it may complete your sense of life. You must believe in the value of men, and war means that you must not weaken in that belief. If there is such a thing as a War Poet, it must mean someone whose vestigial heart swells only when vast quantity of suffering mills all around him, a poet normally indifferent to the intensity and quality of individual suffering. So only Peace-time Poets matter at all. Pity, or *saeva indignatio*, is not only to be caused by an air-raid or a concentration camp.

Captain JOHN MANIFOLD:

WAR, POETRY AND THE INDIVIDUAL—I don't think I've much to say about them. You can only do three things about a war—fight in it, protest against it, or ignore it. I'm not capable of ignoring it, as Yeats ignored the 1914-18 war. *Pour moi, le monde extérieur existe*. And, idiotic as it is, I don't protest against it, or rather not basically. Opposition is probably a better attitude for preserving one's "poetic integrity" in, but while people are being shot at I'd sooner be in the danger area. The process of fighting a war isn't very different from living in an alleged state of peace. Not from the way I am living, anyhow. I'm still nomadic, exposed to rather more boredom and rather more danger, surrounded by fewer friends of fewer different nationalities, subject to the same alternative of inactivity and furious concentration. The war has confirmed more of my beliefs than it has destroyed. I still think that the human race is on the average rather likable, that nationality is no more important than class or occupation in making people likable or not, that authority is bad for the soul and responsibility good for it, and that once a thing becomes official it's dead and damned. The war has given me a lot of experience that I share with other people, which is one of the real bases of poetry, and has considerably influenced my style and vocabulary, which is another. I like using precise words and phrases which have not had the meaning dulled out of them, and military vocabulary provides plenty of them—"resertion," "defilade," "échelon," "revetment," for example, all good lively words fit for metaphors and exact images. But on the average I think I should still be writing as I do even if the war we spent our lives waiting for had not actually been declared.

Captain DONALD STAUFFER:

POETRY AND WAR—War does not change poetry in its nature or in its use, and many of us will be glad that this is so. In compensation, however, we must remember that poetry does not change war. All our fine talk about the uplifting spiritual values of art, all our action of resolutely withdrawing from a coarse and cruel world to the beautiful citadel of poetry, cannot affect the nature of war. If I may mix two clichés, an ostrich hiding its head in an ivory tower is no worthy solution in relating war and poetry.

The question is not a choice between war and poetry. To view it as a dilemma makes war more purposeless and poetry more ineffectual than in actuality they are. Cutting off either war or poetry as a spiritual experience maims our capabilities as conscious human beings, and diminishes the responsibility that we can and should assume. In the Olympian hierarchy, Mars and Apollo were not opposed deities, like Ormazd and Ahriman; they were independent spiritual forces whose sway and power men recognized and rightly respected.

It is as useless to consider that war and poetry are the same thing as to consider that they are unalterable opposites. If we must avoid the dilemma of choosing one or the other, we must also resist the temptation to identify them. Only by accepting them both as important parts of human experience and by trying to relate them may we do justice to the two forces and to our own intelligence.

I do not wish to try to establish a case for either war or poetry at the expense of the other, nor even a case for war *and* poetry. Human nature being what it is in its weaknesses, strengths, and desires, both war and poetry will continue to subsist very well without benefit of defense or argument. I should like to consider their close and mysterious relationship, and the strange fact that different though the two are, intimate contact of the one with the other seems to bring out the finest qualities both in war and in poetry. They are mutually sustaining.

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If the totalitarian powers could eradicate poetry and the memory of poetry from the Western world, their battle against England and the United States would be half won. In our poetry we find our most profound beliefs best expressed. That is the simple reason for its survival, more lasting than bronze or marble. One cannot con-

duct a war without basic conviction and passion. And though the convictions are often hidden, indirectly expressed, or not stated at all, the democracies *can* act because they believe in the worth of men, in man's right to own himself, in the inviolability of the individual human spirit, in truth so far as we can ascertain it, and in justice in intention even if in execution it often falters and fails. Our poetry has made these beliefs sharper, more evident to us, and more precious. These are beliefs, not velleities; we are ready to defend them, to implement them. Perhaps the greatest blindness of the totalitarian states in judging the democratic way of life springs from their philosophy of fear. They have failed to realize that the brutal ruthlessness of masters towards vassals, which the democracies by nature cannot manifest, may find its match in the courage that comes from the brotherhood of free men. The spirit of tragic poetry and the spirit of such a war as we are now waging lift up human nature by conceiving that there are principles and qualities and convictions in man far more important than his mere existence. The willingness to give up his own life stamps the hero's actions and beliefs with an exalted seriousness.

Sergeant VERNON WATKINS:

ART AND WAR—No poet is made by war, which is productive of no good. But a poet's work may be potentiated by his experience of war, and of suffering. In the last war Wilfred Owen's poetry found a new power the moment he lost faith in poetry. The work of every true poet is shaped by his belief or by its inversion, distrust; it was distrust in art which made Owen's greatest poems. His art is caught up in the heaven of pity.

Yeats, on the other hand, knew that war cannot touch a poet while he keeps his faith in joy; and Yeats leaves us "Lapis Lazuli" celebrating the indestructible faith in art. His pity is caught up in the heaven of art. The truest statements about war are made under one's breath, and the most false on public platforms. Bad art and false gods motivates war as much as national greed. That is why a poet should write always from his own footprint, which, wherever it is, if it's truthful, is at peace.

MARK VAN DOREN:

NOTE ON POETRY AND WAR—The best war poets I know are Homer and Shakespeare; and in modern times, Thomas Hardy. The difference is interesting. War could be beautiful to Homer and Shakespeare because it could be tragic. It has ceased to be that, or at any rate fully that; now it is all catastrophe, with nothing to guide our measurement of its meaning. It is epidemic calamity, during which all or most of us suffer dumbly. Hardy among modern poets is the best instance of the dumb sufferer; dumb, not in that he says nothing, but in that his statements cancel out, leaving undefined and unresolved the miseries caused in us by wars which no one wants, but in which everyone assists. I suspect any war poet now who says he knows what the current calamity means—including the one who says it means nothing at all. It means what later men will decide it meant; we are too early for that, and at best can note with honesty the feelings it makes us have. The deeper the feelings, the more difficult to express. I respect most the poet who is willing to let inconsistencies appear among the thoughts he is moved to think. He is trying to measure what cannot be measured yet, and he is not to be blamed if in the dark he takes up a variety of rulers. He is most to be praised when he restricts himself to those that feel right; and, it should be unnecessary to add, when he writes well. War is no different from any other subject. The best poetry about it is the best poetry, and our final judgment must be not of the poet's feelings as such, but of his art.

JULIAN SYMONS:

POETRY AND THE WAR—It is only on a superficial plane, I think, that one can talk of "poetry" and this war having any direct relation. And even on this plane it seems to me that there are really two questions and two answers: what sort of poetry will be (and is being) written in this war; and what sort of poetry should (or might) be written.

For the first question: it is obvious that the beating of a drum is a congenial sound in wartime. There has been a good deal of drum-beating in this war. And there has been, by way of superficial contrast or opposition, a lot of beating of the *individual* drum, by writers who saw with horror and surprise that this war threatened

their standards of life, and have been moved to express the importance and value of those standards. All this could be (and by some of us was) foreseen; and it could be foreseen also that the beaten drum, whether patriotic or individual, would lead to nothing very much in the way of poetry.

For the second question: I don't believe that the "war poet" exists. All poets are war poets, and peace poets too. It is pointless to "demand" of poets in this or perhaps in any war any degree of participation or support of one side or another. Most of the best lyrics have been written a long way from the battlefield. It is a truism just worth repeating that the preservation of individual integrity is an important thing for a poet; and an interest in humanity is another important thing. If our poets were more interested in men, and less in themselves, we might have had some better war poems.

But these are only minor and partial illuminations because, I believe, the question does not permit serious treatment. Questions about "poetry and the war" are still basically questions about the position of the writer in capitalist society, which you will not expect me to answer here. So perhaps I should have said merely that two years spent in the Army gave me feelings of comradeship which it is difficult for the petty-bourgeois intellectual to feel except in such conditions; and gave me also the most bitter contempt and distaste for the bureaucracy and class-distinction with which the British Army is permeated. In the Army I had the useful experience of seeing this bureaucracy and class-distinction from the bottom of the social scale; in civilian life I'm halfway up it. These two feelings, of comradeship and bitterness, I've tried to put into some poems.

Lieut.-Commander RICHARD EBERHART:

A NOTE ON WAR POETRY—Generalizations about war poetry are easy and dangerous to make. War lends the poet objects upon which to exercise his perceptions. These objects are multifarious; they may or may not be seized upon. They may impinge upon the sensibility in curious and differing ways. It cannot be said whether the poetry resulting will be superior to poetry conceived against other sets of objects, in other times. Objects themselves are loose determinants; the poem will result from endless subjective

springs welling up on these objects, which may only incite, but not fully cause, the resulting words on paper. Poetry is a complex, essential operation of the spirit; this is one of the easy and dangerous observations.

The poetry comes out of the chaos. Chaos is present to the poet in war in violent forms. He may recognize in this violence his true element, a reduction to terrible simplicity of what he knew in the heart before. Gigantic objectifications tossed and forced on sky, land and sea only emphasize the essential fact of struggle. Thus, a poet knows war without objective war in the world; it was conflict at the root of his mind that impelled him to the masking of these conflicts in the apparent resolution and order of works of art. In a dialectical sense, all poetry is war poetry.

Poems technically or substantively about war come down from ancient times. It would be difficult to evaluate such actual war poetry through the ages. Rather, the ages have already evaluated them. Likewise, it is a matter of taste whether one or another modern war poem is considered of the essence of the type, or of the essence of the author, or of the essence of what it is thought a war poem ought to be.

I would not venture to say whether young poets, alive yet, or dead, will write or have written poetry superior to that performable in peace time, due to their confrontation of the holocaustic circumstances of the present conflict. The imponderables of this problem are unresolvable. I am inclined to believe that the man who must write poetry will write it. The war may present or force a subject; it may bring out a poet, or shock him into insensibility of silence. It may kill him. Or germinate the best war poems for exfoliation years after the event.

War is another kind of show than the peace show, intractable, profoundly ingrained in man's nature. It is the evil standing up. A poet may cope with these examples, as he can with the natural shows of normal peacetime phenomena. The best war poetry will transcend war, just as it transcends nationalistic or sectarian boundaries; which is to say that the best war poetry will have to be of the spirit. Like God, it will have to be on both sides, or on none. It will be applicable to different peoples and centuries.

The universality of utterance I claim for the best war poetry tends to make it less about war than about man. Therefore, it is about the spirit; judgment upon it cannot be limited to its context, but must run the whole gamut of poetical possibilities. It is the lack

of a sufficiency and abundance of these spiritual qualities which condemns most war poetry to the particular.

Flight Lieut. HENRY TREECE:

THE WAR AND MY POETRY—Naturally, I cannot yet see the size or the full implications of the war, nor shall I for some years, I suspect: it has become so much of a habit. However, how it strikes me at this moment is this: When the war became inevitable, I was greatly perturbed as a person—since I did not believe in the necessity of war, and, moreover, had personally reached a state of living which I regarded as near-perfect for my needs; as a poet, I do not think that I was really affected. My poems and those of the Apocalyptic Group, which I had started with J. F. Hendry, had long sensed and expressed an ultimate disintegration, and the necessity for the individual to control the political and philosophic Machine. My poetry, that is, had *known* that all this would happen, and had prepared itself for the chaos.

I volunteered for the Royal Air Force in order to fulfill a social duty: so that I should not be ashamed of myself as the years went on. As a poet, I was naturally cynical of such behaviour. Nevertheless, the impetus of my prewar craftsman energy carried me through the first two years of war, my work retaining much of its prewar character. Gradually this impetus wore off and I was unable to produce more than a very thin trickle of verse: this being due not only to the limitations imposed on me by Service duties, but also to the fact that the *purpose* of my poetry, its warning nature, was now no longer required. The catastrophe had happened. Then, as a reaction to the complexity of the difficult early war years, my poetry became simple and often nostalgic. I wanted only to end the war and become a quiet, private person again. Now, after five years of war, there is so little to write about. War, as I see it here and now, is not the material of poetry. Lasting poetry must go down deeper than the superficial appearances of war machines; It must seek out the spirit of man in pain and glory, and must express that spirit and that pain and that glory in simple terms, in those fundamental statements to which the mechanisms of contemporary warfare are irrelevant.

This war, the last war—and possibly the next war—are all the same war, whether fought with flamethrowers or stone axes; and

it is the poet's function to seek out the germ of all war, to isolate and parade it as a warning against future disease of this sort and as a cure for the present disorder.

I feel that it is the poet's duty as a man to fight, physically; but I maintain that it is his duty as a poet to heal the results of that fighting now, and to attempt to prevent such horror for the future.

I am aware that this is all commonplace stuff, but it is the only statement I am capable of.

FREDERIC PROKOSCH:

REGARDING WAR POETRY—The anxiety to unearth a body of poetry which might be labeled "war poetry" is, at present, an inclination both conspicuous and curious. The fact is, of course, that there is really no such thing as pure "war poetry," "war poetry" being a catch phrase which came into prominence during the last war owing to the popularity of poets like Rupert Brooke, Sassoon, Graves, etc. (If I am not mistaken, the poets we now admire most as war poets—like Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg—were less popular than men like Graves and Sassoon and their verse had far less circulation than books like *Counter-Attack* or *Over the Brazier*: in other words, it was long after World War I that critical discrimination made itself felt.)

The interesting point is this: *Why* are we so anxious to cultivate a body of war poetry? The reasons are several, and symptomatic; I shall mention, cautiously and hesitantly, some possible reasons.

1—The emotional decay noticeable in contemporary poetry. There is a curious absence of love poetry; there is a really curious absence of any striking and informing passion among the more talented poets. Perhaps we feel, instinctively, that the war might resuscitate a direct emotional vigor which we feel is lacking in our poetry.

2—The centrifugal heterogeneous tone of most contemporary poetry. A decade ago, for example, it was apparently felt that a consistent *social* approach might present a core, a kind of tradition, around which the scattered, peripheral instincts toward poetry might collect, and thereby give substance and coloration to all that hodgepodge. More recently other tendencies have emerged; and now, perhaps, the war as a magnet toward which emotions might

more uniformly gravitate; in short, as a universal theme, which we certainly stand in need of.

3—A sense of guilt. One can't help being struck by one thing; the poets at the front write poems about peace; home, nostalgia, etc. It is mostly the "poets" safely beyond the reach of the bombers who specialize in rhetoric about Lidice, air raids, foxholes, etc. I suggest, tentatively, that this very noticeable passion and indignation at a safe distance may be a form of compensation for the sense of guilt deriving from inaction, a luxuriant steam bath of secondhand and third-rate emotions. Our best contemporary poems do not belong to this group, assuredly.

M/Sergeant SELDEN RODMAN:

WAR POETRY—War does not produce poets, any more than it produces artists or composers. On the contrary, it produces conditions infinitely hostile to art. All that can be said is that whereas it is impossible for an active soldier to compose music, and miraculous to find anything like the Guadalcanal Private's "Stretcher Bearers" coming out of modern war, the serious poet, if he is hardy enough, and lucky enough, can continue to write poems. There will not be good novels, or good plays, or even good war books written until the war is over—there never have been—but there will be, and there are, good poems. (Poems that will stand up with the best have been written in the present war by Gervase Stewart, Timothy Corsellis, Karl Shapiro, Roy Fuller and Alun Lewis, to mention only a few.) The nature of the lyric permits it. The tools are the same as a map-maker's or a dispatch-bearer's. The immediate, overwhelming personal experience is there. But first, and as fully clothed as Pallas from the head of Zeus, there must be the poet. He cannot learn his trade in a foxhole.

All serious war poetry is anti-war poetry.

It has been said that anti-war poetry began with the poems of Wilfred Owen, or a little earlier, with "Dover Beach." But that is not so. Owen was simply the first to describe the peculiar atmosphere of mechanized war, and the soul of man afflicted by its sicknesses. "Dover Beach" was unique because it came at the end of the longest period of peace and complacency in man's memory—a time during which a great deal of pseudo-war poetry had been written—and lifted the veil rather rudely on the "darkling plain" which had

been there all along. Homer's *Iliad* is full of anti-war poetry: all of what Owen called "the pity of war" is in Andromache's speech to Hector and Hector's answer. Aeschylus who fought at Marathon, and was more proud of it than of all his poetry, did not omit to mention the mud and the lice, "the sleeping on crowded decks," "the rations that never reached us," and he added:

*"Heavy is the murmur of an angry people
Performing the purpose of a public curse."*

Because these things are so, some of the best war poetry has been written by poets who have never been near a battle field—witness Thomas Hardy, Rilke, Rimbaud. But by the same token almost all of the poetry glorifying war has been written by people who have never been near a battle field. And those who do not understand these things about war will do well to stay away from war poetry.

WALLACE STEVENS:

POETRY OF WAR—The immense poetry of war and the poetry of a work of the imagination are two different things. In the presence of the violent reality of war, consciousness takes the place of the imagination. And consciousness of an immense war is a consciousness of fact. If that is true, it follows that the poetry of war as a consciousness of the victories and defeats of nations, is a consciousness of fact, but of heroic fact, of fact on such a scale that the mere consciousness of it affects the scale of one's thinking and constitutes a participating in the heroic.

It has been easy to say in recent times that everything tends to become real, or, rather, that everything moves in the direction of reality, that is to say, in the direction of fact. We leave fact and come back to it, come back to what we wanted fact to be, not to what it was, not to what it has too often remained. The poetry of a work of the imagination constantly illustrates the fundamental and endless struggle with fact. It goes on everywhere, even in the periods that we call peace. But in war, the desire to move in the direction of fact as we want it to be and to move quickly is overwhelming.

Nothing will ever appease this desire except a consciousness of fact as everyone is at least satisfied to have it be.

S/Lieutenant ALAN ROSS:

POETRY AND WAR—The writing of poetry on active service is very largely dependent on personal circumstances, and the tone and attitude of the poetry is conditioned by (a) the temperament of the poet and (b) the type of impact, ideologically and actually, the war has made on the poet.

The poet who has seen war at its source and who has been in action is in a particularly exciting position, because he is able to write most accurately about the atmosphere of war, the behaviour of men closest to its heart, the personal reaction to fundamental emotions, pity, fear, love, and situations of despair and heroism. Most importantly he can write at first hand with his whole mind and body (the noncombatant cannot do this, because he is writing about something he has not experienced in the flesh, and so cannot identify himself with the feelings of those taking part without straining the imagination and being aware either of a false emphasis in himself or in the mind of the reader).

It is only possible to write under active service conditions when the mind and body are balanced, and not divorced: when there is a measure of belief in the end, if not in the means. It is possible to write well heroically or anti-heroically, realistically and of things remote from the war, emotionally and dispassionately, about boredom and about courage—because war contains all these things, but it is not possible to write if there is no basic acceptance of the fact of war or if there is an avoidance of it.

The poetry of this war has been notably free from sentimentality and from false heroics. For the most part it has been extremely sensitive of the atmosphere, of the conditions of existence, of the change and developments underlying the ideology of statesmen, and the reaction of the servicemen to them. It has been uniformly insistent on the values for which men are dying, on the rational ordering of the issues, and the rational condemnation of the means when they become ends. It is not easy to write poetry when you are fighting a war which in detail has so many contradictions and in outline has so many essentials. When in a particular case it is a necessity and yet is bad in itself, when both the necessity and the evil cannot be too strongly emphasized, when the poetry should be both, in a sense an inspiration and a testimony, and yet also a deterrent.

Those who so emptily and arrogantly decry the real poets of this

war, would learn a lot by taking the trouble to read them. The poetry is in the vision, in the coherence behind the words, and not simply in the language: it is a poetry conceived in the intellect and the emotions working together, a fusion never very satisfactory to those lacking in both or either. But you have only to live with men on a field of battle or in action, in a ship or at any aerodrome, to understand it.

MURIEL RUKEYSER:

WAR AND POETRY—The subject of poetry cannot be restricted. There is no way to speak of war as a *subject* for poetry. War enters all our lives, but even that horror is only a beginning. The war is in our poetry only so far as it is in our imaginations, as a meaning, as a relationship, or simply as a fact. It has not been in much of our poetry because the meanings of this war have been lost; and through this the fashion in writing is aversion, wit, or easy mysticism and easy despair. We have been told by our governments—we have allowed our governments to tell us—to win the war first, and work out the meanings afterwards. This policy breeds more war, and nothing else.

For myself, war has been in my writing since I began. The first public day that I remember was the False Armistice of 1918. And now the terms “soft peace,” “hard peace,” that are being passed as currency seem to me only other words for war, and war seems to me the after-image of many failures to react to truth at the time that truth first happens. We confess by this war that we did not react to fascism as it arrived. But now the fact that it might be a war against fascist ideas has slipped away. So that the war for those concerned with life, the truth which is open to all, is still ahead. It is a struggle in which poetry also lives and fights.

A poet said to me, “You bring the world in too much. Poems should not be written about the war. Are you not afraid of guessing wrong?” I deny all of this. Again, I do not believe in any rule about the *subject* of poetry. If you do not love the world you become the slave of the world. As for guessing wrong, I am not afraid of that. The war I think of is the common fight that is going on, the old same war, the struggle that gives these wars a touch of life—a fight which expresses itself in many ways among the people, always to make more freedom accessible to all. Peace, it seems to

me, is not the lack of fighting. I want an end to false armistice. Peace, I think, is the force that works for creation and freedom, that fights war. I want that. I want peace which is a way in which peoples can work together for a wide creative life. I believe that poetry is a part of that, of the means which is peace, and of the living changing goal.

EDWIN MUIR:

WAR AND POETRY—As for the question of poetry and war, I don't feel I have much to say about it, or rather that there is so much to be said about it that I hardly know what to say. I think war has been written about so much by the great poets, Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare (especially in *Henry V*, but also incidentally in many of his other plays) because it gives such a striking image of tragic fate, and is a situation necessarily tragic: almost all the elements of tragedy are contained in it. We cannot see this war as Homer and Virgil saw the Trojan War and the wars following it, or even as Tolstoy saw the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, because we are part of it and are involved in it. But it has modified our feelings and thoughts, and consequently the things which we write, whether these are directly about the war or not. This can be seen very clearly in contemporary French poetry, and I think in English poetry as well; where this change of feeling and thought is seen least is, I think, in some of the war poetry (or perhaps rather patriotic poetry) written by men of my own and now older generation in the conventional tradition. The war comes directly into poetry only, it seems to me, when it crystallizes into an image in the poet's mind; but its indirect influence may be seen in many things, an inflection, a sequence of thought, a sudden reference, a mood of sorrow. I think this indirect reference is about the most that we can hope to expect just now; the best of contemporary French poetry is inspired by it, and the best of the English, too.

Corporal KARL SHAPIRO:

SINCE THE WAR BEGAN, I have tried to be on guard against becoming a "war poet." I remember reviewing some works of certain of the Georgian writers during my first weeks in the army; at

the time I was shocked to discover that there were men whose recollections of an old war remained the most cogent experiences of their lives. A year later, ten thousand miles from home, I understood better what it was they persisted in reliving and rewriting: the comparison of the old peace with the old war seemed to be the expression of their fate rather than their wish.

There is no need to discuss the private psychological tragedy of a soldier. It is not the commonplace of suffering or the platitudinous comparison with the peace, or the focus on the future that should occupy us; but the spiritual progress or retrogression of the man in war, the increase or decrease in his knowledge of beauty, government and religion.

We know very well that the most resounding slogans ring dead after a few years, and that it is not for poetry to keep pace with public speeches and the strategy of events. We learn that war is an affection of the human spirit, without any particular reference to "values." In the totality of striving and suffering we come to see the great configuration abstractly, with oneself at the center reduced in size but not in meaning, like a V-letter. We learn that distances and new spatial arrangements cannot disturb the primordial equation of man equals man and nation nation. We learn finally that if war can teach anything it can teach humility; if it can test anything it can test externality against the soul.

I have not written these poems to accord with any doctrine or system of thought or even a theory of composition. I have nothing to offer in the way of beliefs or challenges or prosody. I try to write freely, one day as a Christian, the next as a Jew, the next as a soldier who sees the gigantic slapstick of modern war. I hope I do not impersonate other poets. Certainly our contemporary man should feel divested of the stock attitudes of the last generation, the stance of the political intellectual, the proletarian, the expert, the salesman, the world-traveler, the pundit-poet. Like the jaded king in the fairy tale we should find our clothes too delicately spun for the eye to see; like the youngster in the crowd make the marvelous discovery that our majesty is naked!

Lieutenant HUBERT CREEKMORE:

WAR AND POETRY—On the surface, war and poetry are mutually inimical. War destroys what poetry would make; poetry

combats the elements from which war springs. Yet, reaction to war is such that its very violence stimulates more poetry. The shivering brutality and suffering, the distant longing and love create a tension. Sensibility becomes so keyed that slight, formerly ignored incidents register vividly. Everything strikes with a hitherto unknown and brilliant acuteness, until somewhere in the silent locked depths, feeling tries to organize, explain, express and perhaps justify. The phenomenon is evident in the large body of writing by men in service who are novices at poetry and whose work will never see print.

Poets who were writing before 1941 probably have a broader historical, social and economic background than previous war poets. Because the basis of this war involves exactly those factors in their background, their poetry cannot echo completely conventional sentiments. Although no one is likely to confine the sprawl of this war in a single poem, the collected work should form a mosaic of the responsibility, the purpose, the feel, the look of it, and the human being in it, that may possibly be new. New, because that background of the poets brings war into a mature perspective. We may expect a shift in emphasis from the traditional "war acting on man" to "man acting in war."

Of two poetic attitudes toward war—the cathartic ("*dulce et decorum*") and the antagonistic ("War is hell")—the former died, I think, in 1918. Today's poets will not want the catharsis of the military monument and the paean of courage, but rather that of man progressing. From them will emerge, I believe, a detached and reasonable compromise position: war *is* hell, but hell is sometimes expedient; and as we go through it, let's be men, not so called in bombast, sycophancy and intrigue, but by virtue of justice in our own hearts.

Lieutenant GAVIN EWART:

POETRY AND THE WAR—Personally, I feel very strongly that the best poems about war (modern war) have already been written—most of them by Wilfred Owen before he died in 1918. In a good many cases, all we can do today is to rewrite the poems of the earlier war. For this reason I find myself very shy of the war as a subject, although there is always room for good war reporting. I feel, however, that this is better done in prose. Stephen Spender's

poems on the Spanish War are probably the best war poems that have been written since World War I, but even here the poet lays himself open to the charge of sentimentality. The subject is too large and looms too near; it crushes the writer. All we can do is to provide footnotes, the small, detailed cameos of our own experience.

Squadron Leader JOHN PUDNEY:

THE WAR POET is a modern legend, originating from the soldier-poets of the last war, Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and many others. This poetry reached wide appreciation after the war. Robert Graves, who survives, lives to write his greater poetry upon themes dissociated from war.

The poet has always followed his nose. Where that deep consciousness of humanity is for him he will seek his themes. Walt Whitman or the great Soviet poet Mayakovsky may find them in the conflict of the mass. Gerard Manley Hopkins or Beddoes may find them in individuals. The classification of war as a theme is irrelevant.

I have written poems for ten years or so, and the coming of war seemed to bludgeon all desire or need for self-expression. Then in the Royal Air Force I met circumstances which drove my thoughts into the shape of verse. Whether I lost my friends or whether I noticed the splendid summer cornfield in the midst of the blitz is not ultimately important, but at the time I needed to write and, writing, happened to write war poetry. If my work expressed anything of the bright objective humanity of the flying people I am content.

On the subject of war poetry I think we are inventing a non-sensical category. Poetry survives the longest wars.

JOHN BERRYMAN:

ON WAR AND POETRY—I should be sorry if the relation between one of man's most destructive and witless activities and one of his most purely and intelligently creative activities should seem to be very close or satisfactory. I do not think it has been so,—is less and less, as war loses its human countenance and

living is hard enough. But poetry is not civilized. It takes its themes where it finds them, and some permanently interesting to it are thrown up by war: fear, departure, courage, loss, ambition, loyalty, intrigue, madness, faith and death. Whether its themes will engage the poetry of a particular man is another matter. There are not many poets, and there are no rules. War is an experience, worse than most, like illness or a journey or belief or marriage; those who "have" it will be affected in different degrees, in different ways; some trained to speech will talk about it, others trained equally and affected strongly will have nothing to say; those affected most—the dead—will be most silent.

Thomas Hardy's Poem on the Turn of the Century

THE DARKLING THRUSH

I leaned upon a coppice gate
When Frost was specter-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings from broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted night
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant;
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervorless as I.

At once a voice burst forth among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

Part I
The Poetry of World War One

THE PITY OF IT

*I walked in loamy Wessex lanes, afar
From rail-track and from highway, and I heard
In field and farmstead many an ancient word
Of local lineage like "Thu bist," "Er war,"*

*"Ich woll," "Er sholl," and by-talk similar,
Nigh as they speak who in this month's moon gird
At England's very loins, thereunto spurred
By gangs whose glory threats and slaughters are.*

*Then seemed a Heart crying: "Whosoever they be
At root and bottom of this, who flung this flame
Between kin folk kin tongued even as are we,*

*"Sinister, ugly, lurid, be their fame;
May their familiars grow to shun their name,
And their brood perish everlastingly."*

—THOMAS HARDY

April, 1915

Wilfred Owen

GREATER LOVE

Red lips are not so red
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.
Kindness of wooed and wooer
Seems shame to their love pure.
O Love, your eyes lose lure
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

Your slender attitude
Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed,
Rolling and rolling there
Where God seems not to care;
Till the fierce love they bear
Cramps them in death's extreme decrepitude.

Your voice sings not so soft,—
Though even as wind murmuring through rafters loft,—
Your dear voice is not clear,
Gentle, and evening clear,
As theirs whom none now hear
Now earth has stopped their piteous mouths that coughed.

Heart, you were never hot,
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;
And though your hand be pale,
Paler are all which trail
Your cross through flame and hail:
Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.

ARMS AND THE BOY

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger or blood;
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-heads
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth,
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And god will grow no talons at his heels,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

INSPECTION

“You! What d’you mean by this?” I rapped.
“You dare come on parade like this?”
“Please, sir, it’s—” “ ‘Old yer mouth,” the sergeant snapped.
“I take ’is name, sir?”—“Please, and then dismiss.”

Some days “confined to camp” he got
For being “dirty on parade.”
He told me afterwards, the damned spot
Was blood, his own. “Well, blood is dirt,” I said.

“Blood’s dirt,” he laughed, looking away
Far off to where his wound had bled
And almost merged for ever into clay.
“The world is washing out its stains,” he said.
“It doesn’t like our cheeks so red.
Young blood’s its great objection.
But when we’re duly white-washed, being dead,
The race will bear Field-Marshal God’s inspection.”

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

DULCE ET DECORUM EST

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes wilting in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Bitten as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

EXPOSURE

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us. . . .
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent. . . .
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient . . .
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow . . .
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray,
But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;

For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,—
 We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
 For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
 But nothing happens.

DISABLED

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasures after day
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,—
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands;
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join.—He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
That's why; and may be, too, to please his Meg;
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years.
Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
And Austria's did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
And soon he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits,
Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul.

Now he will spend a few sick years in Institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

THE SHOW

*We have fallen in the dreams the ever-living
Breathe on the tarnished mirror of the world,
And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh*

—W. B. YEATS

My soul looked down from a vague height with Death,
As unremembering how I rose or why,
And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,
Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,
And pitted with great pocks and scabs of plagues.

Across its beard, that horror of harsh wire,
There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled.
It seemed they pushed themselves to be as plugs
Of ditches, where they writhed and shrivelled, killed.

By them had slimy paths been trailed and scraped
Round myriad warts that might be little hills.

From gloom's last dregs these long-strung creatures crept,
And vanished out of dawn down hidden holes.

(And smell came up from those foul openings
As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening.)

On dithering feet upgathered, more and more,
Brown strings, towards strings of gray, with bristling spines,
All migrants from green fields, intent on mire.

Those that were gray, of more abundant spawns,
Ramped on the rest and ate them and were eaten.

I saw their bitten backs curve, loop, and straighten,
I watched those agonies curl, lift, and flatten.

Whereat, in terror what that sight might mean,
I reeled and shivered earthward like a feather.

And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan.
And He, picking a manner of worm, which half had hid
Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further,
Showed me its feet, the feet of many men,
And the fresh-severed head of it, my head.

MENTAL CASES

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?

Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who are these hellish?

—These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
Always they must see these things and hear them,
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
Carnage incomparable, and human squander,
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
Back into their brains, because on their sense
Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh
—Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
—Thus their hands are plucking at each other,
Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging,
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.

INSENSIBILITY

I

Happy are men who yet before they are killed
Can let their veins run cold.
Whom no compassion fleers
Or makes their feet
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.
The front line withers,
But they are troops who fade, not flowers,
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling:
Losses who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.

II

And some cease feeling
 Even themselves or for themselves.
 Dullness best solves
 The tease and doubt of shelling,
 And Chance's strange arithmetic
 Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.
 They keep no check on armies' decimation.

III

Happy are these who lose imagination:
 They have enough to carry with ammunition.
 Their spirit drags no pack,
 Their old wounds save with cold can not more ache.
 Having seen all things red,
 Their eyes are rid
 Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
 And terror's first constriction over,
 Their hearts remain small-drawn.
 Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
 Now long since ironed,
 Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

IV

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion
 How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,
 And many sighs are drained.
 Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:
 His days are worth forgetting more than not.
 He sings along the march
 Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,
 The long, forlorn, relentless trend
 From larger day to huger night.

V

We wise, who with a thought besmirch
 Blood over all our soul,
 How should we see our task
 But through his blunt and lashless eyes?
 Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
 Dying, not mortal overmuch;

Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

VI

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones;
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

À TERRE

(Being the Philosophy of Many Soldiers)

Sit on the bed. I'm blind, and three parts shell.
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.
Both arms have mutinied against me,—brutes.
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.

I tried to peg out soldierly,—no use!
One dies of war like any old disease.
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.
I have medals?—Discs to make eyes close.
My glorious ribbons?—Ripped from my own back
In scarlet shreds. (That's for your poetry book.)

A short life and a merry one, my buck!
We used to say we'd hate to live dead-old,—
Yet now . . . I'd willingly be puffy, bald,
And patriotic. Buffers catch from boys
At least the jokes hurled at them. I suppose
Little I'd ever teach a son, but hitting,

Shooting, war, hunting, all the arts of hurting.
Well, that's what I learnt,—that, and making money.

Your fifty years ahead seem none too many?
Tell me how long I've got? God! For one year
To help myself to nothing more than air!
One Spring! Is one too good to spare, too long?
Spring wind would work its own way to my lung,
And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.

My servant's lamed, but listen how he shouts!
When I'm lugged out, he'll 'still be good for that.
Here in this mummy-case, you know, I've thought
How well I might have swept his floors for ever.
I'd ask no nights off when the bustle's over,
Enjoying so the dirt. Who's prejudiced
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn,
Less warm than dust that mixes with arms' tan?
I'd love to be a sweep, now, black as Town,
Yes; or a muckman. Must I be his load?

O Life, Life, let me breathe,—a dug-out rat!
Not worse than ours the existences rats lead—
Nosing along at night down some safe rut,
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
And subdivide, and never come to death.
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.
"I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone,"
Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
"Pushing up daisies" is their creed, you know.
To grain, then, go my fat, to buds my sap,
For all the usefulness there is in soap.
D'you think the Boche will ever stew man-soup?
Some day, no doubt, if . . .

Friend, be very sure
I shall be better off with plants that share
More peaceably the meadow and the shower.

Soft rains will touch me,—as they could touch once,
And nothing but the sun shall make me ware.
Your guns may crash around me. I'll not hear;
Or, if I wince, I shall not know I wince.
Don't take my soul's poor comfort for your jest.
Soldiers may grow a soul when turned to fronds,
But here the thing's best left at home with friends.
My soul's a little grief, grappling your chest,
To climb your throat on sobs; easily chased
On other sighs and wiped by fresher winds.

Carry my crying spirit till it's weaned
To do without what blood remained these wounds.

STRANGE MEETING

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;
By his dead smile I knew I stood in Hell.
With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange, friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said the other, "save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something has been left,

Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this death; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . .”

Rupert Brooke

THE SOLDIER

If I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

THE GREAT LOVER

I have been so great a lover: filled my days
So proudly with the splendor of Love's praise,
The pain, the calm, and the astonishment,
Desire illimitable, and still content,
And all dear names men use, to cheat despair,
For the perplexed and viewless streams that bear
Our hearts at random down the dark of life.
Now, ere the unthinking silence on that strife
Steals down, I would cheat drowsy Death so far,
My night shall be remembered for a star
That outshone all the suns of all men's days.
Shall I not crown them with immortal praise
Whom I have loved, who have given me, dared with me
High secrets, and in darkness knelt to see
The inenarrable godhead of delight?

Love is a flame:—we have beacons the world's night.
A city:—and we have built it, these and I.
An emperor:—we have taught the world to die.
So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence,
And the high cause of Love's magnificence,
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names
Golden for ever, eagles, crying flames,
And set them as a banner, that men may know,
To dare the generations, burn, and blow
Out on the wind of Time, shining and streaming. . . .

These I have loved:

White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faëry dust;
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light; the strong crust
Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food;
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers;
And flowers themselves, that sway through sunny hours,
Dreaming of moths that drink them under the moon;
Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon
Smooth away trouble; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets; grainy wood; live hair that is
Shining and free; blue-massing clouds; the keen
Unpassioned beauty of a great machine;
The benison of hot water; furs to touch; .
The good smell of old clothes; and other such—
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,
Hair's fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers
About dead leaves and last year's ferns. . . .

Dear names,
And thousand others throng to me! Royal flames;
Sweet water's dimpling laugh from tap or spring;
Holes in the ground; and voices that do sing:
Voices in laughter, too; and body's pain,
Soon turned to peace; and the deep-panting train;
Firm sands; the little dulling edge of foam
That browns and dwindles as the wave goes home;
And washen stones, gay for an hour; the cold
Graveness of iron; moist black earthen mold;
Sleep; and high places; footprints in the dew;

And oaks; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new;
And new-peeled sticks; and shining pools on grass;—
All these have been my loves. And these shall pass,
Whatever passes not, in the great hour,
Nor all my passion, all my prayers, have power
To hold them with me through the gate of Death.
They'll play deserter, turn with the traitor breath,
Break the high bond we made, and sell Love's trust
And sacramental covenant to the dust.
—Oh, never a doubt but, somewhere, I shall wake,
And give what's left of love again, and make
New friends now strangers. . . .

But the best I've known
Stays here, and changes, breaks, grows old, is blown
About the winds of the world, and fades from brains
Of living men, and dies.

Nothing remains.

O dear my loves, O faithless, once again
This one last gift I give: that after men
Shall know, and later lovers, far-removed
Praise you, "All these were lovely"; say, "He loved."

E. E. Cummings

I SING OF OLAF

i sing of Olaf glad and big
whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or

his wellbelovéd colonel (trig
westpointer most succinctly bred)
took erring Olaf soon in hand;
but—though an host of overjoyed
noncoms (first knocking on the head
him) do through icy waters roll
that helplessness which others stroke
with brushes recently employed
anent this muddy toiletbowl,
while kindred intellects evoke
allegiance per blunt instruments—
Olaf (being to all intents
a corpse and wanting any rag
upon what God unto him gave)
responds, without getting annoyed
“I will not kiss your f.ing flag”

straightway the silver bird looked grave
(departing hurriedly to shave)

but—though all kinds of officers
(a yearning nation’s blueeyed pride)
their passive prey did kick and curse
until for wear their clarion
voices and boots were much the worse,
and egged the firstclassprivates on
his rectum wickedly to tease
by means of skilfully applied
bayonets roasted hot with heat—
Olaf (upon what were once knees)
does almost ceaselessly repeat
“there is some s. I will not eat”

our president, being of which
assertions duly notified
threw the yellowsonofabitch
into a dungeon, where he died

Christ (of His mercy infinite)
i pray to see; and Olaf, too

preponderatingly because
unless statistics lie he was
more brave than me: more blond than you.

MY SWEET OLD ETCETERA

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister

isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds) of socks not to
mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers

etcetera wrists etcetera, my
mother hoped that

i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my

self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et

cetera
(dreaming,
et
cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)

Robert Graves

RECALLING WAR

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
The blinded man sees with his ears and hands
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these twenty years ago
And now assumes the nature-look of time,
As when the morning traveller turns and views
His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.

What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags
But an infection of the common sky
That sagged ominously upon the earth
Even when the season was the airiest May.
Down pressed the sky and we, oppressed, thrust out
Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.
Natural infirmities were out of mode,
For Death was young again: patron alone
Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

Fear made fine bed-fellows. Sick with delight
At life's discovered transitoriness,
Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.
Never was such antiqueness of romance,
Such tasteless honey oozing from the heart.
And old importances came swimming back—
Wine, meat, log-fires, a roof over the head,
A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call.
Even there was a use again for God—
A word of rage in lack of meat, wine, fire,
In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

War was return of earth to ugly earth,
War was foundering of sublimities,
Extinction of each happy art and faith

By which the world had still kept head in air,
Protesting logic or protesting love,
Until the unendurable moment struck—
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns—
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch!
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be recalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair.

DEFEAT OF THE REBELS

The enemy forces are in wild flight.
Poor souls (you say), they were intoxicated
With rhetoric and banners, thought it enough
To believe and to blow trumpets, to wear
That menacing lie in their shakos.

Enough: it falls to us to shoot them down,
The incorrigibles and cowards,
Where they shiver behind rocks or in ditches
Seek graves that have no headstones to them—
Such prisoners were unprofitable.

Now as our vanguard, pressing on,
Dislodges them from village and town,
Who yelling abandon packs and cloaks,
Their arms and even the day's rations,
We are not abashed by victory,

We raise no pitying monument
To check the counter-stroke of fortune.
These are not spoils: we recognize
Our own strewn gear, that never had been robbed
But for our sloth and hesitancy.

Herbert Read

THE END OF A WAR

"In former days we used to look at life, and sometimes from a distance, at death, and still further removed from us, at eternity. To-day it is from afar that we look at life, death is near us, and perhaps nearer still is eternity."

—JEAN BOUVIER, a French subaltern, February 1916.

ARGUMENT

In the early days of November 1918, the Allied Forces had for some days been advancing in pursuit of the retreating German Army. The advance was being carried out according to a schedule. Each Division was given a line to which it must attain before nightfall; and this meant that each battalion in a division had to reach a certain point by a certain time. The schedule was in general being well adhered to, but the opposition encountered varied considerably at different points.

On November 10th, a certain English Battalion had been continuously harassed by machine-gun fire, and late in the afternoon was still far from its objective. Advancing under cover, it reached the edge of a plantation from which stretched a wide open space of cultivated land, with a village in front about 500 yards away. The officer in charge of the scouts was sent ahead with a corporal and two men to reconnoitre, and this little party reached the outskirts of the village without observing any signs of occupation. At the entrance of the village, propped against a tree, they found a German officer, wounded severely in the thigh. He was quite conscious and looked up calmly as Lieut. S— approached him. He spoke English, and when questioned, intimated that the village had been evacuated by the Germans two hours ago.

Thereupon Lieut. S— signalled back to the battalion, who then advanced along the road in marching formation. It was nearly dusk when they reached the small place in front of the church, and there they were halted. Immediately from several points, but chiefly from the tower of the church, a number of machine-guns opened fire on the massed men. A wild cry went up, and the men fled in rage and terror to the shelter of the houses, leaving a hundred of their companions and five officers dead or dying on the pavement. In the houses and the church they routed out the ambushed Germans and mercilessly bayoneted them.

The corporal who had been with Lieut. S— ran to the entrance of the village, to settle with the wounded officer who had betrayed them. The German seemed to be expecting him; his face did not flinch as the bayonet descended.

When the wounded had been attended to, and the dead gathered together, the remaining men retired to the schoolhouse to rest for the night. The officers then went to the château of the village, and there in a gardener's cottage, searching for fuel, the corporal already mentioned founded the naked body of a young girl. Both legs were severed, and one severed arm was found in another room. The body itself was covered with bayonet wounds. When the discovery was reported to Lieut. S—, he went to verify the strange crime, but there was nothing to be done; he was, moreover sick and tired. He found a bed in another cottage near the château, where some old peasants were still cowering behind a screen. He fell into a deep sleep, and did not wake until the next morning, the 11th of November 1918.

I. MEDITATION OF THE DYING GERMAN OFFICER

Ich sterbe . . . Life ebbs with an easy flow
and I've no anguish now. This failing light
is the world's light: it dies like a lamp
flickering for want of oil. When the last jump comes
and the axe-head blackness slips through flesh
that welcomes it with open but unquivering lips
then I shall be one with the Unknown
this Nothing which Heinrich made his argument
for God's existence: a concept beyond the mind's reach.
But why embody the Unknown: why give to God
anything but essence, intangible, invisible, inert?
The world is full of solid creatures—these
are the mind's material, these we must mould
into images, idols to worship and obey:
the Father and the Flag, and the wide Empire
of our creative hands. I have seen
the heart of Europe send its beating blood
like a blush over the world's pallid sphere
calling it to one life, one order and one living.
For that dream I've given my life and to the last
fought its listless enemies. Now Chaos intervenes

and I leave not gladly but with harsh disdain
a world too strong in folly for the bliss of dreams.

I fought with gladness. When others cursed the day
this stress was loosed
and men were driven into camps, to follow
with wonder, woe, or base delirium
the voiceless yet incessant surge
then I exulted: but with not more
than a nostril's distension, an eager eye
and fast untiring step.

The first week

I crossed the Fatherland, to take my place
in the swift-winged swoop that all but ended
the assay in one wild and agile venture.
I was blooded then, but the wound
seared in the burning circlet of my spirit
served only to temper courage
with scorn of action's outcome.
Blooded but not beaten I left the ranks
to be a leader. Four years
I have lived in the ecstasy of battle.
The throbbing of guns, growing yearly,
has been drum music to my ears
the crash of shells the thrill of cymbals
bayonets fiddlers' bows and the crack of rifles
plucked harp strings. Now the silence
is unholy. Death has no deeper horror
than diminishing sound—ears that strain
for the melody of action, hear
only the empty silence of retreating life.
Darkness will be kinder.

I die—

But still I hear a distant gunfire, stirring in my ear
like a weary humming nerve. I will cling to that sound
and on its widening wave
lapse into eternity. Heinrich, are you near?
Best friend, but false to my faith.
Would you die doubtfully with so calm a gaze?
Mind above battles, does your heart resign
love of the Fatherland in this hour of woe?

No drum will beat in your dying ears, and your God
will meet you with a cold embrace.
The void is icy: your Abstraction
freezes the blood at death: no calm
bound in such a barren law. The bond between
two human hearts is richer. Love can seal
the anguished ventricles with subtle fire
and make life end in peace, in love
the love we shared in all this strife.
Heinrich, your God has not this power, or he would heal
the world's wounds and create the empire
now left in the defeated hands of men.
At Valenciennes I saw you turn
swiftly into an open church. I followed
stood in the shadow of the aisle
and watched you pray. My impulse then
was to meet you in the porch and test
my smile against your smile, my peace against yours
and from your abashment pluck a wilder hope.
But the impulse died in the act: your face was blank
drained of sorrow as of joy, and I was dumb
before renunciation's subtler calm.
I let you pass, and into the world
went to deny my sight, to seal my lips
against the witness of your humble faith.
For my faith was action: is action now!
In death I triumph with a deed
and prove my faith against your passive ghost.

Faith in self comes first, from self we build
the web of friendship, from friends to confederates
and so to the State. This web has a weft
in the land we live in, a town, a hill
all that the living eyes traverse. There are lights
given by the tongue we speak, the songs we sing,
the music and the magic of our Fatherland.
This is a tangible trust. To make it secure
against the tempests of inferior minds
to build it in our blood, to make our lives
a tribute to its beauty—there is no higher aim.
This good achieved, then to God we turn

for a crown on our perfection: God we create
in the end of action, not in dreams.
God dies in this dying light. The mists receive
my spent spirit: there is no one to hear
my last wish. Already my thoughts
rebound in a tenement whose doors
are shut: strange muscles clench my jaws
these limbs are numb. I cannot lift
a finger to my will. But the mind
rises like a crystal sphere above the rigid wreck
is poised there, perhaps to fall into the void
still dreaming of an Empire of the West.
And so still feels no fear! Mind triumphs over flesh
ordering the body's action in direst danger.
Courage is not born in men, but born of love
love of life and love of giving, love
of this hour of death, which all love seeks.

I die, but death was destined. My life was given
my death ordained when first my hand
held naked weapons in this war. The rest
has been a waiting for this final hour.
In such a glory I could not always live.

My brow falls like a shutter of lead, clashes
on the clenched jaw. The curtain of flesh
is wreathed about these rigid lines
in folds that have the easy notion of a smile.
So let them kiss earth and acid corruption:
extinction of the clod. The bubble is free
to expand to the world's confines or to break
against the pricking stars. The last lights shine
across is perfect crystal: rare ethereal glimmer
of mind's own intensity. Above the clod
all things are clear, and what is left
is petulant scorn, implanted passions,
everything not tensely ideal. Blind emotions
wreck the image with their blundering wings.
Mind must define before the heart intrigues.
Last light above the world, wavering in the darkest
void of Nothing—how still and tenuous

no music of the spheres—and so break with a sigh
against the ultimate
shores of this world
so finite
so small
Nichts

II. DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE SOUL OF THE
MURDERED GIRL

Body

I speak not from my pallid lips
but from these wounds.

Soul

Red lips that cannot tell
a credible tale.

Body

In a world of martyred men
these lips renounce their ravage:
The wounds of France
roused their fresh and fluid voices.

Soul

War has victims beyond the bands
bonded to slaughter. War moves with armoured wheels
across the quivering flesh and patient limbs
of all life's labile fronds.

Body

France was the garden I lived in.
Amid these trees, these fields, petals fell
flesh to flesh; I was a wilder flower.

Soul

Open and innocent. So is the heart
laid virgin to my voice. I filled
your vacant ventricles with dreams

with immortal hopes and aspirations that exalt
the flesh to passion, to love and hate.
Child-radiance then is clouded, the light
that floods the mind is hot with blood
pulse beats to the vibrant battle-cry
the limbs are burnt with action.

Body

This heart had not lost its innocence so soon
but for the coming of that day when men
speaking a strange tongue, wearing strange clothes
armed, flashing with harness and spurs
carrying rifles, lances or spears
followed by rumbling waggons, shrouded guns
passed through the village in endless procession
swift, grim, scornful, exulting.

Soul

You had not lost your innocence so soon
but for the going of men from the village
your father gone, your brother
only the old left, and the very young
the women sad, the houses shuttered
suspense of school, even of play
the eager search for news, the air
of universal doubt, and then the knowledge
that the wavering line of battle now was fixed
beyond this home. The soil was tilled
for visionary hate.

Body

Four years was time enough
for such a seedling hate to grow
sullen, close, intent;
To wait and wonder
but to abate
no fervour in the slow passage of despair.

Soul

The mind grew tense.

Body

My wild flesh was caught
in the cog and gear of hate.

Soul

I lay coiled, the spring
of all your intricate design.

Body

You served me well. But still I swear
Christ was my only King.

Soul

France was your Motherland:
To her you gave your life and limbs.

Body

I gave these hands and gave these arms
I gave my head of ravelled hair.

Soul

You gave your sweet round breasts
like Agatha who was your Saint.

Body

Mary Aegyptiaca
is the pattern of my greatest loss.

Soul

To whom in nakedness and want
God sent a holy man.
Who clothed her, shrived her, gave her peace
before her spirit left the earth.

Body

My sacrifice was made to gain
the secrets of these hostile men.

Soul

I hover round your fameless features
barred from Heaven by light electric.

Body

All men who find these mauled remains
will pray to Mary for your swift release.

Soul

The cry that left your dying lips
was heard by God.

Body

I died for France.

Soul

A bright mantle fell across your bleeding limbs.
Your face averted shone with sacred fire.
So be content. In this war
many men have perished not blessed
with faith in a cause, a country or a God
not less martyrs than Herod's Victims, Ursula's Virgins
or any massed innocents massacred.

Body

Such men give themselves not to their God but to their fate
die thinking the face of God not love but hate.

Soul

Those who die for a cause die comforted and coy;
believing their cause God's cause they die with joy.

III. MEDITATION OF THE WAKING ENGLISH OFFICER

I wake: I am alive: there is a bell
sounding with the dream's retreating surf
O catch the lacey hem dissolved in light
that creeps along the healing tendrils of a mind
still drugged with sleep. Why must my day
kill my dreams? Days of hate. But yes a bell
beats really on this air, a mad bell.
The peasants stir behind that screen.
Listen: they mutter now: they sing
in their old cracked voices, intone

a litany. There are no guns
only these voices of thanksgiving. Can it be:
Yes yes yes: it is peace, peace!
The world is very still, and I am alive!
Look: I am alive, alive, alive.
O limbs, your white radiance
no longer to stand against bloody shot
this heart secure, to live and worship
to go God's way, to grow in faith
to fight with and not against the will!
That day has come at last! Suspended life
renews its rhythmic beat. I live!
Now can I love and strive, as I have dreamt.

Lie still, and let this litany
of simple voices and the jubilant bell
ease rebirth. First there are the dead to bury
O God, the dead. How can God's bell
ring out from that unholy ambush?
That tower of death! In excess of horror
war died. The nerve was broken
frayed men fought obscenely then: there was no fair joy
no glory in the strife, no blessed wrath.
Man's mind cannot excel
mechanic might except in savage sin.
Our broken bodies oiled the engines: mind was grit.

Shall I regret my pact? Envy that friend
who risked ignominy, insult, gaol
rather than stain his hands with human blood?
And left his fellow men. Such lonely pride
was never mine. I answered no call
there was no call to answer. I felt no hate
only the anguish of an unknown fate
a shot, a cry: then armies on the move
the sudden lull in daily life
all eyes wide with wonder, past surprise:
our felt dependence on a ruling few:
the world madness: the wild plunge:
the avalanche and I myself a twig
torn from its mother soil

and to the chaos rendered.

Listless

I felt the storm about me; its force
too strong to beat against; in its swirl
I spread my sapling arms, tossed on its swell
I rose, I ran, I down the dark world sped
till death fell round me like a rain of steel
and hope and faith and love coiled in my inmost cell.

Often in the weariness of watching
warding weary men, pitched against
the unmeaning blackness of the night, the wet fog,
the enemy blanketed in mystery, often
I have questioned my life's inconstant drift;
God not real, hate not real, the hearts of men
insentient engines pumping blood
into a spongy mass that cannot move
above the indignity of inflicted death:
the only answer this: the infinite is all
and I, a finite speck, no essence even
of the life that falls like dew
from the spirit breathed on the fine edge
of matter, perhaps only that edge
a ridge between eternal death and life eternal,
a moment of time, temporal.

The universe swaying between Nothing and Being
and life faltering like a clock's tick
between a pendulum's coming and going.

The individual lost: seventy years
seventy minutes have no meaning.

Let death, I cried, come from the forward guns
let death come this moment, swift and crackling
tick-tock, tick-tock—moments that pass
not reckoned in the infinite.

Then I have said: all is that must be.
There is no volition, even prayer
dies on lips compressed in fear.
Where all must be, there is no God
for God can only be the God of prayer
an infinitely kind Father whose will
can mould the world, who can

in answer to my prayer mould me.
But whilst I cannot pray, I can't believe
but in this frame of machine necessity
must renounce not only God, but self.
For what is the self without God?
A moment not reckoned in the infinite.
My soul is less than nothing, lost,
unless in this life it can build
a bridge to life eternal.

In a warm room, by the flickering fire
in friendly debate, in some remote
sheltered existence, even in the hermit's cell
easy it is to believe in God: extend the self
to communion with the infinite, the eternal.
But haggard in the face of death
deprived of all earthly comfort, all hope of life,
the soul a distilled essence, held
in a shaking cup, spilled
by a spit of lead, saved
by chance alone
very real
in its silky bag of skin, its bond of bone,
so little and so limited,
there's no extenuation then.
Fate is in facts: the only hope
an unknown chance.

So I have won through. What now?
Will faith rise triumphant from the wreck
despair once more evaded in a bold
assertion of the self: self to God related
self in God attained, self a segment
of the eternal circle, the wheel
of Heaven, which through the dust of days
and stagnant darkness steadily revolves?
The bells of hell ring ting-a-ling
for you but not for me—for you
whose gentian eyes stared from the cold
impassive alp of death. You betrayed us
at the last hour of the last day
playing the game to the end

your smile the only comment
on the well-done deed. What mind
have you carried over the confines?
Your fair face was noble of its kind
some visionary purpose cut the lines
clearly on that countenance.
But you are defeated: once again
the meek inherit the kingdom of God.
No might can win against this wandering
wavering grace of humble men.
You die, in all your power and pride:
I live, in my meekness justified.

When first this fury caught us, then
I vowed devotion to the rights of men
would fight for peace once it came again
from this unwilling war pass gallantly
to wars of will and justice.
That was before I had faced death
day in day out, before hope had sunk
to a little pool of bitterness.
Now I see, either the world is mechanic force
and this the last tragic act, portending
endless hate and blind reversion
back to the tents and healthy lusts
of animal men: or we act
God's purpose in an obscure way.
Evil can only to the Reason stand
in scheme or scope beyond the human mind.
God seeks the perfect man, planned
to love him as a friend: our savage fate
a fire to burn our dross
to temper us to finer stock
man emerging in some inconceivèd span
as something more than remnant of a dream.
To that end worship God, join the voices
heard by these waking ears. God is love:
in his will the meek heart rejoices
doubting till the final grace a dove
from Heaven descends and wakes the mind
in light above the light of human kind

in light celestial
infinite and still
eternal
bright

It was necessary for my poetic purpose to take an incident from the war of 1914-18 which would serve as a focus for feeling and sentiments otherwise diffuse. The incident is true, and can be vouched for by several witnesses still living. But its horrors do not accuse any particular nation; they are representative of war and of human nature in war. It is not my business as a poet to condemn war (or, to be more exact, modern warfare). I only wish to present the universal aspects of a particular event. Judgment may follow, but should never precede or become embroiled with the act of poetry. It is for this reason that Milton's attitude to his Satan has so often been misunderstood.

Isaac Rosenberg

DEAD MAN'S DUMP

The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
Upon our brothers dear.

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched;
Their shut mouths made no moan.
They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,
Man born of man, and born of woman;
And shells go crying over them
From night till night and now.

Earth has waited for them,
All the time of their growth
Fretting for their decay:
Now she has them at last!
In the strength of their strength
Suspended—stopped and held.

What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit?
Earth! Have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,
And flung on your hard back
Is their souls' sack,
Emptied of God-ancestral essences.
Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half-used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
When the swift iron burning bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth.

What of us who, flung on the shrieking pyre,
Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,

Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed,
Immortal seeming ever?
Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,
A fear may choke in our veins
And the startled blood may stop.

The air is loud with death,
The dark air spurts with fire,
The explosions ceaseless are.
Timelessly now, some minutes past,
These dead strode time with vigorous life,
Till the shrapnel called 'An end!'
But not to all. In bleeding pangs
Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,
Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.

A man's brains splattered on
A stretcher-bearer's face;
His shook shoulders slipped their load,
But when they bent to look again
The drowning soul was sunk too deep
For human tenderness.

They left this dead with the older dead,
Stretched at the cross roads.

Burnt black by strange decay
Their sinister faces lie,
The lid over each eye;
The grass and coloured clay
More motion have than they,
Joined to the great sunk silences.

Here is one not long dead.
His dark hearing caught our far wheels,
And the choked soul stretched weak hands
To reach the living word the far wheels said;
The blood-dazed intelligence beating for light,
Crying through the suspense of the far torturing wheels
Swift for the end to break
Or the wheels to break,
Cried as the tide of the world broke over his sight,
'Will they come? Will they ever come?'

Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,
And the rushing wheels all mixed
With his tortured upturned sight.

So we crashed round the bend,
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face.

BREAK OF DAY IN THE TRENCHES

The darkness crumbles away—
It is the same old druid Time as ever.
Only a live thing leaps my hand—
A queer sardonic rat—
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German—
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver—what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe,
Just a little white with the dust.

Siegfried Sassoon

THE REAR-GUARD

Groping along the tunnel, step by step,
He winked his prying torch with patching glare
From side to side, and sniffed the unwholesome air.

Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know,
A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed;
And he, exploring fifty feet below
The rosy gloom of battle overhead.
Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw someone lie
Humped at his feet, half-hidden by a rug,
And stooped to give the sleeper's arm a tug.
"I'm looking for headquarters." No reply.
"God blast your neck!" (For days he'd had no sleep.)
"Get up and guide me through this stinking place."
Savage, he kicked a soft, unanswering heap,
And flashed his beam across the livid face
Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore
Agony dying hard ten days before;
And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound.
Alone he staggered on until he found
Dawn's ghost that filtered down a shafted stair
To the dazed, muttering creatures underground
Who hear the boom of shells in muffled sound.
At last, with sweat of horror in his hair,
He climbed through darkness to the twilight air,
Unloading hell behind him step by step.

COUNTER-ATTACK

We'd gained our first objective hours before
While dawn broke like a face with blinking eyes,
Pallid, unshaved and thirsty, blind with smoke.
Things seemed all right at first. We held their line,

With bombers posted, Lewis guns well placed,
And clink of shovels deepening the shallow trench.
The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs
High-booted, sprawled and groveled along the saps;
And trunks, face downward in the sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags, loosely filled;
And naked, sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads, slept in the plastering slime.
And then the rain began—the jolly old rain!

A yawning soldier knelt against the bank,
Staring across the morning blear with fog;
He wondered when the Allemands would get busy;
And then, of course, they started with five-nines
Traversing, sure as fate, and never a dud.
Mute in the clamor of shells he watched them burst
Spouting dark earth and wire with gusts from hell,
While posturing giants dissolved in drifts of smoke.
He crouched and flinched, dizzy with galloping fear,
Sick for escape,—loathing the strangled horror
And butchered, frantic gestures of the dead.

An officer came blundering down the trench:
“Stand-to and man the fire-step!” On he went. . . .
Gasping and bawling, “Fire-step . . . counter-attack!”
Then the haze lifted. Bombing on the right
Down the old sap: machine guns on the left;
And stumbling figures looming out in front.
“O Christ, they’re coming at us!” Bullets spat,
And he remembered his rifle . . . rapid fire . . .
And started blazing wildly . . . then a bang
Crumpled and spun him sideways, knocked him out
To grunt and wriggle: none heeded him; he choked
And fought the flapping veils of smothering gloom,
Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans. . . .
Down, and down, and down, he sank and drowned,
Bleeding to death. The counter-attack had failed.

DOES IT MATTER?

Does it matter?—losing your leg? . . .
For people will always be kind,
And you need not show that you mind
When the others come in after hunting
To gobble their muffins and eggs.

Does it matter?—losing your sight? . . .
There's such splendid work for the blind;
And people will always be kind,
As you sit on the terrace remembering
And turning your face to the light.

Do they matter?—those dreams from the pit? . . .
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won't say that you're mad;
For they'll know that you've fought for your country,
And no one will worry a bit.

THE DUG-OUT

Why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled,
And one arm bent across your sullen, cold,
Exhausted face? It hurts my heart to watch you,
Deep-shadowed from the candle's guttering gold;
And you wonder why I shake you by the shoulder;
Drowsy, you mumble and sigh and turn your head. . . .
*You are too young to fall asleep for ever;
And when you sleep you remind me of the dead.*

AFTERMATH

Have you forgotten yet? . . .
For the world's events have rumbled on since those gagged days,
Like traffic checked a while at the crossing of city ways:
And the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow

Like clouds in the lit heavens of life; and you're a man reprieved to go,
Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.

But the past is just the same,—and War's a bloody game. . . .

Have you forgotten yet? . . .

*Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never
forget.*

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz,—
The night you watched and wired and dug and piled sand-bags on
parapets?

Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench,—
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, "Is it all going to happen again?"

Do you remember that hour of din before the attack,—
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you then
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads, those ashen-gray
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?

Have you forgotten yet? . . .

*Look up, and swear by the green of the Spring that you'll never
forget!*

EVERYONE SANG

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark green fields; on; on; and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted,
And beauty came like the setting sun.
My heart was shaken with tears, and horror
Drifted away. . . . O, but everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless;
the singing will never be done.

Alan Seeger

I HAVE A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.
It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town;
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

W. B. Yeats

AN IRISH AIRMAN FORESEES HIS DEATH

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

Part II

Poems by the Men in the Armed Forces of England and America

THE NEXT WAR

War's a joke for me and you,
While we know such dreams are true.

—SASSOON

*Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death;
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,—
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.
We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,—
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe.
He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed
Shrapnel. We chorussed when he sang aloft;
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.*

*Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.
No soldier's paid to kick against his powers.
We laughed, knowing that better men would come,
And greater wars; when each proud fighter brags
He wars on Death—for Life; not men—for flags.*

—WILFRED OWEN

William Abrahams

Sergeant, U. S. Military Police

POEM IN TIME OF WAR for Howard Turner

So make your impassive passage to the act
Of violence, to the impossible deed.
Macduff you are, who were Mercutio,
And boy of words is boy of blood, and all
Is a sea-change. I saw those boisterous waters come,
Slapdash with our future up the shore,
And in recession, tidal total, draw
Like pebbles, the deluded beauty of the past.

Drown, drown, in the impersonal depths,
While, on the green ceiling, tense tankers
Catwalk gingerly toward their piers.
Drown: drown: the graveyard by the sea,
Icarian waters, the cello-breathing shell,
All the secluded symbols of our past,
Unnerved beneath the searchlight's eye, drop masks,
Present true faces in the racing tide.

For the war is everywhere, and like the sea,
Flows over the beaches of illusion,
Even resorts where crooks and poets kept
Their beautiful secrecy; and like the sea
Is resolute, but O, no resolution
Brings, even to those who form their questions.
For the war is everywhere, and like the sea,
Death-giver, gives ambiguous utterance.

The sons are soldiers, the mothers remain as mourners.
In the cafe by the harbour, sailors tell
Tall tales to dwarf the night's tall silent shadows.
And the tousled girls brighten their eyes with tears,
And the gay music goes sour in the glasses,
But everywhere is the war, roaring beyond
The dancers, like a surf, waiting, waiting,
Low tide of the moment while the moon climbs higher.

And each of us is caught: poet or painter;
The very rich; mother's invalid boy;
The handsome athlete; the sad refugee;
All, friends and lovers, are passengers
Into the ambient tidal twilight. Land
Of largesse is lost, and the dear particular face,
Under the helmet, is friend or fatal face.

So make your impassive passage to the Act:
Drown, drown, in the impersonal depths,
For the war is everywhere and like the sea.
The sons are soldiers; the mothers are mourners,
And each of us is caught. Poet or painter,
Under the helmet is friend or fatal face.

THE MUSEUM

1. *Classic*

Who rose up like a goddess from the sea,
A vision of beauty to haunt so many houses,
Dies in a marble stasis, gallery goddess.
And only the prurient children will discern
How wet flanks gleamed in the sunlight, the very waves
Shone admiration through the racing foam.

It comes to this: the bleak memorial halls,
The guide in sour serge, the tired feet,
And faint through the mausoleum walls the sound
Of streetcars. These patterns have their meanings far
From the grove of olive trees, the passionate dancers
Hot in the frenzy of Etruscan summer.
It comes to this: the middle-aged on camp chairs
Sketching those marble limbs that once were love's.

2. *Renaissance*

Princeling in velvet and furs, the fairhaired boy
With a sly smile and a goblet of gold wine.
Also the costumed dwarf, the chained falcon,

The spotted hound arrogant by the throne.
Such profusion of wealth, such suffocating beauty!
And all set down with a genius for the rich
Self-confident detail. But time is traitorous.

Easily the baize walls confer their apathy.
Time closes in: an anonymity
Of dust and varnish. The sly smile will induce
No further rubies. No emeralds will mingle
With the stuffed bird, the manuscripts swearing
Perpetual devotion. No more gold collars
To please the almost life-like hunting bitch.

3. *19th Century*

A grace like swans, and swanlike gleaming at
The stage's centre, turn and turn again
Those beautiful dancers. O simple to understand
The fashionable painter disowning his faubourg
Of expensive portraits. Simple to understand
How in an age of dying gods this grace
To believe in. Fairer than swans they float in the blue light,
Over the blue lake hover in a white radiance,
Glide and fall, rise up, circle, like swans,
While legato the music calls each swanlike gesture.

O at this instant the complex is simple,
Time poses no problems, Art is volition.
But already, poised in the future: the apotheosis
Of the meatpacker, the thwarted anguish of the slums.

4. *The Present*

Nothing to paint but what the eye can see.
The eye sees the broken faces, the cities
In convulsive disorder, how the bones puncture the flesh,
How the teeth break from the gums, how the tears fall.

Nothing to paint but what the mind discerns.
The mind discerns the implacable insects burrowing,
The fatal complacency of the skyscraper,
The insects honeycombing final triumph.

Nothing to paint but what the heart tells.
The heart tells of love. O still repeats
Strong in its need and confident, of the young
Still turning to one another in the dangerous darkness,
Where the many are hooded and carry knives, where still
There is one who waits, unarmed, and will be kind and gentle.

5. *Conclusion*

The doors are closed. The lights turned down. The dog
Trots through the galleries sniffing the air
For some possible intruder. The streetcars creak
In the night, and the camp chairs are stacked in a storeroom.

O now, surely, the haunting spirit of beauty
Rises from its long sleep, now surely,
In the empty silence, delivers its messages.
The archaic lips open, and reaffirm;
The fairhaired boy reads in the dim light
The perpetual parchment and is glad and proud;
The dancers tremble in a reawakened music;
And even the wrecked towers have an affirmative meaning:
Where love whispers softly, heard at last,
Whispering, consoling, promising: I am Love.

IN THE HENRY JAMES COUNTRY

Spring, for Julian, was amber in the hand,
Pale amber, a trinket left to him by his aunt,
To be kissed lightly with bloodless lips, and placed
Lightly, with bloodless fingers, in a tufted casket.
Pale yellow amber, turning in the hand,
An April afternoon out of Henry James,
Boating parties, a low-slung shallop sulking
In cold currents; indefinite pale ladies,
Whose pompadours exhaled pale parma violets.
All these, as his soft hand deployed the amber,

Grew large—like an opening hyacinth—grew real,
Were aquarelles, scattered on a painter's easel,
Admired through a delicate haze of dreams.
At length, when twilight filtered down through spring,
And his hand grew weary, for the hand tires,
The hand weakens, the hand withers in the glove,
He placed the jewel in the casket and lay down to sleep.

Summer, for Julian, was a dull gold ring,
Which he had one day found in an antique shop
Off Jermyn Street. A setting wrought
With serpentine young girls, but for the stone,
A sallow void. Yet he was not disturbed.
He coiled the gold frame in his hand, and dreamed
Quite placidly of sunlight winding out
Its thread through parks, and of the carousel
Crowded with enigmatic, porcelain children,
Who read their Stevenson from linen books,
Perfected into death. Moppets who sang—
O flavored music-box—on mahogany stairs,
And waltzed so properly with governess
In the dying nursery. Dead jackaclocks.
And turned the frame, dreaming of emeralds,
Which might rest comfortably within the void.
Yet he could not decide, and the summer faltered,
And his hand grew weary, for the hand tires,
The hand weakens, the hand withers in the glove.
He placed the jewel in the casket and lay down to sleep.

Autumn, for Julian, was a sapphire in the hand,
A gift from a schoolboy friend who played at verse.
He turned the sapphire in his plump white hand,
Admiring the blue against the white, so cool.
And sang out in a breath one sapphire line
That seemed to him quite beautiful. He spoke,
And as he spoke, his voice recalled the speech
In dim foyers, at gala balls, the talk
In suave barouches that trotted down through time.
Also the country houses, and the orange
Of autumn expiring through the potted palms.
He turned the sapphire, and the trio played
Vivace, yet with style, a gliding polka.

This was his favorite, so almost dead,
Bloodless, and almost beautiful, and the autumn
Dying, but fitfully, prepared for death,
A bed that should be graced by florid speech,
But not too florid. Yet he could not decide,
And his hand grew weary, for the hand tires,
The hand weakens, the hand withers in the glove.
He placed the jewel in the casket and lay down to sleep.

Winter, for Julian, was a diamond in the hand,
Flawless crystal, which had required his shares
Of railway stock—quite good, the broker said—
And now he turned the diamond, like ice,
And thought that he could hear, turning the stone,
The delicate whirr of skates, the brisker bite
Of hooves on packed snow. He wrapped the fur
Closely about his whitening cheeks, hands
Twitching with the ever-mounting cold.
Snow mounted. Craftily, the snow mounted.
He held the frozen cup within his hands
And sipped warm tea. Slowly the snow curved
Upward over plush. Silence, like frost,
Laced arabesques across his eyes, and the world,
The only world that he was certain of,
Froze in a mould of tea and candlelight.
This, he thought, was the favorite stone, turning
The diamond. He banished amber, gold, and sapphire,
And chose the colorless color, almost certain.
But his hand grew weary, for the hand tires,
The hand weakens, the hand withers in the glove. . . .
He placed the jewel in the casket and lay down to sleep.

Brian Allwood (1920-1944)

Pilot, R.A.F.

NO LAWS

What there is once may not be twice:
No laws provide for this event.
What's hinted may be really meant.
Such speculation is not nice.

Philosophy works up and down:
The real is still in sketch-plan yet,
Corners for angles, all upset.
So far, the king's beneath the crown.

So far. But one can't assume
Always the laws one may discover
Will hold poet, king and lover.
Not always: there may not be room.

Jack Beeching

Petty Officer, Royal Navy

1944—ON THE INVASION COAST

Waiting today while planes roar over the seacoast,
Secretly pondering tomorrow, the impending battle
We must forget how the past has framed this crisis.
Four years is long enough to forget, but today remember.

First came French refugees, crowding the decks of a trawler,
Then one day of silence, when a German plane came over
Dropping its bombs, and then three fishing smacks
And a lifeboat, piled to the gunwales with wounded soldiers.

From that day on we finished with the old war
When home had been a place of flagdays and ragtime music,
Whores and hospital blue, flagdays and hysteria;
When Passchendaele swallowed its Englishmen and France was full
of widows.

No one listens nowadays to an old soldier's story,
Having seen the leer behind the mask, the fingers tremble
Within that iron glove whose clenching onetime quelled us.
Four years have taught us more than they taught our fathers.

No one danced and sang for this war. No one has illusions
Of a paradisaal blighty. Our tongueless khakied strangers
Fight their way home. The rest wait soldier's payment:
Salt for the thirsty, in place of bread, a stone.

Those were our fathers' wages, the reward of exiles
In a strange land that fed its dogs and horses
And let its soldiers starve. Today the fingers tremble.
Tomorrow we make new war of this old war.

Map doesn't indicate nor memory hold home for the exile.
It lives in longing hearts, and may grow real
After the hate and horror. But there can be no building
Without our bombing planes. No life without our dying.

Walter Benton

Lieutenant, U.S. Army

SUMMARY OF THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE BOMBER AND THE OBJECTIVE

The duraluminum dove dives—

How slenderly
space splits, the momentum doubles, multiplies,
the dynamite muscles flex for sudden violence!

Beautiful . . beautiful to see against the sky
of flying birds—
against the soft, wide, lavender eyes of morning!

There, proud Caucasian—chemist, poet, lover,
scholar, priest!
Behold the stark embodiment of the millennia of mind—
myth and mechanical, prophetic, proved . . .
Euclid's theorems, Phidias's chiseled curves,
the Flood, redemption . . and The Song of Songs—
Rembrandt, Beethoven, Steinmetz, Plato, Christ:

all the oldest principles, all the latest features
capsuled in a swift and shining shape—
blown out of context and material time.

bringing peace to many.

WITH THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE
ELEMENT, THE MIND, ALREADY
TURNED UNDER THE TOXIC
ACTION—

The irresistible bacilli are at work
upon the tired body of the generation.

And when the body dies, what is of the body dies—
the lice and the hookworm,
the tapeworm and the trichina.

The little men and the little men called big—
the eternal stooges, history's fall guys.

The not-quite poets.

The never-exactly prophets . . .

Which is the only good that can possibly come of it.

But there ought to be a better way of killing a louse
than by destroying the body it feeds on.

Earle Birney

Major, Canadian Army (Overseas)

ON GOING TO THE WARS

I do not go, my dear, to storm
The praise of men; this uniform
May shine less gay in gas and mud
And be medallioned but by blood,
While lips that know your lips will turn
Uneasily to harlot worm.
And war, it's true, fouls both the flesh
Victorious and the flesh it slays.

Yet must we play the beast afresh
To claw from wolves their power to craze
The heirs of Raphael and the kin
Of Bach, our friends the foe.
I, too, let's say, a travail owe:
So that our son, who curls within
The womb, may wake to brighter earth,
I must not shrink from giving birth
To death.

I go that he may stare
Blue-eyed into Canadian air
Unhaunted by the charnel birds
That drop their excrement of death.
I go that he may draw free breath
To speak the rich and ancient words
We use, and spell from books unburned,
And teachers not from trueness turned.
I march that he may learn from grass
And rose what we have missed, the pass
To quiet life, and never set
The rendezvous my father met
In vain.

I go that we may breast
Again the Dorset downs in zest

And walk the Kentish lanes where I
Began a larger life in knowing
You. Yet if from seething sky
I win reprieve but by the slowing
Crutch, or whitened cane, my doom
Will yet have helped to hold in bloom
Old English orchards and Canadian
Woods unscarred by steel, Acadian
And Columbian roofs unswept
By flame. My mother will be kept
From stumbling down a prairie road
Illumed by burning barns and snowed
By patterned death.

Is it so rash
To seek to rank with me who saved
Your English father from a lash
In London streets, and bent head shaved
Because his mother was a Jew
Who starved last year in Lodz? And you—
My dear, I'll not survive to see
You bricked within a ghetto slum
In Canada, by booted scum.
I pledged that if by chance I flee
The blundering malice of the guns
I'll stand by those who strive to chart
A world where peace is everyone's,
A peace that does not rot the heart
With hunger, fear, and hopeless hate,
Nor rust the cunning wheels nor still
The subtle fingers, peace that will
Unlock to every man the gate
To all the leaping joys his hand
Creates. For no less prize I stand.

And now, my dear, since we may yet
Delight in leaf uncrinkling, and
In maple woods the violet,
Then let us from the patient land
Take strength, nor fail to share the charmed
Routine of stars, or trysting keep
With common things, with evenings warmed
By music, food, and love, and sleep.

For present solace these, but for
Our hope we've nowhere else to look
Except into our spirit's book.
No hell unspilled by lords of war
Upon the people's flesh has ever
Parched the human heart's endeavour,
The human will to love and truth.
For one face mired in black unruth
A score will signal us each day
The sun unquenched within our clay.

Across the tundra of our dread
We must beat on, windbitten, to
The unseen cabin's light, and through
The glooming western firwoods thread,
In hope to pass the peaks terrific,
And win the wide sundrenched Pacific.

FOR STEVE *

I'll sit down again, Steve, with your shy ghost;
Many a night we'll talk of books or fishing,
Down a beer and slide our smothering toes
From drillboots. We'll damn Canadian politicians
And argue schemes to weld the human fissures
That cleave the lanky land from which we grew.
We'll reconnoitre confidences and lost wishes,
And I'll come closer both to charity and truth
Those hours, for sitting even with the shade of you.

So here's no exorcising. Mine the stagehand's dream
To funnel words into a magnavox, and lay
The wires, from your fading voice beneath
The platform, to the guards and the forgetful heir,
Blasting the porches of the ears with 'Swear',
'Swear' and 'Remember me'. Forgive the haste,
The home mechanics, prentice insulation;

* P. O. Stevenson Cartwright, R.C.A.F. reported killed in action over Germany, March 1943.

Plays of blood revenge are all the rage
Again, and other spectres crowd us off the stage.

No balm of phrase just now will slow the throbbing
In the scar your name seared, the burn of the black
Malevolent type in the casualty list. No printed sob
No fluttering of maple leaves and orators, brings back
The thing that failed in me, that will be always lacking,
Now that I know you're spent. But there are lots
Who haven't summed—so slick and swift the flak,
So quick your spending—how much you paid, nor what
You meant somehow to buy us and, perhaps, have bought.

Together four wry years ago we sought
Our khaki humbling for these lazar times,
But you had youth to sell and with it caught
The posting perilous, found flight in flight,
Schooled quietly your nerves, tightened
Trackman sinews for the mazed ascent
Into our brandnew battlefield, where sky
Is only wheeling ground for shell, and men
Thunder precisioned bolts through stars and innocence.

You rose to ride that faithful hunt and seek
The fey coyote across the air's wild prairies
Until the casual day you met between
Two flowering clouds the hot fanged farer
Amid some dreaming mist your last waylayer.
Now though this twisting troopship speeds me slyly
It cannot overtake you. I'll not share
Your final quip, nor ever know how wide
Your comment from the point when you were asked to die.

Somewhere now that stored and nimble brain
Is spilled forever; the gentle hands and lithe
Limbs enter the prodigious chemistry of rain
And sun. Straightened now is the hesitant smile,
Curtained the eyes' blue gleam. No chimes
Of solace can achieve the decibels
Required for this one loss, still less for siren

Powered to sound all clear to all your fellows,
Saxon or Anglosaxon, Tolstoi's kind or Raphael's.

The elms at home unloose a quietness
That lingers. They climb the singing April air
And I have walked beneath them, heard the nesting
Bluejay, smelled, alone, the foaming peartree.
Who salve this wound with hope you gained a fairer
Concord should not lie in town ruined
Bedded and snug, but nightly sweep through airy
Hell. Let them be heavilylidded, else, with rue.
They have not shut their eyes as trim and tight as you.

'Take up our quarrel with the foe'? The slogan's odd,
But potent if we've learned to spy who are
The enemy. Else through the blackened bodies
Of our dead, and our victorious tanks, will march
The Nazi creed to stand on our own hearthrug.
It was not for the aborters of a saner clay,
For honored cardsharp, fatted sage, who starved
Our dreams in crib, you wept your heart away
In crimson tears within a crumpled fuselage.

Not for the manic seesaw of the nation's tempo
From slug's crawl to the Stuka's raucous winging,
Not for the rotting oranges and the pinched slumboy,
But for the power and the brotherhood of fingers
To portion out the welfare of their cunning.
Not for the dole, the family patent, the cartel,
The abatoir whitewashed for each crop of earthlings,
But for a peace, distant maybe as Arcturus
Yet spinning white in the telescope of the heart.

Our self-renewing lords who spell democracy
As private enterprise and public rape
May yet be wrong. That was another war, and we
Are haunted by our frustrate fathers, and the late
Souring of a milksop truce, when lads with brains
And hands alone to trade with, and no credit,
Were paid in promises, or jailed or warned off freights
And politics and love, unless they peddled
The latest brightest stones to all who asked for bread.

We'll not forget the stock that opened long
Thick ears to Munich's taloned doves, and closed
Its eyes to Spain, who hate the *habitant*,
The Jew, the union—these friends are still our foes,
Not only all whom Hitler duped but those
More fearful of tomorrow than of perjure
Should count the rebel gathering hosts
Of us. Alive or ghosted, Steve, we're spirits not dispersed
By mouldy arguments from history's old murders.

I think you breathed the future and you died
Of it, and there alone's catharsis. No seed
Of hope can sprout but from the wounded side
Of selflessness. Since you who walked in freedom
And the ways of reason fought on our front, we
Foresee the plot is solvable, the duel worthy.
Meantime our stage will pile with poisoned years
Until we tell aright the prince's words,
And blood as proud as yours has built a prouder world.

David Bourne (1921-1941)

Pilot Officer, R.A.F., V.R., (British)

PARACHUTE DESCENT

Snap back the canopy,
Pull out the oxygen tube,
Flick the harness pin
And slap out into the air,
Clear of the machine.

Did you ever dream when you were young
Of floating through the air, hung
Between the clouds and the gay
Be-blossomed land?
Did you ever stand and say,
"To sit and think and be alone
In the middle of the sky
Is my one most perfect wish"?

That was a fore-knowing;
You knew that some day
To satiate an inward crave
You must play with the wave
Of a cloud. And shout aloud
In the clean air,
The untouched-by-worldly-things-and-mean air,
With exhilarated living.

You knew that you must float
From the sun above the clouds
To the gloom beneath, from a world
Of rarefied splendour to one
Of cheapened dirt, close-knit
In its effort to encompass man
In death.

So you can stay in the clouds, boy,
You can let your soul go onwards,
You have no ties on earth.
You could never have accomplished
Anything. Your ideas and ideals
Were too high. So you can stay
In the sky, boy, and have no fear.

Norman Brick

Flight Sergeant, R.A.F.

OF SNOW

This time the snow came fiercely down,
Battering with ice-sheathed javelins;
And the wind that blew it after it had fallen,
That too was fierce and scattered it in fine sprayed clouds.
But when the wind had faded, and the snow had fallen,
The frozen drifts beneath the hedges,
The rolled ground-drift,
Furrowed where posts the blast has cleaved;
And the scalloped pendulous hedge-drift,
Hanging wherever the bank was precipitous;
All these were smooth as though the fingers of the lightest summer
breeze
Had placed each crystal with infinite care.

In the lanes the only sound
Was the crunching of our shoes;
That, and the cracking of the sheeting
Around the twigs of trees and bushes
When the air trembled,
Or they were brushed by an unseen bird;
With now and then a tinkling,
As a tall tree shook its over-burdened branches.

As we went higher the hedges disappeared,
And the trees became fewer;
Until these too disappeared,
And the mountain heath lay all unbroken;
And with them disappeared the sheeting,
With them the cracking,
And the tinkling,
So that now there was no sound
Save for our shoes crunching.

Then as we reached the mountain's summit,
And stopped to gaze upon

The white cowls about us, and the black lined white of the vales
beneath us,
Then too our shoes ceased crunching,
So that now there was no sound save that of silence,
The deep sound-not-heard-by-ears of silence.

John Ciardi

Sergeant, U.S. Air Force

FOR MY TWENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY IN NINETEEN FORTY-ONE

So sleep undoes itself and I arrive
Awake to morning and to twenty-five.
Outside the ramblers climb their strings to summer,
The finished lilacs tumble, and from somewhere
The whistles call the seven o'clocks to be
Rich man, poor man, beggar man . . . and me.

This day it was or this day's night before
That mother screamed and father walked the floor
And sisters waiting strangely in the kitchen
Stared at the doctor and the busy women,
Hushed and uncertain, but unusually
Expecting something, and receiving—me.

And out beyond, some unknown come before
And passed into a uniform no more
Cursed mud and shrapnel, but across the arc
Of whistling shells and calendars took dark
To keep and carry, crossing violently
The door that swung another way for me.

And suddenly Now. And we are back again
To more than memory: those plucked dead men
Find images in every continent
Until it seems that all the world was meant
For running men and running boys to start
And fall like hawks, breaking the air apart.

And so good morning as the mornings rise
And through addition force our sleeping eyes.
Good morning, Mother, thank you for this day.
Good morning, Sisters, each a separate way

We have a place to go and thanks to give
To all from whom we learn a way to live.

And so good morning to such dead men, too,
Who teach the living that it may be true
The jig is up and the fiddling clatterbone
Put back in flesh is our own skeleton.
And so good morning with a day to save,
Cheating the future, and a chin to shave.

Good morning, anyone for any reason,
And if a second egg is a delicate treason
Against the bombers' sky and city's crater,
With Mother's blessing I will be that traitor.
Whatever engine sits the calendar
Not to die before is half the war.

The dead, calmly adjusted to their night,
Reach that condition by loss of appetite.
But here good morning as the mornings bring
The mind alive and stretched like a gull's wing
To try its daily lardering and be
Acrobat, scavenger, mariner—and me.

SONG

The bells of Sunday rang us down
And flowers were blowing across the town
Through faucets of the sun turned on.

For Mary's giggle and Martha's glance
The bankrolls flashed from pants to pants,
The Captain did a Highland dance.

Oh, there were troops in every door,
And liquor spilled on every floor,
And when the sun became a bore

We turned it off and hung a star,
For we were beautiful and far
And all the papers spoke of war.

And all night long from window sills
The Angels beckoned and the bills
Of visors turned and made their kills.

We burned like kisses on the night,
And talented and drunk and bright
We shed ourselves in colored light.

Because the train was at the gate,
And clocks were closing down the date,
And all the seas were running late.

CAMPTOWN

The streets that slept all afternoon in sun
Waken in neon. Now the buses run
In brightest bugeyes from the darkening camp,
Sway on the local traffic, stamp
Frantic brakes heart-inches from collision,
Bumble a new start, and by long revision
Kiss the stone curbs on which the doors are thrown
Wide, wider—and a drumbeat stirs the town.

Yellow skirt girl will you kiss me tonight
From the river farm to the marquis light,
The mail order catalogue home on the shelf
Modeling the dream of your dreamy self,
Red blouse girl on the spinning year
Blue hat, bright hat, here, here, here,
The kiss of your pose across your fright
And the kiss of the wish we wish tonight.

Whirling on the sidewalk, eddying the street,
Dammed where the juke box tom-toms beat.
Yellow skirt girl the dust I've seen,
Red blouse girl the days between
Breast and breast of a night in town,
The bugles tears and the lights turned down,
And the talk of you, the talk of you,
The silence and the center of the tents—of you.

Yellow skirt, red blouse, blue hat, bright,
Quilt the covers of your heart tonight.
Swallow me down the music's beat,
Follow my heart and follow my feet.
Follow my days to the weeks between
Where the land is the dust of a hot machine.
Follow where the drums and the brass run down
For the same dream brought us both to town.

Over the river and the running ranges,
Over the moon —While the record changes:
Last minute boogie, now, now, now,
In the park, in the doorway, no matter how—
Follow, follow, till the neons drop,
One by one the flash-signs stop,
One by one it's over and done—
And we're late and lost unless we run.

GOODMORNING WITH LIGHT

To Tom and Helen Ferril

Civilian for a pause of hours
With books and rooms and window flowers,
My uniform across a chair,
And the alarm clock pointing there
To unalarmed and perfect noon
Served up in bed (if ending soon,
Held perfectly, colored like sleep
And shadowless though moving deep)—
Like sleep, moved on a fluent fact
Too deep to need the static act
Of reason and the reasoned rise
Of commas and geometries—
Wakening delights a single thought:
The sun is up and I am not.

Goodmorning, then, with light prepared
Almost a day ago. Light shared

By half the world before it made
This last turn through the window shade,
And, after half a world, involved
John Ciardi in the thing revolved.

Goodmorning till another day
When morning comes another way,
And tooled and perfect past all thought
I am up and the sun is not.
Switches thrown and levers dressed
Precisely right, and buttons pressed,
Motors checked and energized;
And then the hanger door surprised
(As if a laminated shim
Took on the aura of a whim,
Or engines begged to be released
And, like Moslems, face the East)—

Machines and morning fixed upon
The starting spectrum of the dawn.

Timothy Corsellis (1921-1941)

2nd Officer, Air Transport Auxiliary (British)

THEY HAVE TAKEN IT FROM ME

They have taken it from me
Taken it far, far away;
The deep desire to see
The dawning of another, greater day.
Little I care.
High in the air
With a cloud as a shroud
I would dare death
The hurried snatching of the final breath.
All I know is that
My heart can glow to the thrill
Of hurling through the still air
Blind to all reason:
I can live my moment
Delight in fright
And desire the future, the sure "after-life."
I may ponder
Remember the importance of life at peace
And wonder that now
Life and death are the pressing of a button,
The signing of a scroll,
The explosion's toll.
But I cannot care
That is my madness.

THE THRUSH (*To N. A. W.*)

I plucked a throstle from the throat of God;
Into her teeming freckled breast I sent
Wanton destruction.
Boldly she sat upon the bough,
Outright she sang her song of joy
Constant and careless.

Sadist upon that holy spot,
I raised my gun—and shot.

Plucking immortal chords from life,
I stopped her song and stole
Her immortality.
Profiled she was against the sky,
A taste of world's reality
Amongst chaos, man's strategy.

Lord, much loved you her full-throated song.
Lord, pray forgive me—I did wrong.

ENGINE FAILURE

We are used to the murmur
The regular rumble of holocaust power
The turning propellers defying the air:
We are used to the thunder
The purposeful pounding of steel against steel,
The purring of pistons and petrol explosions.
But not
To the cough
The cacophony of failure,
A hope to recover,
A failure, a failure;
The regular rumble is rupted
An engine has cut on the take off
Broke, broke is the rhythm,
The seconds stand still for a pause
Then hurry their number on faster than speed
As precipitate fear of the pilot is pitched
To action,
 action rehearsed in pretence
Springs to reality, full fraught with fear
“The ground is uneven and hedges are there
We'll aim for the right of the woods
We'll try for the clearance down here;
I've taken the wheels up

Thank God that the wheels are unlocked.
She'll clumsily crash on her stomach
Her broad metal belly of steel
And slithering slide to a standstill
Or crash to the fear of the fence.
This may be the end and the end."
We leap from our chairs
At the first broken cough
At the first loss of power
"It's a Spitfire!" the cry.
We rushed from the room
Avid to witness the wound
Watch the fear fraught, the fatal
Fracture of normal procedure.
We know him, we know him,
One of our number in danger;
It might have been I
Goddam it, I wish it were I
With the will to thrill at the fear
And the danger of death that is near.
I wish it were I.
I heard a false laugh as she landed in safety.
American accent was cynically lifted.
"What are we doing? Goddam him he made it.
No sights of despair for to-day."

REPRESSION

Laughed at the old deliberate ways,
Hated the beautiful intolerable life,
Cut off his memory of those happy days
And watched the waters' intolerable strife.

There was a river
 under the bridge flowing.
There was an athlete
 rhythmically rowing
His pitched-up matchstick craft.
There was a stream-lined telephone

insistent in its petulant shrilling
An ambling answer to an easy question.
There was the down all pleasure
of the boy bending,
The masculine muscle and a soft shock
of thick blond hair.
He leaped, and into my body crept
the old moment when I watched him naked
Draw back his arm and loose the cricket ball;
tensed for a second was his body all
Brown in the sunlight, glistening in the sweat.
There was a woman, half-breed, darkling,
black hair falling, green eyes calling.
There was the muscle, but none of the intensity
of the summer sun and young disdain.
There was the lecherous eyes, hips swaying,
and the treacherous finger-nails playing
In and out of tangled hair,
soft, tousled, tangled hair.

Oh I want you, eyes and hair,
death and destruction;
Oh I want you, bending body,
death and destruction;
Poised for action, gritting breath,
death and destruction;
Black hair curling, blond unfurling,
death and destruction.

Boy's hair, soft to finger,
Black locks, let me linger
In the subtle writhing brown,
In the muscle moving down,
And the wicked eyes that wither,
Chest pinioned to twin fortress breasts.
Come, boy and girl with faces pressed,
Come,
Come hither.

Watch his horror-numbered eyes,
No longer capable of surprise,

Now they stand steady and cold
While laughter his face folds.
This was the man who leant against the bar,
Received his incremental remuneration,
Moved often, but never very far,
Talked only with those of his own station.

Then it fell, rending the air,
Blasting its death everywhere;
Oblivion for an unknown age
And the awakening in a timber cage.
The pressure of the beams across his chest,
The sudden sight of his one-time wife,
Her broken head and shattered breast
And a hopeless prayer for life.

A mind was paralysed,
An overdose of emotion
Fused its susceptibilities
Watch those eyes:
See them look and leap,
Move from side to side,
But never will you see them fill,
With love or hate or humour.
Here there is a real despair.

TO STEPHEN SPENDER

I had expected
A shrewd continental nose
And precision and confidence
In your eyes.
I had expected
That your body would have been small
Indeed it was necessary for you to be small
Stature in contrast with ability.
You should have been able to express
In rapid words and flowing fingers gestures
Some of those subtle things outside my grasp.
And had you come to me as this

I should have said to myself
"Corsellis, this is the very thing you expected
Here is your paragon of the present
A personified critique of the nineteen-thirties."
And I would have been bitterly disappointed.

But you were different
And I had built up strength to meet you.
You were more sensitive than sure
And I had prepared to be definite.
You were tall, ungainly tall
And your fingers were thin and arched.
I thought
"Perhaps I am mistaken,
Perhaps this man is more the poet than philosopher,
Perhaps there is more music than I know in his words
And more observation than dictation in his thoughts."
Before, I could see you sit down
And put unworthy words to great ideas:
Reform the wretched world with your mind
And interest a few men with your pen.
I had expected an overwhelming greatness.

Now I see you much as I am
You sit with a disturbance in your mind
An unknown energy
An embryo beating the walls of a tomb
And your pen scrapes the paper
And your mind knows relief
As an idea is born by expression
An unknown power is mobilized
And out of your repressed and hidden ideas
That you have neglected and battened down
Springs to a song a consummation
And the worried mind is rested
And the hot eyes are cold again
You sigh
You read out what you scarcely knew
And what you have discovered
Lying hidden and unacknowledged
Pleases you conscious
And is put to print.

Louis O. Coxe

Lieutenant U.S.N.R.

RED RIGHT RETURNING *

This red nun on my left hand leans away
From land's last fingerings and with the tide
Strains gauntly for the hundred-fathom curve.
From here on, navigator, let the sea decide.

Behind are promises that in our wash
Leap for fulfilment like this fairway nun,
Yet both must know bleak ecstasy of trust—
Brides to horizons when the ship has gone.

Yet this was known before. I come from coasts
Whose days are seaward-looking, where the hills
Grew round with watching for the China barks
And mackerel seiners hustling to their sails.

And I have need of all sea-silent men
Whose reticence was loosened in their sons:
Very and Hawthorne held their loneliness
By right of heritage and trampling winds.

Be with me now, you travellers into hearts,
And bring me lucky through each threatened night
That I may keep my promises and find
Known channels with a red nun on my right.

PIN-UP GIRL

Flat on the grey steel bulkhead arch her curves
Malsexed by a dimension. Inviolate tease
She whips unpaid desire down the nerves
A pale Aholibah embraced by eyes

* *The title is taken from the mariner's adage: red buoy on your right hand, black on your left, as you return to port from seaward. Red buoys are usually conical in shape, called "nun" buoys.*

Yet in the eye's possession she is more
Than pictured lust. Deception of surrender
Is here deception only, only the blunder
Of lens and body turns this symbol whore.
The heart in camera takes its symbols from
Possession, love, and childhood and collects
Pictures of scrapbook happiness, glued next
To blurred prints from the negatives of home
And mine, that built on symbols, is perplexed
To find you where it hid a bolted room.

DEAD MARINE

“Que hay un cádaver más ¿qué importa al mundo?”

—ESPRONCEDA

This is the death by water. This is dying
Bloat and fishbelly white a thing that slips
And slobbers on the groundswell. Denying
This to survival is the final lying
Before witnesses. This is the end of men and ships.

To die and turn to earth, to rot in the ground,
Is strait and comely. Slack on the tide's withdrawing
Plumped naked offal stinks along the wind
When the rolled wash shudders, facing down
Where aeons in the coral eke their slender growing.

I lobbed my hate in tracers at a pip—
This I have hated, say, This I yearned dead.
Muster that all out with a discharge chit
And make an end. Peace is the end of it,
A burnt-out tracer uninimical and dud.

When do the drowned break surface? Nine days, ten
Before that white slob is a dead Marine?
Question the civil proctors who convene
A parchment anger. This thing turns again
For good to sound the coral at the hearts of men.

Hubert Creekmore

Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.

MUSIC IN THE REC HUT

The pen stops in a phrase of a letter home,
The magazine drops in the sailor's lap,
Its romance defeated. Talk and jokes become

Lost in inner moods, as music wraps
The men in shining cords that wind
Back overseas, like hungry roots to sap

The strength of distant earth. It is behind
Their eyes the music lives, the frieze
Of Tin Pan tunes evolving scores designed

More human than all symphonies. The keys
Fling out from the upright cataracts
Of memory in every nimble piece.

Boogie-woogie, rhumba and waltz attack
The forfeit past, and rout out nights
Of Negro piano in a dim café, and shacks

For barbecue across America, sights
Of lonely childhood, dancing, kiss
Of lips in tree-spread dark, the wife who died

Last week, good times and good friends. For this
Is not the song of radio,
Whose texture conjures merchandise, whose voice

Is advertising. Here the song is no
Barren orchestration of guile,
But is woven with the tones that flow

From each man into it: how the bile
Of sorrow burned them, alchemy
Of love and laughter gilded the body's vial.

Through gray smoke clouds the men stare. Each eye
Entreats the curving walls to part
On the giant swirl of Scorpio in the sky,
And the sting of night and starlight in every heart.

POCKET GUIDE FOR SERVICEMEN

“. . . are not molesters of women” the book says,
Balancing in its hopefulness the rape
That spirals in the eye when women pass.

The tower of morale, as plotted in
A filing cabinet, skitters when
The first wind of custom touches it,
And is a sheaf of blowing papers. We,
Who value only sex and money, feed
Our own disaster with decreed pretense.

The sailor, under the feathers and scarlet bloom
Of flamboyants, invites the French girl
To whoredom, if she does not know his tongue.

The soldier thinks all women prey for him,
But prays within himself for one. The game
Has spare reward, win or lose, but shame.

Not hemispheric in its cause, it effects
A geographic contrast. Movie-fostered,
Pulp-fed, dreaming of money and sex,
We live the lives of Virile American Men—
An emptiness of mirror maze reflecting
The wretched ritual of the pool-room punk.

Here the pioneering spirit finds
Its last debased residence, and blind
To honor, honors nothing, so is honored.

It is too late to teach a fighter love
When he must kill. It is too much to build
Respect where none has been, or been owed.

DIVIDENDS

We are bringing back some canceled notes.
We have them here on the deck, in the bright sun,
With aluminum smears of ocean writhing under the heated clouds.

This is a sort of report to the stockholders.
Each figure on the diagram represents one thousand.

Item: a sailor, leg cut off.
Credit: votes for irresponsible politicians.
Item: a soldier, right arm missing.
Credit: copy and blurbs for conscienceless journals.
Item: a marine, face gone.
Credit:

But am I boring you? You probably want
To clip your coupons, and arrange a merger. . . .
Madame, how was I to know that one
Of them was your son? They are everybody's sons.
Sir, you might consider it a buy on margin—
A sort of side bet. You won on the larger
Investment, didn't you? . . . Am I cruel? Bitter?
Rolling here on the furnace sea with men
Who came back from Saipan and Guam, who still can grin,
Seeing the ship point eastward through the burning
Haze? Cruel? To this man who never will cross
His legs again, to this one slowly learning
To smoke and eat with his left hand, cruel to those
Who faced what did this and are not here?
Or cruel to your civilian heart? Look.
No, no. Come look. Look at these men—these boys.
From their faces you could imagine they
Had kicked a goal in a freshman game.
But in the night, in dark, in silence,
What do their eyes see that were opened by fire,
What do they think that will not let them sleep?

This is the return on your investment,
The "good buy" the Brokers told you about.
It was so cheap; yours for only sloth,
And the glorification of ignorance.

“Thank God, I’m just an ordinary man,”
You always said, and you scorned everything but money.
When you should have thought, you went to sleep.
When you should have read, you took the comic strip.
When you had to vote, you were in the movies.
When you should have acted a citizen, you acted a fool in a night
club.
Well, death is ordinary, too.

How you have deceived your children! Yes,
These, on this ship coming home to your arms,
Where you hope to cure them with sweets
Of the pretty frightened view of America they fought to preserve.
You dare not let them think of America they fought to build,
For your investment is at stake. You might lose
Something. You need not think of the bunks below,
That one where a skull is bandaged down to the mouth,
Around the chin a soft yellow down he would have shaved,
Except he didn’t quite make it back home.

Think of yourself and of them, and think
How your investment has paid.
These loans are canceled forever.

CONCERT AT SEA

Although the ship’s bell marks the time, it is
Not music’s time: a squad of sailors hammer
Paint from rusting plates in rippling beats;
The ventilators pour out noisy breath;
The public address calls, “Sweepers, man your brooms”;

Each side, the bow-wake hisses like the fall
Of silver chains: But somewhere there is music
Edging through the sound of discipline
And cleanliness. That was Debussy’s “Faun,”
Lost, though amplified, in modern life.

And now the Rose leaps through the window Weber
Little dreamed of; but our necessary

Noise of passage withers him to naught.
The boudoir is a drawing room; the garret
Hygienic where the chilly artist coughed.

The classic concept lives in dynamos,
And incantation will not charm it thence.
And yet, recall, there was a softer view,
The somersault of hearts, the mind's abeyance,
Sensuous webs—that, too, has been transformed.

In Paris cafés where golden gas-light steeped
The daring waxen bosoms with incandescence
The waiters now serve female lecturers.
Romance and wickedness cohabit sweetly
In those good bodies who yesterday

Kept their definitions strict and thrilling.
The faun? Perhaps that flying fish that skips
The slicing bow. The Invitation has been
Refused; the Rose, in truth, is spectre now.
Our course is secret; it is a time of war.

Paul Dehn

Major, Intelligence Corps, British Army

LAMENT FOR A SAILOR

Here, where the night is clear as sea-water
And stones are white and the sticks are spars,
Swims on a windless, mackerel tide
The dolphin moon in a shoal of stars.

Here, in the limbo, where moths are spinners
And clouds like hulls drift overhead,
Move we must for our colder comfort,
I the living and you the dead.

Each on our way, my ghost, my grayling,
You to the water, the land for me;
I am the fat-knuckled, noisy diver
But you are the quietest fish in the sea.

AT THE DARK HOUR

Our love was conceived in silence and must live silently.
This only our sorrow, and this until the end.
Listen, did we not lie all of one evening
Your heart under my hand

And no word spoken, no, not even the sighing
Of pain made comfortable, not the heart's beat
Nor sound of urgency, but a fire dying
And the cold sheet?

The sailor goes home singing, the sleepy soldier
May pin to the lit wall his lover's face.
The cocks, my darling, are allowed to crow,
But we must hold our peace.

Day, too, broke silently. Before the blackbird,
Before the trouble of traffic and the mist unrolled,
I shall remember at the dark hour turning to you
For comfort in the cold.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

Lo, where he loometh, a hulk elephantine,
Dragged from the down of a Bayswater bed,
Star of the East—Teheran or Levantine?—
Maker and Monarch and Regional Head!

Cold in his out-tray a cigarette moulders,
Cold on his in-tray are yesterday's jobs.
Cobweb and chrysalis spawn in the folders:
"X. via Y. for attention and obs."

Here, men of England, is my hope and your hope,
Here the bright bulwark if Washington fails.
Chief of Relief for a sliver of Europe,
Waistcoat and watch-chain and two dirty nails.

Toast him, Democracy! Vodka and highball,
Picon, de Kuyper's and cold lemonade!
Tortoiseshell specs and a yellowing eyeball
Guide where our country's redeemer is laid.

Richard Eberhart

Lieutenant-Commander, U.S.N.R.

THE GROUNDHOG

In June, amid the golden fields,
I saw a groundhog lying dead.
Dead lay he; my senses shook,
And mind outshot our naked frailty.
There lowly in the vigorous summer
His form began its senseless change,
And made my senses waver dim
Seeing nature ferocious in him.
Inspecting close his maggots' might
And seething cauldron of his being,
Half with loathing, half with a strange love,
I poked him with an angry stick.
The fever arose, became a flame
And Vigour circumscribed the skies,
Immense energy in the sun,
And through my frame a sunless trembling.
My stick had done nor good nor harm.
Then stood I silent in the day
Watching the object, as before;
And kept my reverence for knowledge
Trying for control, to be still,
To quell the passion of the blood;
Until I had bent down on my knees
Praying for joy in the sight of decay.
And so I left; and I returned
In Autumn strict of eye, to see
The sap gone out of the groundhog,
But the bony sodden hulk remained.
But the year had lost its meaning,
And in intellectual chains
I lost both love and loathing,
Mured up in the wall of wisdom.
Another summer took the fields again
Massive and burning, full of life,

But when I chanced upon the spot
There was only a little hair left,
And bones bleaching in the sunlight
Beautiful as architecture;
I watched them like a geometer,
And cut a walking stick from a birch.
It has been three years, now.
There is no sign of the groundhog.
I stood there in the whirling summer,
My hand capped a withered heart,
And thought of China and of Greece,
Of Alexander in his tent;
Of Montaigne in his tower,
Of Saint Theresa in her wild lament.

DAM NECK, VIRGINIA

Anti-aircraft seen from a certain distance
On a steely blue night say a mile away
Flowers on the air absolutely dream-like,
The vision has no relation to the reality.

The floating balls of light are tossed easily
And float out into space without a care,
They the sailors of the gentlest parabolas
In a companionship and with a kind of stare.

They are a controlled kind of falling stars,
But not falling, rising and floating and going out,
Teaming together in efflorescent spectacle
Seemingly better than nature's: man is on the lookout.

The men are firing tracers, practising at night.
Each specialist himself precision's instrument,
These expert prestidigitators press the luminence
In knowledge of and ignorance of their doing.

They do not know the dream-like vision ascending
In me, one mile away: they had not thought of that.
Huddled in darkness behind their bright projectors
They are the scientists of the skill to kill.

As this sight and show is gentle and false,
The truth of guns is fierce that aims at death.
Of war in the animal sinews let us speak not,
But of the beautiful disrelation of the spiritual.

THE FURY OF AERIAL BOMBARDMENT

You would think the fury of aerial bombardment
Would rouse God to relent; the infinite spaces
Are still silent. He looks on shock-pried faces.
History, even, does not know what is meant.

You would feel that after so many centuries
God would give man to repent; yet he can kill
As Cain could, but with multitudinous will,
No farther advanced than in his ancient furies.

Was man made stupid to see his own stupidity?
Is God by definition indifferent, beyond us all?
Is the eternal truth man's fighting soul
Wherein the Beast ravens in its own avidity?

Of Van Wattering I speak, and Averill,
Names on a list, whose faces I do not recall
But they are gone to early death, who late in school
Distinguished the belt feed lever from the belt holding pawl.

THE PREACHER SOUGHT TO FIND OUT ACCEPTABLE WORDS

They drop with periodic regularity
From the summit of their goodness, young, to death.
They leap to the blue
And it is out of the blue
Comes Death the Enemy.

Some young flier
When he least expected it slips,

Before he ever got into combat, in a training plane,
Before a backdrop of high-puffed, idealistic clouds,
Towering, still, complete, high, like all his dreams,
In luminous heat of sweaty Pensacola.

Closeness to machines going fast gives man brazenness,
Lags him back to brute-heart: who should be
Full of moral imperatives does what he is told,
Is cheerful, counts not the cost, gets in his licks.

The fine body needing no thought, working perfectly,
Has to be discounted, hands capable:
Least likely to do when
Seeing the superiority of the airman's eye
(Unsupplanted by scholarship)
Tools of justice high in the air!

One, to marry tomorrow, dead today,
Broaches the rude history of the world,
This descendant from the sky and man;

While we watched him pulsing with the others,
A painted ship upon a painted sky,
Diverted from swimming a moment when he dropped.

WORLD WAR

Flutesong willow winding weather,
Tomorrow lovely undulant today,
Glorious bird glide in forest glade,
In meadow golden lissom girl dance,

Tremble air with never yesterday,
Grassy twirling boyfoot triumphing,
Budding bough drops lovely lording,
Pearling cuckoobrook cool ecstasy,

Woven from lucid sunny nest,
World of mellow willow mist,
Now forever pleasures piping,
Honey supple body wonderful:

Strike down! batter! shatter! splinter!
Destroy! fracture! cripple! butcher!
Knock! beat! whack! cuff!
Ruin! gash! smash! blast!

Baby Red Breasted Chained Nippled,
Pavement Clattering People Crippled,
Youth Courageous Finger Felled,
Nutty Manhood Maggot Shelled,

Buzzards Smiling Char the Sky,
Pain Caressing Bites the Eye,
Grass Has Adders Time Vipers,
The Heart Burns its Lifted Ladders,

Howls the Whirlwind Over the World,
Tempests Quaking Shake the World,
The Earthquake Opens Abrupt the World,
Cold Dreadful Mass Destruction.

Frederick Ebright

T/Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Force

MEMORIAL TO THE GREAT BIG BEAUTIFUL SELF-SACRIFICING ADVERTISERS

Look, we don't give a hoot if Zippo-Fasteners have gone to war
(millions of us, by some strange coincidence, have done the same
thing);
and it isn't likely to break our hearts if we can't buy one today
or tomorrow or whenever it was we were going to buy a Zippo, or
whatever for—
we believe Life will somehow go on.

And it doesn't matter too terribly much to us in the front lines
if Old Cask whiskey is rationed: not to us for whom it has been
rationed so thinly that we haven't seen a label in eleven months.
Cease worrying us with your nobility: yours is no national disaster;
your apologies are beginning to wear thin.

*If your magazine is late—
If you can't reserve a lower berth—
If you can't purchase Durafilm—
If your long-distance call is held up—
So what! Cease the (advt.) threnody:
nobody's going to die because of this.*

War in itself is a vulgarity; it should not be an excuse for advertisers
to parade their enormous sacrifice behind a thin screen of bond pleas,
of shallow regrets, of four-color-process hypocrisy. We can stand
only so much
of a hard-luck story; then we begin to wonder about your sincerity.
Isn't the government paying you for your product? Okay, then—
pipe down!
We're being paid too for our blood and our legs and our eyes and
our arms,
and we're not making a full-page song-and-dance about it.

The pattern is all too familiar: bright shells burst on the page;
tanks rear and planes crash (the artist's conception of war)
in the midst of well-ordered disaster. Not so much blood and filth,
of course, as to offend good taste—oh, the immaculate conception of
war—
and then the sob-line about no cigarette lighters today, no bath scales,
no aluminum lids for your poor, poor desolate cleansing cream:
some day somebody will fracture an arm thus publicly waving a flag.

The woman in Saginaw who reads the telegram of regret
from the government, for her only son—
and the lad on the cruiser who's just seen his pal
blown to hell in a loud flash—
they too feel the impact of war, but they can't put their grief
in a \$5,000 lithograph and ask you to cry with them.
There is a dignity in silence.

Gavin Ewart

2nd Lieutenant, R. A. (British)

SONNET

The point where beauty and intelligence meet,
Where intersecting lives cross and divide,—
Happy were I to lie between those feet
Or by that rare and warm and lovely side—
You are the centre of my moving world,
The cold ideal to which I daily move
Although iron flags of battle are unfurled,—
You are not yet, though might still be, my love.
And I, before the happy, tough battalions
Engulf me or the frozen seas of Norway,
Have still my dreams of cities and of dalliance,
But most of you as standing in a doorway,
Who might, though I so dissipate my life,
Be mistress or, fear of the young, a wife.

THE BOFORS A.A. GUN

Such marvellous ways to kill a man!
An "instrument of precision," a beauty,
The well-oiled shining marvel of our day
Points an accusing finger at the sky.
—But suddenly, traversing, elevating madly,
It plunges into action, more than eager
For the steel blood of those romantic birds
That threaten all the towns and roads.
O, that man's ingenuity, in this so subtle,
In such harmonious synchronization of parts,
Should against man be turned and be complaisant,
The pheasant-shooter be himself the pheasant!

CIGARETTE FOR THE BAMBINO

Hey, Joe! Cigarette! Cioccolat'!
Egg and chips?
Wanna eat, wanna drink?
Vermouth a very good
Very nice
Wanta girl? Wanta woman?

In filthy streets of handsome towns
Black market kids accost the soldiers—
Under the pictures of the Virgin Mary
Whores give themselves for tins of bully
And still amidst a starving population
The priests ecclesiastically waddle
As fat and sinister as any gangster.
Catholicism, black market of the soul,
That holds this wretched country down,
Corrupted state, corrupted crown,
Dangles its tarnished tinkling Heaven
Above this maze of medieval squalor.

Gone all the good of European culture,
The hangover of 'taste' in tawdry chapels,
Fat cherubs and madonnas puffed like clouds
A throbbing, over-sexed and maudlin music—
O, that the centuries should show so little!

The beauty of the girls and children
Shining through rags, their friendliness,
The easy kindness of a Latin people,
Lacking the hardness of the French,
Brutality of the conceited German,
Deserve a better heritage than this.

Naples, 31st May 1944

WHEN A BEAU GOES IN

When a Beau goes in,
Into the drink,
It makes you think,
Because, you see, they always sink
But nobody says 'Poor lad'
Or goes about looking sad
Because, you see, it's war,
It's the unalterable law.

Although it's perfectly certain
The pilot's gone for a Burton
And the observer too
It's nothing to do with you
And if they both should go
To a land where falls no rain nor hail nor driven snow—
Here, there or anywhere,
Do you suppose *they* care?

You shouldn't cry
Or say a prayer or sigh.
In the cold sea, in the dark,
It isn't a lark
But it isn't Original Sin—
It's just a Beau going in.

26th November 1944

“FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS”

Aircrews have had it and the war goes on
And I have had it if I die tomorrow,
Not needing the marvellous conceits of Donne
Or any word of fear or sound of sorrow.
Love I have had, the climax of all lives,
Traditionally the enemy of death,
That like an Old Testament prophet power-dives
And takes away the hard-drawn, precious breath.

Yeats read much in old poets all his life
And prophecies and dreams of golden sages,
Condensed past wisdom into a few pages,
But in his passionate intellectual strife
Had not the art new generations praise,
To cram a lifetime into seven days.

James Forsyth

Captain, British Liberation Army

TO MY WIFE

You're in my mind.
I did not bring you there.
You should be where my hands can touch your hair;
where your four eyelids drawn across your eyes
express that gem of ultimate extasies—
our tear.

You should be here to let me care.
I care.
But in a mind concern can only stare,
restrain the hands
and hate what put you there—
this war.

You're in my mind.
Your belly—swan against my hand—is there.
Your sweet breasts droop like clouds and in the air,
as shiny, limping rooks and magpies flap
from tree-tops which my eyes let in—despair
erects its famine lusts in this fat land;
for I'm in Surrey and you're in my mind.
You're in my mind, dear, cramped against a brain
that has you where my body cannot claim
more than this care—
to stifle what I'd smother in your hair,
your breasts, your milk-white belly. Oh my love!
you're lying in myself too high above
the roots of longing level with my thighs.
I cannot even plant across your eyes
what brushed your lashes and re-sealed our joy,
dreamed like alabaster behind bars
and moulded in this full mind his pale face

You're in my mind
with him for whom you care
who now must suck the milk you must infuse

with this despair—
this separation curse embraced in war.

March 1941

SOLDIER'S DOVE

The tension in the tendons of her wing
is not the peace a dove should bring to one
—Symbol of balance—in her beaded eye
she dare not weep and drop her symmetry
so all the doves of heaven in snowy peace
should lie in cushioned heaps like autumn leaves
transposed to feathers. What her flight brings me
is negatives of flight—the plane in the sea,
the under-water life of the dragon-fly
and the worm's familiarity with the grave;
yet in younger beings saved my shame
the wing will love its tensions and the dove
invent new feather-strains for nothing more
than the extasy of falling like a fan
beyond our war.

Belgium, October 1944

ARTILLERY SHOOT

The landscape's private and all that it contains
shimmers with my pulse-beat. In a ring
double-vision in a tube of steel
makes the war warm as my tongue;
while between my teeth my double lung
clouds the crystal lenses till the scene
steadies and clears to keep my target clean.

“One round ranging.” “Target easy shot one.”

A little church is centred in my glass
like an underwater coral edifice.
I shift the little thing to segments where,
clear of the black graduation marks, I see
the dutch foreground with little "polder" cows;
and when my wrists are tired the church will come
back below meridian and the trees
quiver with exhaustion.

Orders given—
impersonal as the lenses (media
for automatic reaction—life as drill)
Radio shout, "Shot one!" There is no thrill
of expectation; but hearing is raised a tone
till a tangent thump across the outer earth
gives her birth who shortly dies a moan
echoing all the modern halls of hell
as a curve of promise (but no arc-en-ciel.)
Wrists must not tire us; eyes must scan
swivelled within the circle of my scene . . .
"Shot!" my little church sends up a flower
of delicate dust and smoke, stands soundless till
sounds lag across the polders and the "crump"
confirms the fading dust-flower and the tower
steadies with my landscape and stands still.
Radio:— "Add fifty!" Thump again.
Radio:— "Shot one!" Steady the scene!
The little pointed steeple is so fine
unreasonable blessings and inbred relief
settle on her as the black spurt comes
and billows smoke beyond her, pitching grief
where a miniature sow—ignorant of war—
trailing her pink litter after her
scatters in the straw. Sheep fan out fear
and a black horse stampedes in my green polder.
(The glasses make slow-motion of his lope;
his mane waves as great waves slur in a sea
seen little from a cliff-top). "Smoke. Cap on!"
Steady the scene again—a cloud in the sky
drops into my view like a falling swan.
Again the explosive birthrate in the rear—
crump of the last shot comes while I still hear

the whistle of this. "Shot!" from a model farm
the snake of dust this time, then snakes of flame.
The landscape's private and I cannot see
the kitchen table splintered and the dog
"bomb-happy" in a corner, sneering at
devils-of-nothing doing wonders yet
never present. . . . and the horse in the stall
foaming to root the staple from the wall.
Smoke-froth issues from this white-wash gem
of farms idyllic; little tongues of flame
lick along the pantiles venomously,
scarlet and unreal embroidered by
black smoke fringes; now the little pink sow
goes bowling mad across the polders to
a sanctuary not built for her but man.
Perhaps the Nazi sniper in its tower
reviews his courage in the face of flame
and looking for escape-ways finds no stair,
hesitates and has the time to see
the pig in panic in the knave below
squeal against the scream his head rose to
when up among the echoes with the bells
fate boomeranged him from the hell in his head
on to the hell-on-earth his hands had made
not fit for pigs. "Shot!" The glasses search.
"Two rounds gunfire. Shot!" my little church
disrupts in sudden columns of grey dust.
The scene is private . . . but my wrist is tired;
and it was not I who fused the shells we fired.
"Stand easy guns!" (at your range death's a prig
too dignified) "I'm sorry about the pig."

British Liberation Army, October 1944

G. S. Fraser

Sergeant, R.A.S.C., M.E.F. (British)

NILOTIC ELEGY

Sometimes I seem to see gliding the green
Ghost of a landscape, sometimes other summers
Were marginal upon the summer scene,
Sometimes the river's waft was wet with rumours
Of other scents, the tingle of the sea,
Sometimes the passing walker was the echo
Of one who waits on other shores for me,
Sometimes the sliding mask of the felucca
Spoke of enchanted summer voyages
Through rhododendrons or past shining bathers
To all my lost imaginary Venuses:
Sometimes these thoughts would have my doubtful sharers,
Sniffing the odours of a green sick youth
That spilt its promise on the soils of fancy
And in the rose and tulip found its truth.
Sometimes I thought how broken and how chancy
The tides of every sexual river are
That make the sandy valleys black and fertile
To crop a maggot summer of despair.
But yet I weave the rue and yet the myrtle,
But yet I weave the laurel, and I find
Still stained with a green magic from the south,
Weeds of a boy's desire, my Theban flood.
O walls of Karnac, buttress in your blind!
From the high sources to the stammering mouth
I chose the sun and every chance of blood. . . .

ROSTOV

That year they fought in the snow
On the enormous plain, the rivulets
Thick with the yellow thaw, and darker, dark
With what at distance might be blood or shadows:

Everything melted, everything numbed, broke,
Every hand was pawing at desolation
And the huge, stupid machine felt a shudder.
It did not matter about all the dead
For what better than death in battle
(The sick voice said in the belly,
"What better than death in battle?")
And the heart had been numbed long ago
Against particular pity (yes, and some,
And some have had their pact against all pity:
"If we ask mercy, let it be counted weakness,
And if we repent, let it be counted strategy!")

But the artillery in its tremendous
Asseveration of another existence
Was like the mask of Lenin, thundering power
From a controlled centre. And lumbering
Came the great new tanks, and always
The artillery kept saying, "You make
An effort but it exhausts itself,
Everything meets its shock." And some
Seemed to hear in its thunder, just
The syllables of that strong man, "They want
A war of extermination, let them have it!"
And there was always, blinding and stupefying
The snow, the wet, the shivering soddenness:
And a purpose against one roused that meant death.

So the thing began to stagger, lumbering back,
Reeling under these statements, propositions,
The oratory of the last argument death:
Hammering, hammering, hammering home,
"One man is like another, one strength
Like another strength, and the wicked
Shall not prosper forever, and the turns
Of history bring the innocent to victory:"
The guns lashing like Churchill's sentences
Or the blows of a whip.

The terrible strength of Tolstoy,
And Dostoevski's vision, Lenin's silences,
The great, crude, broad-thewed man with innocent eye

Standing like a queer rock in the path:
And lashing death like lightnings from the heavens.

That year it had rained death like apples,
That year the wicked were strong. But remember
That the time comes when the thing that you strike
Rouses itself, suddenly, very terribly,
And stands staring with a terribly patient look
And says, "Why do you strike me brother? I am Man."

A BOUGHT EMBRACE

Holding the naked body I had bought
Half gingerly, my chin upon her shoulder,
And gently shuddering in her arms I thought:
"We choose the easier way, as we grow older.

"Ten minutes till the cinema begins,
And time to still the hollow vessel's grief,
Buy off the dream of sorrow: all my sins
Shock easily upon this cushioned reef,

"And all desires seem captious and remote:
On a calm swell, without the grief of wishing,
I bob in sunlight with my little boat,
And hardly notice where my thoughts are fishing . . .

"What could they dredge from all that sea, but love?
Those I desired and laid my hands upon:
Those me desiring whom they could not move:
And those desired, but not by me touched, gone.

"What matters, whom I wrote my sonnets to,
Whose letters hurt me, who disturbed my dreams?
I do not think I find them here in you.
I find myself. Which matters more, it seems.

"I do not think my shillings buy your love.
What should she care about her customer,
Who knows, whatever he is thinking of,
He is not thinking especially of her?"

“And yet I think you do not wish me ill,
So unexacting in your arms I lie,
So gently leave the voyage to your will,
Till the craft capsize and the steersman die . . .

“Why think, indeed? The body knows the story:
A single shudder brings the boat to wreck.
Purged of all ecstasies, I feel no more . . . I
Lightly with dry lips brush your placid neck.”

THE TIME

The time demands a rolling eye,
Demands an indecisive gesture,
Demands a slithering journalist's look,
Pinned to no point, but quick for all,
Demands the most extended concept
Of pain, or politics, or cities
And screams against intensities,
Calls out with its names of cities
Our minds to be where we are not,
Our pain to be other than our own:
The time, a bit aside from any
Point we did intend to make,
Crushed our conversations with
Its cruder moral argument. The time,
Like a delator, denounces:
Is a spy in the heart. Has its
Intimate horrors (like a schoolmaster
Denouncing masturbation), assures us
If we take our eyes for a second
Off the ball, we shall soon turn
Into Hitler or De Sade. It has
So many knives, so many slogans,
So many things to die for—and death
Is not enough, unless you die
For exactly the right slogan—
And considers immoral all
Mere incentives to live. The time

Is sly, malicious, has an evil eye.
A glib and abstract time. I hate
The time; I would desire to
Have time, in time, to live without
The crushing weight of purposes.
They say everything must be done
And nothing properly. I would wish . . .
But those who ride wishes like horses
Find when they come to take their fences
Their bottoms fall with a hard bump
On the cold stone ground.

The time

Demands so much, a nagging woman,
Denouncing our impotence, or else
Our salaries, our hobbies, and our friends,
That we forget its own false promises
And that we should be masters of the time.

Roy Fuller

S/Lieutenant, R.N.V.R. (British)

JANUARY 1940

Swift had pains in his head.
Johnson dying in bed
Tapped the dropsy himself.
Blake saw a flea and an elf.
Tennyson could hear the shriek
Of a bat. Pope was a freak.
Emily Dickinson stayed
Indoors for a decade.
Water inflated the belly
Of Hart Crane, and of Shelley.
Coleridge was a dope.
Southwell died on a rope.
Byron had a round white foot.
Smart and Cowper were put
Away. Lawrence was a fidget.
Keats was almost a midget.
Donne, alive in his shroud,
Shakespeare in the coil of a cloud,
Saw death very well as he
Came crab-wise, dark and massy.
I envy not only their talents
And fertile lack of balance
But the appearance of choice
In their sad and fatal voice.

OCTOBER 1942

The shade, the light, the figures, the horizon as
An illness, daily retreating and advancing:
A brilliant ball where no one ceases dancing,
A darkened room whose objects all are mass—

Across confusion, movement, momentary
Perceptions cut, as symbols present themselves
To poets, though the convenient nymphs and elves
They know fall short of truth as does a story.

And these: the giraffes that lope, half snake, half horse,
A slowed up film; the wildebeest with faces
Of mandarins; and soft bright zebra racing
Over the plain, unreal as rocking horses;

And sometimes in the mess the men and their
Belongings, paper thin, become detached
From their background; and my mornings all are patched
With pallid newspapers about the war.

And should I be asked to speak the truth are these
What I should try to explain and leave untold
The unformed wish, irrational or cold
Actions, the phantoms of ancestors and trees?

For what can be explained? The animals
Are what you make of them, are words, are visions,
And really they are moving in dimensions
Impertinent for us to use or watch at all.

And of the men there's nothing to be said:
Only events, with which they wrestle, can
Transfigure them or make them other than
Things to be loved or hated and soon dead.

It is the news at which I hesitate,
That glares authentically between the bars
Of style and lies, and holds enough of fears
And history and is not too remote.

And tells me that the age is thus: chokes back
My private suffering, the ghosts of nature
And of the mind: it says the human features
Are mutilated, have a dreadful lack.

It half convinces me that some great faculty,
Like hands, has been eternally lost and all
Our virtues now are the high and horrible
Ones of a streaming wound which heals in evil.

SADNESS, GLASS, THEORY

I watch the curious hastened trait of twilight
Here as I drink my poignant coffee and
Look out across the wide street through the central
Island of palms at steady darkening stone.
Fretted by pale green leaves and silhouettes
Of banks and consulates, the sky is smooth,
As smooth as tightened silk, as loose as water.

Cast up by war upon this freakishly
Quiet and neutral shore I should deliver
A statement, a summing up, an integration
Of all the passion, boredom, history,
Of all the suddenly important lives;
A statement as of apples like Cézanne's.
I wish myself as sure as he appears,
And wonder if the hesitancies, defects
Of observation, awful gaps in feeling,
Experience, will in retrospect be lost
In the expression of my limited art,
Whose surface like those convex mirrors may
Contain a little but an exact world.

I see the future like a theory,
The proof of old pamphlets, as ordained erectness
After an age of stooping, or the knowledge
Of murderous glaciers in a million years.
The future is tomorrow but today
I fold my blanket and that moment is
Immense: I walk across the airfield and
The aircraft, like stuffed birds, are there for ever
And horrible to touch. The present is
A lucid but distorting medium,
As though the cunning of perspective had
Been lost by nature and all was flat and savage
And terribly more truthful. Only the past
Is real, and real because it's understood.
Having presented us to guns and ice,
To fear and the desert, it remains as sadness.
Like age remembering sexually its youth,
It cannot be remembered without pain.

There is no luxury of sentiment—
Simply regret, as those regret in bedlams
Their last concession to madness.

Wait upon
The sloth of history living through you, and
You reach at last the day of infinite loss
Or hear guns die seditiously to silence.
There is a time when on reality
The vision fits, and sadness, glass and theory
Fuse and, as easily as squadrons clear
The sky, the mass directs its destiny.
The integration is the action, I
Can only scribble on the margin: here
We mourned our dead; here saw strange stars revolving
As the struck ship swayed from the pointed convoy;
Here suffered in the sun, here snow; and strangely
Realised here that out of all the world
Only one other in our life would know us.

WHAT IS TERRIBLE

Life at last I know is terrible:
The innocent scene, the innocent walls and light
And hills for me are like the cavities
Of surgery or dreams. The visible might
Vanish, for all it reassures, in white.

This apprehension has come slowly to me,
Like symptoms and bulletins of sickness. I
Must first be moved across two oceans, then
Bored, systematically and sickeningly,
In a place where war is news. And constantly

I must be threatened with what is certainly worse:
Peril and death, but no less boring. And
What else? Besides my fear, my misspent time,
My love, hurt and postponed, there is the hand
Moving the empty glove; the bland

Aspect of nothing disguised as something; that
Part of living incommunicable,
For which we try to find vague adequate
Images, and which, after all,
Is quite surprisingly communicable.

Because in the clear hard light of war the ghosts
Are seen to be suspended by wires, and in
The old house the attic is empty: and the furious
Inner existence of objects and even
Ourselves is largely a myth: and for the sin

To blame our fathers, to attribute vengeance
To the pursuing chorus, and to live
In a good and tenuous world of private values,
Is simply to lie when only truth can give
Continuation in time to bread and love.

For what is terrible is the obvious
Organization of life: the oiled black gun,
And what it cost, the destruction of Europe by
Its councils; the unending justification
Of that which cannot be justified, what is done.

The year, the month, the day, the minute, at war
Is terrible and my participation
And that of all the world is terrible.
My living now must bear the laceration
Of the herd, and always will. What's done

To me is done to many. I can see
No ghosts, but only the fearful actual
Lives of my comrades. If the empty whitish
Horror is ever to be flushed and real,
It must be for them and changed by them all.

A WRY SMILE

The mess is all asleep, my candle burns.
I hear the rain sharp on the iron roof
And dully on the broad leaves by the window.
Already someone moans, another turns
And, clear and startling, cries "Tell me the truth."

The candle throws my shadow on the wall
And gilds my books: tonight I'd like to bring
The poets from their safe and paper beds,
Show them my comrades and the silver pall
Over the airfield, ask them what they'd sing.

Not one of them has had to bear such shame,
Been tortured so constantly by government,
Has had to draw his life out when the age
Made happiness a revolution, fame
Exile, and death the whimsy of a sergeant.

But without envy I remember them,
And without pity look at my condition:
I give myself a wry smile in the mirror
—The poets get a quizzical ahem.
They reflect time, I am the very ticking:

No longer divided—the unhappy echo
Of a great fault in civilization; inadequate,
Perhaps, and sad, but strictly conscious no one
Anywhere can move, nothing occur,
Outside my perfect knowledge or my fate.

SPRING 1943

1

The skies contain still groves of silver clouds,
The land is low and level, and the buzzards
Rise from a dead and stiff hyena. Hazards
Of war and seas divide me from the crowds
Whose actions alone give numbers to the years;

But all my emotions in this savage place
This moment have a pale and hungry face:
The vision metropolitan appears.
And as I leave the crawling carcass, turning
Into the scrub, I think of rain upon
Factories and banks, the shoulders of a meeting:
And thoughts that always crouch in wait come burning—
Slim naked legs of fabulous and fleeting
Dancers, and rooms where everyone has gone.

2

Always it is to you my thoughts return
From harrowing speculation on the age,
As though our love and you were fictional
And could not ever burn as cities burn,
Nor die as millions, but upon a page
Rested delightful, moving and immortal.
This momentary vision fades. Again
You join the sheeted world whose possible death
Is also ours, and our nostalgic breath
Expires across two continents of pain.
And clearly I see the organizations of
The oppressed, their dangerous and tiny actions,
The problematic serum of the factions,
In these decayed and crucial times, as love.

3

Intelligent, fair and strictly moral as
A heroine of Jane's; here where the hill
Is in another country and shadows pass
Like towns, I think of you so civilized still.
And in that chaos of Europe which surrounds
Your little calm I see those leaping, rising,
Almost engendered by the times, the hounds
Of courage, hawks of vision, and the surprising
Gazelles of love. And so I run through all
The virtues, and this hopeless, barbarous space,
Which sometimes I think the future's self, can fall
Into its ancient and forgotten place.
No, I will not believe that human art
Can fail to make reality its heart

Bernard Gutteridge

Major, South East Asia Command, (British Army)

BURMA HILLS

Sometimes in the hills
Satin pink orchids with a delicate
Stamen of violet pendant from a tree,
Head high shift in the intricate
Pattern of green brocade;
And higher in the gloom fade
Like a coin thrown in the sea.

Sometimes in the hills
Water light crowded is the jewel;
Candelabra breaks in a cascade,—
Noise flames and fuel
Consuming itself in the grey stone
Falls to the ferns alone
To the mystery of shade.

Sometimes in the hills
Fireflies drift and festoon
Dark foliage like drifting stars
Under the eye smarting moon.
The gunfire's halo of red
Flames brightly round the dead:
These hills bear human scars.

PATROL: BUONAMARY

Beyond the white dust flushed by the carriers
A scene of mangrove and sea:
Ten small figures running stumbling over the hill,
Over bullets yelping after like harriers
Keen on a kill.

And that was all the enemy's resistance.
The potbellied children fondled
Tommy guns and Brens; brought bananas; stared.
The chalk road gashed into the distance,
The sea glared.

The men swim idly all the afternoon,
Beech leaves on the brilliant water;
The tide dropped; stems of the mangroves shiny and seal black
Lifted tight green sheaves from the lagoon;
The horizon went slack

With orange sunset slipping into the sea.
Sentries were detailed and posted.
Night followed the shadows, snakes of fire leapt
Where the men smoked and brewed their tea,
Gossiped and slept.

And in the policeman's house I slowly sipped
The poisonous rum with some alarm;
Admired a photo of De Gaulle, laboured: "oui,
Paris avec us Boches, madame,
Ce n'est pas Paris."

NAMKWIN PUL *

Each soldier as he passes looks at their breasts
Laced tightly in child like bodices (in Northern Burma, the full
Breasts of the Indian women are unfashionable)
And lets his glance run

Over the full hips to their hard ugly feet.
They come to our small market with eggs for sale.
Yesterday there was one girl dressed in crimson
Who lolled with a whore's walk

And plucked a flower with a sudden gesture
So that her breast came free from her longyi—

* PUL: bridge; LONGYI is pronounced Lunjy and is a cotton or silk skirt that everyone wears.

As she intended—and at the soldiers' whistle
Pretended to be shy.

But most are prim as they follow their bullock carts
And crossing the Namkwin Pul avert their eyes
For standing in the pink sunset that glides
Along the kine grass spears

Knee high in the water the soldiers soap their thighs
And crack their bawdy jokes—brown to the waist.
And gleaming white bottoms—a hundred of them—
Shock the Burmese lasses.

John Hay

Sergeant, U.S. Army

AND GROW

As patience paints the flower red, so grass
binds heaven with its cautious love. Slowly
their roots divide the earth, which draws
down rain to fill its metrics, and their leaves
devour jewels before the pauper snow.

What spawns is shaped in war, as spiders spin
toward death in their becoming. Hollow shells,
and filigree of bones, align the sea,
where fishes run below the salt-torn ships,
and birds conform to air, with bending wings.

We have the flower's veins, the fish's blood;
we ran like deer before our birth; our rage
was tempered in the caution of an ant.
In depth of leaves, we will engage the sun,
and grow like birds, from ugliness to wings.

RAILWAY STATION

Goodbyes and griefs come here to join the world,
leaving their hideaways apart to meet
in hospitality; and travellers
have made a land of what their roofs secrete.

A web of parting, in a thread of roads
which lead through porches, graying with the dust
of talk, and parlors holding back their pride,
waiting for God to sweep away their must;

through attics asking witness of the time
their clothes stood up like sundials, making shade
and hours touch and question all their folds;
through what is old that keeps the young afraid.

And paths through summer pastures, where the birds
conduct down granite slopes and fields of song
to milk and sun, loud humming in the eaves,
and boys who run to bring their pails along.

The roads go down the shelves, where fruits and jam,
the pale and purple, shine in palaces,
seeds of the dew and the begetting dawn;
where flowers die in kitchen chalices.

From shacks and willows, walls and wrestling vines,
bare foot that stumbles on a stone, and shoe
that creaks on creaking stairs, the roads run out
to join their sphere and shadows' rendezvous.

A silence comes to silence, shape to shape,
and memories that flow in separate veins
put faces on the fresh or sorrowful;
as tracks lead inward to the waiting trains.

Alfred Hayes

Private, U.S. Army

THE CITY OF BEGGARS

The wops came down to the port
When we docked
Dressed in the most fantastic rags,
Infantry caps on their heads
And feet tied in flour bags,
A garibaldian cape and throat scarved
With a dirty towel,
Half wild and half starved.
We threw them bread and cigarettes
Crowding over the starboard rail
To see what Italy was like.
They ducked their heads in an awful thanks,
Cramming the bread in a tin pail.
And we who had come on the foreign ship
Risking shark and submarine
Looked at the city the troops had won.
She lay in the Mediterranean sun
Under her moored balloons
With great holes knocked in her
As though with a wild hammer.
Fallen masonry and dust
Hanging balconies and stairs
Iron and iron rust
Abasso Il Duce on warehouse walls
And no glass anywheres.
Ruined and in ruins.
And American and Britisher
Who'd shelled her vias
And mined her waters
Hung on the pitted walls of their quarters
Their bulging aphrodites,
Rinsing their loneliness with cheap wine.
Morte del fascismo! Too late, too late.
The operatic dream and the reclaimed Caesar

Dredged from the swamp
Had climaxed in this:
Typhus and the walls down,
The gas escaping with a slow hiss.
And the adored jaw, the blared news,
To heat the mild Italian blood,
The second empire
From Tunis to the Nile
Had triumphed so:
The kids flopping in soldier shoes,
A cigarette picked out of the mud,
The bread depots and the water doles
In the tin cup,
The garibaldian cape shot full of bullet holes.

Italy, April 1944

THE DEATH OF THE CRANEMAN

Happened like this: it was hot as hell
That afternoon, sand, stone dust, the sun,
We were in the mountains.
Drinking-water was by the gasoline drum,
We were all drinking like fish that day.
He must have come down from the crane
For a drink I guess, a cigarette
Might have done it, blew it bang up, that drum.
Like dynamite been dropped in it.
We came running down from the mountains.

The blacksmith got to him first: gasoline
Had made a bonfire of him, and we shouted
Craneman! Craneman! with the wops talking
Their language, and nobody knowing his name.
Standing there you could see him, a flame
Lighter and yellower than the sunlight,
And burning, hands and feet, his hair on fire,
Getting up from the ground, standing there,
Yelling out of the fire, flame shooting white

In the sunlight: Lemme alone! Lemme alone!
I'm all right!

Well, we get him here and here he dies.
And that's where we buried him out there,
In the goldenrod beyond them pines.
It's a Potter's Field and nobody'd care.
We dug the grave with our drills and hands.
You got to bury a guy somewhere.
Funny I thought as I looked at him
Blackened, with a pair of holes for eyes,
You bury a stiff and there he lies,
And Christ only knows where he come from
And whether there's kids somewhere or a dame,
We buried him like he came in this world,
A stiff, naked, without a name.

Rayner Heppenstall

Private, British Army

FLEUR DE LYS

In Honour of France

Men do not long endure the light,
Love confuses the heart.
The proudest cause is the best betrayed,
The loveliest woman gets most hurt.
For the world's sake,
This lily trampled underfoot
Not for the last time dare not fade.

TAMMUZ

At first I went apart. And now I see
This wound along my thigh has let me go
And put a shadow where my gold would be.

I was that Lord in whom the people owe
Their land's increase. I am that Mortal who
Regards a plain this people cannot know.

The soil is powder. No breath sidles through.
Small is the rain. Its threads of scum convey
A want of definition: final you.

But have you no remission when you pray?
Now that your body is untouched by me,
Does not my truth (asserted through the clay)

Bleed up the fact of one anemone?

Randall Jarrell

Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Force

THE EMANCIPATORS

When you ground the lenses and the moons swam free
From that great wanderer; when the apple shone
Like a sea-shell through your prism, voyager;
When, dancing in pure flame, the Roman mercy,
Your doctrines blew like ashes from your bones;

Did you think, for an instant, past the numerals
Jellied in Latin like bacteria in broth,
Snatched for by holy Europe like a sign?
Past sombre tables inched out with the lives
Forgotten or clapped for by the wiggled Societies?

You guessed this? The earth's face altering with iron,
The smoke ranged like a wall against the day?
The equations metamorphose into use: the free
Drag their slight bones from tenements to vote
To die with their children in your factories.

Man is born in chains, yet everywhere we see him dead.
On your earth they sell nothing but our lives.
You knew that what you died for was our deaths?
You learned, those years, that all men wish is Trade?
It was you who understood; it is we who change.

THE DEATH OF THE BALL TURRET GUNNER

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

PRISONERS

Within the wires of the post, unloading the cans of garbage,
The three in soiled blue denim (the white ball on their backs
Sending its chilly *North* six yards to the turning blackened
Sights of the cradled rifle, to the eyes of the yawning guard)
Go on all day being punished, go on all month, all year
Loading, unloading; give their child's, beast's sigh—of despair,
Of endurance and of existence; look unexpectedly
At the big guard, dark in his khaki, at the dust of the blazing plain,
At the running or crawling soldiers in their soiled and shapeless green.

The prisoners, the guard, the soldiers—they are all, in their way, being
trained.

From these moments, repeated forever, our own new world will be
made.

2ND AIR FORCE

Far off, above the plain the summer dries,
The great loops of the hangars sway like hills.
Buses and weariness and loss, the nodding soldiers
Are wire, the bare frame building, and a pass
To what was hers; her head hides his square patch
(A bird falling to a lobster from a star)
And she thinks heavily: My son is grown.
She sees a world: sand roads, tar-paper barracks,
The bubbling asphalt of the runways, sage,
The dunes rising to the interminable ranges,
The dim flights moving over clouds like clouds.
The armorers in their patched faded green,
Sweat-stiffened, banded with brass cartridges,
Walk to the line; their Fortresses, all tail,
Stand wrong and flimsy on their skinny legs,
And the crews climb to them clumsily as bears.
The head withdraws into its hatch (a boy's),
The engines rise to their blind laboring roar,
And the green, made beasts run home to air.
Now in each aspect death is pure.

(At twilight they wink over men like stars
And hour by hour, through the night, some see
The great lights floating in—from Mars, from Mars.)
How emptily the watchers see them gone.

They go, there is silence; the woman and her son
Stand in the forest of the shadows, and the light
Washes them like water. In the long-sunken city
Of evening, the sunlight stills like sleep
The faint wonder of the drowned; in the evening,
In the last dreaming light, so fresh, so old,
The soldiers pass like beasts, unquestioning,
And the watcher for an instant understands
What there is then no need to understand;
But she wakes from her knowledge, and her stare,
A shadow now, moves emptily among
The shadows learning in their shadowy fields
The empty missions.

She hears the bomber calling, *Little friend*,
To the fighter hanging in the hostile sky,
Watching the ragged flame eat rib by rib
Along the metal of the wing into her heart:
The lives stream, blossom, and float steadily
To the flames of the earth, the inextinguishable
Citizens of everybody's heart, the flames
That burn like stars above the lands of men.

She saves from the twilight that takes everything
A section shipping, in its last parade—
Its dogs run by it, barking at the band—
A gunner walking to his barracks, half-asleep,
Starting at something, stumbling (above, invisible,
The crews in the steady winter of the sky
Tremble in their wired fur); and feels for them
The love of life for life. The hopeful cells
Heavy with someone else's death, cold carriers
Of someone else's victory, grope past their lives
Into her own bewilderment: The years meant *this?*

But for them the bombers answer everything.

AN OFFICERS' PRISON CAMP SEEN FROM A TROOP-TRAIN

It is some school, brick, green, a sleepy hill,
That blazes from the train's turn in its wire.
Nightly the guns are set, the cold guards yawn,
The lights burn for the sleepless prisoner
Who works like a gopher through the dirt of time
To climb this midnight back to his own war.

At first he waited: read, slept, or heard the lies
They told him always—the interminable defeats—
Till he began to see—next year, next year—
What he remembered from his childhood, Peace:
The marks papering a wall, the hungry weeping,
The machine-guns pulsing in the workers' streets.

Numb, filthy, shivering, he sees again
The stars dim behind the eternal lights of man
And sobs. It is, as it has been, the joy of men
To escape from another's evil to their own.
Here, so like, so different, is all that you had planned.
Think, as you tremble in the new world's air,

That more than seas, than continents, the years
Lie absolute between you and those wars
You wished, worked out, and thought at last were yours.
Here, here around you are your colonies;
Here in the midnight of the alien wilderness
The mastering races forge their destiny and yours.

Teach me the meaning of my world too well
For you or it to be endurable to me;
Last, till the states, the years, end here with you
To cough their blood out on the neutral earth.
Die, soldier, while the guns learn everything
From your thin body pinned against the light.

THE SOLDIER WALKS UNDER THE TREES OF THE UNIVERSITY

The walls have been shaded for so many years
By the green magnificence of these great lives
Their bricks are darkened till the end of time.
(Small touching whites in the perpetual
Darkness that saturates the unwalled world;
Saved from the sky by leaves, and from the earth by stone)
The pupils trust like flowers to the shades
And interminable twilight of these latitudes.

In our zone innocence is born in banks
And cultured in colonies the rich have sown:
The one is spared here what the many share
To write the histories that others are.
The oak escapes the storm that broke the reeds,
They read here; they read, too, of reeds,
Of storms; and are, almost, sublime
In their read ignorance of everything.

The poor are always—somewhere, but not here;
We learn of them where they and Guilt subsist
With Death and Evil: in books, in books, in books.
Ah, sweet to contemplate the causes, not the things!
The soul learns fortitude in libraries,
Enduring patience in another's pain,
And pity for the lives we do not change:
All that the world would be, if it were real.

When will the boughs break blazing from these trees,
The darkened walls float heavenward like soot?
The days when men say: "Where we look is fire—
The iron branches flower in my veins"?
In that night even to be rich is difficult,
The world is something even books believe,
The bombs fall all year long among the states,
And the blood is black upon the unturned leaves.

SOLDIER (T. P.*)

When the runner's whistle lights the last miles of darkness
And the soldier stumbles into the hard green clothes
(From the night where his earth is the dream of a stranger
And the years are stripped from his heart like a sigh;
Where death and life and their child are—civilian)
And stands for his hour there in the cold green lines
That are always waiting for something, or waiting;
There wakes in the cropped dusty head, one supposes,
In the blistered hands, in the soft uneasy eyes,
The smell of the ages where no one is dying
And the old dog stirs in his sleep in the sun:
The world where they marry and live in houses.

But his house and his wife are—pending; and the life
That was his to starve in, to waste as he chose,
Has no option now: the iron unchanging
Chance that had governed his price like a plate's
Is smashed for an instant, as the atoms' wills
Are fused in the grim solicitude of State.
Yet it is not You the sergeants hoarsely
Curse at there where the traveling sand
Obscures the relief-map of the parade-ground.
That You may be, perhaps—as Justice
May be, may be; *this* world's justice
Is here, is now—as you too are, soldier.

What have you learned here? To bear, and be silent.
To do what I must, as I must: that is, to die.
What are the soldier's answers? Yes, sir;
No, sir; no excuse, sir. . . . *But (sir) there is no room there, to die—
To die or to live. . . .* Hush, no one is listening.
Ask as you please, there is no one here to reply.
Here what they teach is other people's deaths;
Who needs to learn why another man should die?
Who has taught you, soldier, why you yourself are dying?
And there is no time, each war, to learn.
You must live or die as the dice are thrown on a blanket;
As the leaf chars or is kindled; as the bough burns.

* T. P. means Title Pending: the interviewer writes this, in pencil, on the recruit's Form 20, and his job title is filled in by another worker, an expert in these things.

LOSSES

It was not dying: everybody died.
It was not dying: we had died before
In the routine crashes—and our fields
Called up the papers, wrote home to our folks,
And the rates rose, all because of us.
We died on the wrong page of the almanac,
Scattered on mountains fifty miles away;
Diving on haystacks, fighting with a friend,
We blazed up on the lines we never saw.
We died like aunts or pets or foreigners.
(When we left high school nothing else had died
For us to figure we had died like.)

In our new planes, with our new crews, we bombed
The ranges by the desert or the shore,
Fired at towed targets, waited for our scores—
And turned into replacements and woke up
One morning, over England, operational.
It wasn't different: but if we died
It was not an accident but a mistake
(But an easy one for anyone to make).
We read our mail and counted up our missions—
In bombers named for girls, we burned
The cities we had learned about in school—
Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among
The people we had killed and never seen.
When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;
When we died they said, "Our casualties were low."

They said, "Here are the maps"; we burned the cities.

It was not dying—no, not ever dying;
But the night I died I dreamed that I was dead,
And the cities said to me: "Why are you dying?
We are satisfied, if you are; but why did I die?"

Sidney Keyes (1922-1943)

2nd Lieutenant, R.A. (British)

ELEGY

(In Memoriam S.K.K.)

April again and it is a year again
Since you walked out and slammed the door
Leaving us tangled in your words. Your brain
Lives in the bank-book, and your eyes look up
Laughing from the carpet on the floor:
And we still drink from your silver cup.

It is a year again since they poured
The dumb ground into your mouth:
And yet we know, by some recurring word
Or look caught unawares, that you still drive
Our thoughts like the smart cobs of your youth—
When you and the world were alive.

A year again, and we have fallen on bad times
Since they gave you to the worms.
I am ashamed to take delight in these rhymes
Without grief; but you need no tears.
We shall never forget nor escape you, nor make terms
With your enemies, the swift-devouring years.

REMEMBER YOUR LOVERS

Young men walking the open streets
Of death's republic, remember your lovers.

When you foresaw with vision prescient
The planet pain rising across your sky
We fused your sight in our soft-burning beauty:
We laid you down in meadows drunk with cowslips
And led you in the ways of our bright city.

Young men who wander death's vague meadows
Remember your lovers who gave you more than flowers.

When truth came prying like a surgeon's knife
Among the delicate movements of your brain
We called your spirit from its narrow den
And kissed your courage back to meet the blade—
Our anaesthetic beauty saved you then.
Young men whose sickness death has cured at last
Remember your lovers and covet their disease.

When you woke grave-chilled at midnight
To pace the pavement of your bitter dream
We brought you back to bed and brought you home
From the dark antechamber of desire
Into our lust as warm as candle-flame.
Young men who lie in the carven beds of death
Remember your lovers who gave you more than dreams.

From the sun sheltering your careless head
Or from the painted devil your quick eye,
We led you out of terror tenderly
And fooled you into peace with our soft words
And gave you all we had and let you die.

Young men drunk with death's unquenchable wisdom
Remember your lovers who gave you more than love.

Stanley Kunitz

S/Sergeant, U.S. Army

CARELESS LOVE

Who have been lonely once
Are comforted by their guns.
Affectionately they speak
To the dark beauty, whose cheek
Beside their own cheek glows.
They are calmed by such repose,
Such power held in hand;
Their young bones understand
The shudder in that frame.
Without nation, without name,
They give the load of love,
And it's returned, to prove
How much the husband heart
Can hold of it: for what
This nymphomaniac enjoys
Inexhaustibly is boys.

REFLECTION BY A MAILBOX

When I stand in the center of that man's madness,
Deep in his trauma, as in the crater of a wound,
My ancestors step from my American bones.
There's mother in a woven shawl, and that,
No doubt, is father picking up his pack
For the return voyage through those dreadful years
Into the winter of the raging eye.

One generation past, two days by plane away,
My house is dispossessed, my friends dispersed,
My teeth and pride knocked in, my people game
For the hunters of man-skins in the warrens of Europe,

The impossible creatures of an hysteric's dream
Advancing with hatchets sunk into their skulls
To rip the god out of the machines.

Are these the citizens of the new estate
To which the continental shelves aspire;
Or the powerful get of a dying age, corrupt
And passion-smear'd, with fluid on their lips,
As if a soul had been given to petroleum?

How shall we uncreate that lawless energy?

Now I wait under the hemlock by the road
For the red-haired postman with the smiling hand
To bring me my passport to the war.
Familiarly his car shifts into gear
Around the curve; he coasts up to my drive; the day
Strikes noon; I think of Pavlov and his dogs
And the motto carved on the broad lintel of his brain:
"Sequence, consequence, and again consequence."

THE HEMORRHAGE

The people made a ring
Around the man in the park.
He was our banished king
Of blames and staunchless flows,
Exhibitor of the dark
Abominable rose;

Our chief, returned at last
From exile, with the grim
Stamina of the lost,
To show his sovereign hurt.
Wildly we dreaded him
And the strong god of his heart

Escaping, crawling down
Ditches where papers blow,
Smearing the sills of the town,

Strangling the hydra-drains
Coiled under. Stop! We know
How much a man contains.

We picnicked all that day,
Dishonored signs that nayed us,
Pulled marigolds, were gay
Before the apes, smashed glass.
Rifles could not have made us
Keep off the bloody grass;

For we were sick of crimes
Against us, and the head
Pitched on the absorbing *Times*,
And no one to accuse,
And nothing paid for, and we read,
We read that day what blotted out the news.

Patricia Ledward

Driver, A.T.S. (British)

EVENING IN CAMP

Mist and cold descend from the hills of Wales,
Relentless as a flood they cover
Deep valley, wood and town,
They creep into our hut,
We cough and shiver:
The oak leaves fall against the door
And somebody murmurs: "It feels like snow."
The work is done, the violence of the day
Goes westward with the sun:
To weary senses all things are
The tone of khaki, hair and eyes and skin,
And girls relaxed on chairs and floor are still
With the stillness of saints;
The light is dim and voices
So slow it seems they dream.

At this hour of quietness we wonder:
Where are we? What are we doing?
Perhaps we are players in a Russian scene,
Crouching around the stove discussing
Love and death and the dusty path of time:
Or it may be that we pause
In one of life's vacant places
Where nothing happens,
Where we wait for evolution wondering
What are we doing?

Somebody pokes the fire; the sparks
Rush up the old tin chimney, the coal
Scatters in blue and crimson light.
We remember the pit lads who we saw
Going for lunch through country lanes
To poor cramped homes,
This jet of flame is like the laughter
On their grimy faces.

Some of us think—our thoughts are soft
Because our life is harsh;
Some of us scan the tender, drifting faces
Of our friends to stanch our fear;
We are all so much the same, it is only the weak
Who believe they are different,
Who give themselves airs;
Peace has elusive qualities we do not understand,
We do not turn our minds in that direction,
Nor do we seek for joys not worth the seeking,
But sometimes features shrivel with a lonely pain,
Calling for help we cannot give.

Rest, rest, do not speak. It is right
That the dying year should fill you with dark grief,
Give yourself up to the coming and going of life
Let the leaves and the snow drift over your heart
If you would rise to the sun like a phoenix.

Alun Lewis (1918-1944)

Lieutenant, South Wales Borderers

TO EDWARD THOMAS

(On visiting the memorial stone above Steep)

I

On the way up from Sheet I met some children
Filling a pram with brushwood; higher still,
Besides Steep church an old man pointed out
A small white stone upon a flinty spur
Projecting from the high autumnal woods.
I doubt if much has changed since you came here
On your last leave: except the stone: it bears
Your name and trade: — 'To Edward Thomas, Poet.'

II

Climbing the steep path through the copse I knew
My cares weighed heavily as yours, my gift
Much less, my hope
No more than yours.
And like you I felt sensitive and somehow apart,
Lonely and exalted with the friendship of the wind
And the silent afternoon enfolding
The dangerous future and the smile.

III

I sat and watched the berried dusky ridge
Of yew trees, deepened by oblique dark shafts,
Damming the flame of red and gold and russet
That leapt from beech and ash to birch and chestnut
Along the downward arc of the hill's shoulder;
And sunlight streaming from the windblown branches
Softly explore the distant wooded acres
And plotted tilth, and with discerning fingers
Touch the white farmsteads one by one with lightness,
Until it reached the Downs, whose soft green pastures
Went slanting sea- and sky-wards to the edge
Where sight surrenders and the mind alone

Can find the sheeps' track and the grazing.
And for that moment life appeared
As lovely as the view I gazed upon.

IV

Later, a whole day later, I remembered
This war and yours, and your weary
Circle of failure and your striving
To make articulate the groping voices
Of mist and snow and dripping branches
And winds that screamed against the cottage eaves
And ringed the candle-flame with lurid dumb
Shadows that jiggled distorted round your head—
While in the stricken room there was no ease
For you or Helen or those small perplexed
Children of yours who only wished to please.

V

Divining this, I knew the voice that called you
Was quiet and neutral as the sea's
Arc, or the grey horizon; stronger
Than Night's immediate grasp, the limbs of velvet
Oblivious as the blood; and growing sharper,
More urgent as all else dissolves away—
Projected books and anniversaries
Of weddings cold as history—
The dream beyond the fact, and farther still,
The final fact beyond that final dream,
The endless rides of stormy-branched dark
Whose fibres are a thread within the hand
Till suddenly, at Arras, you possessed that hinted land.

TROOPSHIP IN THE TROPICS

Five thousand souls are here, and all are bounded
Too easily perhaps by the immediate purpose
Of wheel and compass, holding plotted courses
As steady as the ploughshare cleaving England.

The sun-deck for the children and the officers
Watching the mid-sea blue until the nurses
Pass with the soft excitement of a breeze;
Idle and brown they lie beneath the awning.

Deep in the fetid holds, and crowded bunks
The sweaty bodies struggle for their sleep.
The gamblers on the hatches; by the bulkhead
The accordionist and barber ply their trade.

And on hunched knees a few are scribbling letters
And others, sulking in a stray dejection
Curse the hot smell of oranges and feet
And chafe against the night's nostalgic fetters.

But everywhere in this sweltering Utopia
In corners where the shadows lie like water
In the bareheaded crowd's two minute's silence,
In dog-eared photographs of wife and daughter
Are countless pools of crystalline reflection.

Time is no master here; this torrid blueness
Blazed in a fortnight from the English winter;
Distance is subject to their moods and wishes,
And they are free to contemplate the ocean
And watch the limpid flash of flying fishes,
Only the void of feeling must be filled.

And as this ship makes peace within herself
The men with tattooed arms and rugged features
Emerge, the simple donors of a wisdom.
Composed of scraps and crusts of all that happens
Every man listens to these unknown teachers.

Welsh songs rise softly in the darkness;
Thoughts sail like swans toward the English winter;
Time hardens. But the bitter Now grows gracious.

Emanuel Litvinoff

Lieutenant, British Army

ALL RUIN IS THE SAME

All ruin is the same, the form of death
is wasted like the body of a child,
not by any means a sacrament, nor mystery
presented perfectly in prayer. The hideous mask
that fastens to a face has less significance
than the act of indifference, and is less horrible.

It would be easy to say, "This is necessary,
it will end war, suddenly produce the blessing,"
if imagination had been omitted
by the Power whose idea of justice is poetic,
to say the least: but this distorted shape is real,
the crushed bones beneath rubble the ravaging hunger,
not your placid sorrowful abstractions.

So you must suffer inevitably no matter how impervious
your numbed heart is to pity. What terrible visitation
will come upon you, who can say? The seven plagues
were merciful, sparing all but the first born.
Perhaps a black wind will bury even those
who prayed carefully the whole time and stopped
their ears against the evil bombardment.
It is a likely image, anyway.

One might almost say, "What nonsense this fellow writes,
why, he hasn't even bothered to present it decently.
Such offensive, lugubrious stuff, too."
It makes no difference. Write an elegant verse
in the manner of a Greek tragedy, if you like,
but you haven't given an artistic shape to Life.
Or perhaps Death would be more appropriate?
So why should my protest be formed to please?
Even Christ crucified wasn't a pleasant sight,
although He has inspired the orderly and beautiful.
The various attitudes of suffering are agonising
rather than uplifting.

There is no point in cataloguing them, adding
depression to depression.
All ruin is the same.

REDEDICATION

We saw truth shining through the shabby compromise
and closed our eyes.
We wove spider-webs of theory and shrank
from the insect's death.
Like derisive urchins, we mocked simplicity.
Many were the works of our hands,
but our hands betrayed their work.

Harsh laughter pursuing the tremulous victim,
The shame, yes, the shame of it. . . .
Our hearts fled weeping to dishonorable retreats,
Away from our crimes.

Standing between all these and what is next to come
we make our atonement.
First, in suffering. With grim retribution
let us grasp the open wound.
Let us see the world crumble in this avalanche
without pity for ourselves,
Who could spare but a tear and a penny
for the agony of others.
Let us know the full agony, and survive.

The fruit is coiled within the wounded earth,
Springtime waits in the graveyard.
We are hunters and make a prey of our happiness,
Why pursue what is waiting for us patiently?

Standing between all these and what is next to come
we make our atonement.
In suffering; then in rededication.
We give ourselves to the truth we saw and lost.
To all men we extend our comradeship;

The love we have for our children, to them
and to theirs.
This also, that none shall build a barrier
between our hearts,
And our hands shall be guiltless and open.
That this clear flame shall burn undiminished, we say,
No man shall go hungry while the earth yields.
And thus to the earth we pledge assistance
in the fulfilment of her purpose.

All these and more. . . .

Here in the silent dedication of our eyes,
Will live our conscience with such pure surprise,
That understanding will flash through the arrested mind.

GARRISON TOWN

Here ploughshares rot and farmers
Are like masons, city clerks and clods
Of arid soil,
For sweat can force no sweetness
From the barrack-square.
The straight furrow, twisted in an iron-mould,
Is lost and waits resemblance.

Men swarm upon the town
Like locusts of insatiable appetite,
Settling when evening comes
Upon the devious routes of boredom;
And hear the excited girls stir like grasses
Rustling thirstily before the dry storm.

Here is a forest in full summer:
Trees strong and tall like sentinels
Guard the fierce marriage of their roots;
But no leaf. . . .
Habit is harder to destroy,
For see how time, simulating
Sunday afternoon, rots from within,
And leaves the robust shell
Unaware of death.

It walks beside indifferent churches,
Casting no shadow.

Yet life is life
And beats a louder call
When unrelieved pain
Spreads from a throbbing central heart
And radial mind
Into monotonous streets.

If we are more than groping pain,
If we are more than soldiers,
Can we separate desire and death?
And must these streets form scabs,
The smiling fields grow sick
While little shops hoard luxuries, and avarice
Gleams in the commercial eye?

WAR SWAGGERS

War swaggers past the window
Where youth, promiscuous, seeks the utter
Refinement of desire;
I think war is death, perhaps,
But again it springs from monotony to pain,
And I think war perhaps is birth.
But is it after all the taking of each other
With bitter casualness
And the fumbled flirtation?
I think perhaps war is the crowded brothel.
Then, when the flung night searches
Each eye of fear,
Is war a rodent monster eating flesh hollow?
Never the answer in the obvious wound,
Nor the botched death;
Somewhere in the young men swaggering randily
Is the answer; I sense it in the girls on heat,
Even more in such disease
As wracks our hungered limbs,
When gaunt men lie writhing in the night
Dreaming of their wives.

Willard Maas

Private, U.S. Army

LETTER TO R

It is the memory of the peacock and the muses
Green on the ancient urn that haunts the midnight and
The visions of the anacondas
Sleeping in the harp and the kisses. Hand
I hold against my heart, forever hold me. Praise
Gratitude and desire my faith portends
If beckoning you call me home to happiness.
The paratroop boy at my side with his barracks dreams
Of heroes and girls and knives speaks from his bed.
I answer the yes. Out of this martyrdom
I wish only the future caged blue in your eyes with the cloud
And the bird, but behind the lie stands the blood and the gun.
What can I give you then but my anguish and the need
Which grows from the arms' want through desolation.

ON READING GENE DERWOOD'S "THE INNOCENT"

Death of the innocent by the innocent
Endured! Poet, asking for Death who asked for Life,
Rare as rose by savage new-spring sent,
Warm welcome to the bursting eyes, O living leaf!
Over us all the act we all repent,
Over us all the pall, the deed, this grief.
Dare the tongue cry out but what *our* guilt repents?

Everyone being the cause of everyone's pain,
Under star, under war, under the look of joy
Great as the marble smile from Greece, everyone
Endures the mutual crime. The flying-boy,
Nightward to murder lifted, in his heart-stone,
In which like the thunder-rock the amethysts lay,
All acts in their secret core bear the violet jewel then.

Ben Maddow

S/Sergeant, U.S. Army

THE CITY

Children of the cold sun and the broken horizon,
O secret faces, multitudes, eyes of inscrutable grief,
great breath of millions, in unknown crowds or alone,
rooms of dreamers above the cement abyss,—and I,
who all night restive in the unsleeping rain,
awoke and saw the windows covered with tears.

I heard, like the noise of melting rivers, the concourse of the living:
all hours mingled, violent, murmuring, or bright:
the cheers; the radio; the metal shriek of the accident;
the whisper of hired affection, hit of the week;
applause; gunfire on the screen; and at night the tragic houses
issuing like voluble flame the outcries of the city.

Yet none pronounced the truth, no hand disclosed
the heartbreak behind the muted door, denying all.
I longed to read letters therefore which were never sent,
to pierce walls, covers, silences, part the sad lips,
to stand by warm bed and witness the instantaneous dream,
put my hand in men's foreheads and clasp the beating spring.

The girl in the park cried *Juan! Juan!* but it was not I.
None answered, but I felt the breath of unknowable love.
Dawn silent: an old woman climbed with dry hands
the iron stoop where her daughter feared to give birth.
None spoke, but waited to watch the discolored twins drawn forth,
wrapped on the bed, together, born to the extremes of neglect.

Light on the painful eyelids, agony of beginnings;
the assault naked against the edges of the world;
then the long childhood inexplicably kind or cruel;
the boy fingering himself, the flush and the blind pulse,
the maiden touching the first blood of sex;
still ignorant of desire, the double wilderness.

Life smiles with heavy breast: her children run
forward with shouts, hunger, the impulse of free affection;
but each gets punished for his open face, each falls
twisted, twisted returns, gets dreaded blow, and turns
back screaming into that room at last, into himself
obscure, restful with lonely forces, like the sea.

The young return,—but cold, with skin-tight mask,
seeing this city honors most the most false:
the lady behind glass, untouched by human hand,
with plaster pubis, thigh and docile belly
lifting the admired fabric up for sale,—
while the living long to wear her enameled eyes.

Within is dearer merchandise: men and numbered words
cold, vehement, or admiring, as the price demands;
where the painter hangs for sale beside his work;
the critic, the peddler, and the smiling acrobat;
toady and plagiarist for the price of one;
and a masked surgeon offering jars of happiness.

The sheen, the glamour, and the marvelous fanfare,
the alluring neon and the porcelain smile,
the arranged caress of furs, the forearm blazing with dollars,
the headlines bought in advance for the subnormal beauty;
and all life long the shoppers with laboring hearts
desire and possess at last: the corpse in cellophane.

Black halloween! I walked with the crooked nun;
heard the cruel father sob in the empty room;
and households dining together in daily hatred;
the posed hysteria, and the idiot calm; and those
whose love was poisoned with delay, I saw still smile,
—and felt in myself forever the anguish of understanding.

O lost people! O vendors of desperate myths!
Who prints the cold path of stars that promise voyages?
Who markets the daydream to the tubercular,
puts obscene clothing on the frigid wife,
makes woman its soft automaton, and man its bed,
and brands the false face on the living flesh of the child?

I read the smooth journals, but they gave no news of this.
Who rents the cells of this city? Whom shall I learn to kill?
The mysterious pencil? The dealer in abstract food?
Or past the chrome-steel and the politeness of corridors,
with row of buttons summoning tears or flattery,
at his old powerful desk, the immaculate imbecile?

As I walked on the glossy avenue, and with morose fire
thought the immense proud fraudulence to vivisect,
I heard the derision and the girls' duet of laughter
of two who stopped before me with flaunting hair,
insulting the photo of the noted man,
who, finger in his printed cheek, could not reply.

All three we drank together, mentioning love,
delights, friends, quick passion, and the fine pale sky.
So rapid cognac glittered in our heads,
while I to each gave sumptuous years; to one
her house with windows full of the green sea light;
and foretold one to have love wherever she goes.

And late, after the headlong passage of first desire,
now two alone, we lay awake in murmuring ease,
and spoke again of happiness, and of the elan of flight,
and as outdoors the high branch yielding to invisible air,
so she to her wish to learn the touch of that wind,
hold motor, and ride on the immeasurable gestures of space.

Night dwindling, from how many tranquil hands, white
morning extends the beautiful directions of the world;
luminous chasms, city of vertical south, north,
upward, dark march of windows, inlaid each by that star
softening with precious light in streams of dawn
toward the close court, the black leap, and the suicide's open eye.

Like a fall forward into time too fast, is death,
springing in each the coil of irreversible years:
the lymph and architecture of the self,
unique delirium, lust, and dreams of lightning,
the body remembered in luscious movement or at ease,
names lost forever, and childhood of wonderful snow.

Knees broken backward, refugees from life,
leaving behind the houses they have lived in,
the sweat on the walls, the toilet, the hateful embrace,
the colored mottoes and the step of the insane son;
or failure driving like point of dynamite into the heart
lifelong, till they escape across the impossible sill.

O space that lifts the monoplane strong did suck them down,
this act upon this stone; and shadows on it of living people,
noon, and dark twilight, and night with argon peaks,
matchless city, terrible, and I cried aloft
what monster, O what monstrous foot
here trod, leaving in blood the measure of its corruption?

Rages in this packed town, in this wilderness of hands,
beast over mankind, ruling with cruel mark;
on the delicate mind, on the beautiful mouth like syphilis,
sometime on everyone, on myself horrible I have seen it:
the perversion by money, wasting, mad, and universal,
measure of humanity, and its heavy assassin.

Here the strict labor of the many must support
the monotony of the useless; and luxury is got
with smiles, false kindness, marriage, or embezzlement;
he who can feign desire, praise poison, or hang by his teeth,
lives well, accumulates the powerful bond,
receives inhuman honor,—but the kind man is strangled.

Vaulting metropolis, under whose diagrams of eloquent light
wrestle decay and energy, both blind,—
I went in your purest hours, and met with friends,
some with familiar calm, or gay, or drunk in the bright rooms,
but I heard the terrifying pulse of other selves:
on the face of each I touched unknown the invisible tear.

In the membranes of the skull there lie in millionfold
powers and memories, and I find them forth
often: the deep smile, and the simple day at the zoo,
the voices over the bay, the avowal, and the window with leaves,
the joint of the thigh of the beloved person,
and the wish to live calmly on the highest level.

Yet who is it crawls on the subway's iron floor to sing
where all must give or listen, since the door is shut?
O in the proud mirrors of the brain, the ugly clerk
I see is myself! and the murderer trapped on the fire-escape;
and the desperate salesman; the thief; and the sick girl bought and
awakened
to open herself again to the stranger's thrust.

I see a boy's hand move as pale as glass,
and women sleeping with infinite eyes, and all, all
I see are innocent; not walls, nor men
brutal, remote, stunned, querulous, weak, or cold
do crimes so massive, but the hideous fact
stands guilty: the usurpation of man over man.

Thus in the grating rack and torsion of society,
the inmost being cracks; gulfs there with groaning cliffs
disfigure hope; and secret fires grow; and chasms
unknown hold paralyzed the maelstroms of love; despair
with frigid pinnacles, hatred, silent catastrophes;
crevasses of self the self dares not discover,—

Between the inner and the outer face,
between the cold palm and the incestuous mind,
between the thought, the pleasure, and the indifference,
between the bright talk and the solitude,
between the oratory and the massacre,
between the music and the soundless scream.

H. B. Mallalieu

Captain, British Army

COZZO GRILLO

Silence here bears gunfire in its breath,
Hot upon night's cheek, disturbing sleep:
Distant crescendoes of revolting death.
The sentries talk outside; their quiet words creep
Like ants across my hearing as the guns
Tread down their sense: and crickets sing
Throughout the night continuous orisons,
A vine of sound on which my words must cling.

Damp with sweat, I cannot close my eyes.
Though all is quiet, peace is my least desire,
While northward tracer scars the star-cool skies.
One stricken plane, a golden cross of fire,
Purges the dark. Fear tempts us to the fight
In which all pity's shed and love foregone:
And thought's incisive as a bullet's flight
To hurt and drain the heart when action's done.

The smell of death blinds pity in the heart.
The rotting mules upon the road deride
Sorrow, whose flowers on the graves apart
Already wither. Mourning to put aside.
And from the agony of wounds no tear
Can salve in gangrene's violent stench
Our sympathy with pain. Death can rear
Only indifference to its final wrench.

The cricket's chirring in the night appears
The same as silence: and the graves concede
No sorrow different from the willow's tears
That do not fall until its own leaves bleed.
From time the sluggish minutes steal
Our impulse to shout horror once again;
Fear the sole emotion that we feel
Throbbing, beneath the wound, the whole world's pain.

LOOK FOR ME ON ENGLAND

Look for me on England.
On each oak and swan
When I am gone,
Pay the tribute of my glance;
As if by chance
My shadow on the water stirred
The real surface with your own.
Look on bud and leaf and bird
Not for yourself alone.

Hear for me in England
The music of the shires.
By memory's fires
The whisper of flame
Engraves your name.
Listen to the bells which spell
That name where echoes peal and stray
Beyond the valley and the fell
To us who are away.

Touch for me in England
Bark of elm and yew,
The morning dew.
Hands in your lap shall be
Cradles for me.
Your fingers on the pen reach out
Through words to mine, that trace
On sand and on the seas about,
As if in braille, your face.

TO NAPLES

All day the coast of Africa was seen,
Gliding with us along the world's sea-edge:
Parched hills on which the silken olives cling,
Warm-scented wind, minarets that burst
Through haze their dazzling tones of white.

The calm sea's murmur underlined
Our solitude. The islands rose to sight,
Our steps to battle. Fear enlivened the slow blood,
Quickened each sense to read against the sky
The print of stars making our childhood plain.
Gunfire broke across the hills of quietness.

That voyage done, waiting again we hear
News from the north and have become aware
That battle calls above our near desire,
Waiting is worst whose open sea allows
Ships from past years to harbour in the heart.
We know the wreckage, all that battle leaves:
Forgotten graves, the crumpled rag of planes
Tossed on the alien earth; the smell of death,
Mules rotting in the sun: tears, madness, all
The desperation luring us to hell.
And after: silence and sunlight on the plain,
Grain gathered in, the fire and fury gone.

We who have all and nothing much to lose,
Only our lives in others and our loves,
Caught in this fascination of our fear
Or warmed to anger by the battle's fire,
Living beyond time's barriers and death,
Are nomads bringing flocks of peace to drink.
Time swings its hours over Africa
Away from us to whom life now becomes
Cicadas' song too blurred to point or score.
Fatigue and hurt, dust and the whine of shells
Absorb our love, consuming our desire
In vivid images of far lovelier days.

But we can turn our tired eyes to home:
Among these ruins we can conjure love
And silence spreading suddenly through air,
As lark's song breaks or moonlight pours
A mournful splendour over the dull sense.
Then we shall watch the peasant with his grain,
The wheat returning where we burnt a way,
Join with the idle in their summer walks
And children playing their deathless games, secure.

Meanwhile fair dawn will find us in the north,
Flames scaring the shy light: fury in the guns
Announcing peace in death and love in hate.

PLATFORM GOODBYE

My hand waving from the window
Felt still the touch of your fingers:
Sorrow that made me dumb
Becomes pride in your love: and now,
As you turn the key in the door,
Or enter the room where our lives
Are still touched by the cushions and cards,
The tea gone cold in the cups,
My train takes me as though through sleep
To an empty room and the night.

I cannot delude my sense. The cards
Through my fingers slip. Loneliness
Brings you near, a tear's reach from my hand:
But from the flower at your neck
The colours already fade.

It is not these tangible things
That give me the strength to endure,
But the echo still of your voice
In the deep abyss of my heart:
The way that you stare through my eyes,
The intimate touch of your hand
On this pencil with which I write.

The years we have shared will give
To the hive of our senses both,
Honey to sharpen the taste
Of the years while our bodies lie
Lonely and separately.

The hammering in my heart
Forges from sorrow pride
As the train draws us apart.

Though the hurt under the flesh
Spreads like the numbness of snow,
My love is in all you do,
Yours with me wherever I go.

En-route Woking-Blandford, May 5, 1943

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Not that I have cause for celebration,
This midnight I raise my glass to you.
The dividing moments hold no secret
Under the wind: and the thunder drowns
My heart's small cry. Regret dies
In the emptied glass. Hope through the past
Plays its nostalgic tune among the lilies
And the doves return sleepily at noon
To the heart's valley, far from this storm
That breaks up the year, falls on the walls outside.

I am left with nothing between the years
But the guns' sudden augury upon the hills,
Fear's signals along the sense that stir
My nerves into remembrance and take
The night in through my heavy limbs. Rain drives
Idiot messages against the panes. A mine bursts
With bullet's suddenness inside my heart.
Pity flows along a tongue of flame
Burning the brain that chokes all pity back;
The days fall like shells, pitting the face of time.

To you my thoughts and resolutions turn.
Resolve even this agony to share. Absence
Has made you symbol of my peace. Your touch
Shall wake forgotten hours in me, who now
Standing between two years with you unite
The flood of Egypt to the final stars.
Run tomorrow quiet veins to your heart.
Gather my words, my longing, at your side.
Only our hands lie separate by sea.
My glass lies shattered at your feet. Resolve.

NEXT OF KIN

Where do you walk this moment that I fall?
The pain I feel, brings it no hurt at all?
This sudden darkness, does it cloud your eyes,
That closes mine forever from blue skies?
I think the music paused, a bright glass fell,
Breaking your laughter; signs that you could tell
Singled this minute from the dancing hours.
Or can we think so little of blood's powers
To feel no tautness break within the vein
As these wounds flow that will not heal again?

Or now that moonlight falls on this white cross,
Lonely among strange hills, sense you no loss
As yet in your familiar room? But stare
Beyond the stars to dawns we cannot share;
Living new days in hope's eternity,
While memory holds all that you have of me,
Coiled in your mind as sea's sound in the shell,
A mirrored brightness shattered in the well.
Upon this grave your dreaming falls like snow:
And hear you still my voice that's silent now?

There was no time to weep or mourn; the night,
Red-streaked, descended on my noon. My sight,
Holding your image to the spinning globe,
Snapped at the eye. I felt the bullet probe
Through my full heart, seeking love's secret there.
And you, who still breathe in the English air,
Have yet the winds' cool kiss upon your cheek,
Hearing leaves' whisper, say it is I who speak
And all the dead whom ill luck brought to bay:
To you each one commits his debt today.

John Manifold

Captain, British Army (Australian)

FIFE TUNE

(6/8) for Sixth Platoon, 308th I.T.C.

One morning in spring
We marched from Devizes
All shapes and all sizes
Like beads on a string,
But yet with a swing
We trod the bluemetal
And full of high fettle
We started to sing.

She ran down the stair
A twelve-year-old darling
And laughing and calling
She tossed her bright hair;
Then silent to stare
At the men flowing past her—
These were all she could master
Adoring her there.

It's seldom I'll see
A sweeter or prettier;
I doubt we'll forget her
In two years or three,
And lucky he'll be
She takes for a lover
While we are far over
The treacherous sea.

THE SIRENS

Odysseus heard the sirens; they were singing
Music by Wolf and Weinberger and Morley
About a region where the swans go winging,
Vines are in colour, girls are growing surely

Into nubility, and pylons bringing
Leisure and power to farms that live securely
Without a landlord. Still, his eyes were stinging
With salt and seablank, and the ropes hurt sorely.

Odysseus saw the sirens; they were charming,
Blonde, with snub breasts and little neat posteriors,
But could not take his mind off the alarming

Weather report, his mutineers in irons,
The radio failing; it was bloody serious.
In twenty minutes he forgot the sirens.

RATION PARTY

Across the mud the line drags on and on;
Tread slithers, foothold fails, all humours vanish,
Rain falls; the barking N.C.O.s admonish
The universe more than the lagging man.

Something like an infinity of men
Plods up the slope; the file will never finish,
For all their work serves only to replenish
Stores for tomorrow's labours to begin.

Absurd to think that Liberty, the splendid
Nude of our dreams, the intercessory saint
For us to judgment, needs to be defended

By sick fatigue-men, brimming with complaint
And misery, who bear till all is ended
Every imaginable pattern of constraint.

LISTENING TO A BROADCAST

There is no siding for the brain,
No safety in an alibi,
Escape's impossible and vain.

Draw music from the crackling sky
And tuck it round you like a quilt,
You'll not be given long to lie.

No human handwork ever built
Is pure of human blood and sweat
Or proof against deserter's guilt.

Strauss won't cajole me to forget
The slaughter of the Ottakring,
The concrete running red and wet,

Nor false sophisticated swing
Disown the whip and noose and chain,
Nor Handel sanctify a king;

There is no siding for the brain.

CAMOUFLAGE

Because the paint is not the shadow of branches
But dies like a fish on the concrete in the sun's glare
Leaving the mechanical outline bare
To fool only the plane's mechanical glances;

Because this bonhomie is a skinny false
Mask on the iron skeleton of constraint,
And freedom in newsprint only a smear of paint
Across the old menace, "Believe, or else . . ."

Therefore if I must choose I prefer to sing
The tommy-gun, the clean functional thing,
The single-hander, deadly to the rigid line,
Good at a job it doesn't attempt to conceal.

Give me time only to teach this hate of mine
The patience and integrity of the steel.

NIGHTPIECE

Three men came talking up the road
And still "tomorrow" was the word.
The night was clear with the lamps' glitter.
The first man spoke and his voice was bitter,
"Tomorrow like another day
I draw the dole and rust away."
The second one said scared and low,
"Tomorrow I may have to go."
And the two spoke never another word
But drew together and looked at the third,
And the third man said, "If tomorrow exists,
It's a day of streets like rivers of fists,
It's the end of crawling, the end of doles,
And men are treated as human souls."
I stood in the doorway and heard these things
As the three came past with the step of kings.

THE BUNYIP AND THE WHISTLING KETTLE

I knew a most superior camper
Whose methods were absurdly wrong,
He did not live on tea and damper
But took a little stove along.
And every place he came to settle
He spread with gadgets saving toil,
He even had a whistling kettle
To warn him it was on the boil.
Beneath the waratahs and wattles,
Boronia and coolibah,
He scattered paper, cans and bottles,
And parked his nasty little car.
He camped, this sacrilegious stranger
(The moon was at the full that week),
Once in a spot that teemed with danger
Beside a bunyip-haunted reek.

He spread his junk but did not plunder,
Hoping to stay the weekend long;
He watched the bloodshot sun go under
Across the silent billabong.

He ate canned food without demurring,
He put the kettle on for tea.
He did not see the water stirring
Far out beside a sunken tree.

Then, for the day had made him swelter
And night was hot and tense to spring,
He donned a bathing-suit in shelter
And left the firelight's friendly ring.

He felt the water kiss and tingle.
He heard the silence—none too soon!
A ripple broke against the shingle,
And dark with blood it met the moon.

Abandoned in the hush, the kettle
Screamed as it guessed its master's plight,
And loud it screamed, the lifeless metal,
Far into the malicious night.

“HEUREUX QUI COMME ULYSSE . . .”

Lucky like Cook to travel and return
Or like MacArthur of the golden fleece
Is he who drops his bluey and in peace
Lives out among his mates the rest of his time.

For me, I can't remember what we burn
In open hearths at home that smells so sweet—
Only recall the scent; and incomplete
I fight in foreign lands for what I earn.

No, not the Rhine, the Niger or the Thames
Sluggish with history and reflected flames
Is worth a drop of Yarra. Till time ends

Nothing of Europe holds a hope for me,
Nor is the mistral worth the wind that blends
Bluegum and cordite with the southern sea.

THE TOMB OF LIEUTENANT JOHN LEARMONTH A.I.F.

*“At the end on Crete he took to the hills, and so
he’d fight it out with only a revolver. He was
great soldier.”* One of his men in a letter.

This is not sorrow, this is work: I build
A cairn of words over a silent man,
My friend John Learmonth whom the Germans killed.

There was no word of hero in his plan;
Verse should have been his love and peace his trade,
But history turned him to a partisan.

Far from the battle as his bones are laid
Crete will remember him. Remember well,
Mountains of Crete, the Second Field Brigade!

Say Crete, and there is little more to tell
Of muddle tall as treachery, despair
And black defeat resounding like a bell;

But bring the magnifying focus near
And in contempt of muddle and defeat
The old heroic virtues still appear.

Australian blood where hot and icy meet
(James Hogg and Lermontov were of his kin)
Lie still and fertilize the fields of Crete.

Schoolboy, I watched his ballading begin:—
Billy and bullocky and billabong,
Our properties of childhood, all were in.

I heard the air though not the undersong,
The fierceness and resolve: but all the same
They’re the tradition, and tradition’s strong.

Swagman and bushranger die hard, die game,
Die fighting, like that wild colonial boy—
Jack Dowling, says the ballad, was his name.

He also spun his pistol like a toy,
Turned to the hills like wolf or kangaroo
And faced destruction with a bitter joy.

His freedom gave him nothing else to do
But set his back against his family tree
And fight the better for the fact he knew

He was as good as dead. Because the sea
Was closed and the air dark and the land lost,
“They’ll never capture me alive,” said he.

.

That’s courage chemically pure, uncrossed
With sacrifice or duty or career,
Which counts and pays in ready coin the cost

Of holding course. Armies are not its sphere
Where all’s contrived to achieve its counterfeit;
It swears with discipline, it’s volunteer.

I could as hardly make a moral fit
Around it as around a lightning-flash.
There is no moral, that’s the point of it,

No moral. But I’m glad of this panache
That sparkles, as from flint, from us and steel,
True to no crown nor presidential sash

Nor flag nor fame. Let others mourn and feel
He died for nothing: nothings have their place.
While thus the kind and civilized conceal

This spring of unsuspected inward grace
And look on death as equals, I am filled
With queer affection for the human race.

Michael C. Martin

(South African), Signaller, Royal Durban Light Infantry

GUARD

All is quiet and the desert moon
Is lowly lingering in dark clouds.
Darkness reigns. The watch ticks on,
Momentous, gleaming, passive
Little engine. No ominous sound, no footsteps,
Break the vigil long and cold and damp.

His webbing creaks: "I hear a man"
He whispers, holding firm his rifle true:
He barely breathes, and peers intent:
His challenge frozen dies upon his lips.

No planes about, no noise:
He breathes again, he knows not how,
And sits again, a district to survey,
Flat, lifeless, loveless, endless, vague,
A profitless place. But hark, what new peril
Is this? Straight as a die, purposeful, hissing,

The wings of a night bird beat the freezing air;
Not a bullet, not a missile, not a bomb, not a flare:
Just one of God's creatures, a creature fair.

Egypt, 28th November 1941

William Meredith

Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.

DO NOT EMBRACE YOUR MIND'S NEW NEGRO FRIEND

Do not embrace your mind's new Negro friend
Or embarrass the blackballed Jew with memberships:
There must be years of atonement first, and even then
You may still be the blundering raconteur
With the wrong story, and they may still be free.

If you are with them, if even mind is friend,
There will be plenty to do: give the liars lessons
Who have heard no rumors of truth for a long time
But have whatever they hear on good authority,
Whether it concerns Chinese women or the arts.

Expose the patrons, some of whose best friends
Are brothers, and who are never now anonymous:
What kind of credit do they expect for that,
Ask them, or better, ask their protested brothers,
The grateful tenants who can't get their curtsies right.

Finally the injured, who think they have no friend,
Who have been convinced by the repeated names
That they are Jews or Negroes or some dark thing;
They must be courted with the lover's touch
And as guiltily as if yourself had turned them inward.

If you complete this program you will have friends
From all the rich races of your human blood:
Meantime, engage in the often friendless struggle.
A long war, a pygmy war in ways,
But island by island we must go across.

TRANSPORT

Now seven days from land the gulls still wheel
high and astern. Quiet but fierce with hunger
they follow the fantail: so does the violin, steel-
thin, follow a high voice in desire and anger.

Her slow stern rolling to the sea, the ship
travels with no bird's blessing and burns her waste.
Bird and hull describe the rise and dip
of heavy ocean where there is no trust.

I think I know a new myth and this is it:
the strength having gone out of certain old men,
formerly terrible, they are changed to gulls,
and follow over endless ocean hulls
of their rejecting states, wishing for them
catastrophe. But we shall prosper yet.

LOVE LETTER FROM AN IMPOSSIBLE LAND

Combed by the cold seas, Bering and Pacific,
These are the exile islands of the mind.
All the charts and history you can muster
Will not make them real as the fog is real
Or crystal as a certain hour is clear
If you can wait.
Write to me often, darling.

Thrown up hurriedly for a late-crossing people,
These are unsettled mountains where I walk,
They dance at the center still and spout new ash;
The teeming salmon remember in their courses
When they were not, and the winds run into the hills
By an old habit.

Now I am convinced there is nothing to fear,
Now on these islands you are all I want;

They shake and change and finally enchant;
But I have wished you a bawdy darling and here
Often, I, rootless and needing a quick home.

Here I have seen such singular strange visions,
So moving strong in beauty
You would not believe them, no
Not if your very lover told you so
At night remembering, stirred in my sleep at night.

One was, in the orange time of morning,
The smoking peak Shishaldin in a glory;
(Eastward I saw, oh, I remember eastward
Pavlof, the black volcano, throwing flame
At night to seaward, when beacons were forbidden.)
Empedocles' element, neither earth nor fire;
And when I put a wing across the cone
(Snowy, and striking deeply at the memory),
It drew me, too, driven and weary
What with the war, and those foolish citizens my thoughts.

Another, the humorless mounds, the kitchen middens
Built in the painful winds that blow forever.
Watch the slow procession laying them down
(An almond-eyed people, parent to Incas and Indians)
Shell upon shell, bone upon bone, until
See they have builded there a little hill!
A thousand years, seated by this cold harbor, eating fish,
In what was to prove only a delaying action.

You are one for the day I landed there in sunshine,
Porcelain little village with your white Russian church,
Your far-eyed children and hollow-barking malemutes
That romp on the beach, cluttered with boats and flowers.
When was June gentleness set in so alien a land,
In a calendar with so few sunny saints?

A moon miracle are the milky hills at night
With streamers of snow dancing in the moon at the summit
An ageless dance with the peculiar rhythm of zero,
And the wind creaking like a green floe.

And now I write you from such another vision.

As the haunted men who wrestle a weariness
Or women who languish from no sickness known
In books a century back, am I alone
In the sheer time of hilltop happiness.
Deft on the harbor I have put behind
The lovely grey vessels for their battles wait.
Twenty-four blue sailors anticipate
Orders of drill that drift up on the wind.
And stiff on the apron are the pretty planes
That waddle to the water and drum away,
Leaving me stammerer, inept to say
Why in their simple duty there is pain.

You will see in this passage I am wanting you.

Providence occurs to me;
I will salvage these parts of a loud land
For symbols of war its simple works and duties
Against when, like the hut-two-three-four sailors
Disbanded into chaos by Fall-out,
I shall resume my several tedious parts,
In an old land, with people reaching backward like many curtains,
Possessing a mystery beyond the mist of mountains,
Ornate beyond the ritual of snow.

The moth sky of evening and the moth sea
Linger into night and coupling sleep.
Sleep for us here is a leaping down safely in silk
From the flaming bull's-eye plane of day,
Stricken ship that twists and thirsts for the metal sea.
We lie in khaki rows, no two alike,
Needing to be called by name
And saying women's names.

Now the moth descends, but when the dove?
God keep us whole and true, my distant love.

Howard Nemerov

Lieutenant, U.S. Air Force

GLASS DIALECTIC

for Dunstan Thompson

- A. Look in this mirror, tell me what you see.
B. Briefly, the good hypotasis of me.
A. A Glass from time and space to set you free.
B. And safely: mirrors have no memory.

Do not delude yourself, you are enthralled.
Magic in glass, your eyes reverse the world
And powerless, you cannot be recalled.

Dead men have been seen, whose eyes retained
A glassy charm: it may be, boy, you stand
In very hell, which cannot be explained.

Midnight, among the cabalistic books,
Old Faustus fell. The means were orthodox
Red tights, a beard and operatic spooks.

Faustus was saved, some claim, in his last hour,
You might not have his luck, might fall before
The contract drawn in pale reflection's power.

Narcissus too, reflected on the pool,
Was caught in simile and drowned; or fell
Right through, like Alice: Freud would call him fool.

His name, indeed, in books on vanity
Often occurs; but, every child's idea,
Alice has gained an awkward sanctity.

The lesson is, you are your metaphor,
Reflecting a light pallid and unsure
From substance that no mirror ever bore.

This ghost will speculate in glass, is cold,
But answers to your name when it is called:
Sometimes, at night, you feel you have been sold.

But you pretend there's time, you are enthralled.
From very hell your eyes reverse the world
And powerless, you cannot be recalled.

SESTINA ON HER PORTRAIT

Thickness of paint or flesh cannot deface
The honor of the bone, no metaphor
Can name or claim that tempest of clear form.
Look through the eyes, conceive the fret and lace
Of place and age. Acid will only grave
Deeper love's lines that limit form's desire.

The painter's hand establishes the form
In volume, space; so that the painted face
Deepens the flat. Deep, deeper than the grave
The brush stroke cuts, involving a fine lace
Of blood and bone and vein, a metaphor
For what, speaking loosely, we call desire.

From chaos, dark night and, desolate, the grave,
From winter's rotten branch, essential form
Advances like a season. The metaphor
Of time extends itself to show your face,
And in this parable, time and desire
May meet, as on a cross, or crossed in lace.

Consumed in time, you are a metaphor
Decided on dark ground. Space is the grave,
But this is borne out, perfect, by desire.
Fire in shape, consumption of clear form,
Elected light within the bone, can lace
What seems the constant bearing of your face.

And like a needle to its North, desire
Continually creates a metaphor
Of truth in falsity. Paint will unlace,
And flesh, and faithful time, maybe, deface
Even the honor of the bone, deform
Even the sense of eyes, serene and grave.

And all this light, reverting from your face
Will be, in parable, a metaphor,
No more, for death. The moment of your form
Exerts a force on time, a constant lace
Endures on your dark ground, that will but grave
Deeper with looking, limits of desire.

No matter to deface that metaphor
Now clear and formal, caught and crossed in lace:
The echo of the grave perfects desire.

J. Elgar Owen

L/Bdr. (Australian)

MATURITY

Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
Bombers come with the moon;
The little dogs howl in sheer dismay
At death that comes too soon.

I was a child not long ago—
The dish ran away with the spoon—
But I grew old in a single night
When the bombers came with the moon.
The sights I saw and the things I heard,
More strange than are fairy tales,
And more absurd than nursery rhymes
Is the truth—when a siren wails.

Little Jack Horner sat in his corner,
Envied his neighbour's pie;
He asked for this, demanded that,
And for these must my comrades die.
Little man with a black moustache—
Oh, what a good boy am I—
He'll rant and rave, and blood will flow,
And a million men must die.
The flames I saw and the choking dust,
The women and children slain;
These were not things for a child to know,
So how can I be young again?

Here we go gathering nuts in May,
But my comrades all lie dead,
Blasted and torn on a jungle trail
Silently still where the river runs red.
I was a child, ah, long ago—
This is the way we bow our head,
And then strive on to a vengeance grim.
This is the way we leave our dead.

I have learned what no child may learn
From a rhyme at its mother's knee;
And I am old with an age that is bred
Of sights that no child should see.

F. T. Prince

Captain, M.E.F. (British)

SOLDIERS BATHING

The sea at evening moves across the sand.
Under a reddening sky I watch the freedom of a band
Of soldiers who belong to me. Stripped bare
For bathing in the sea, they shout and run in the warm air;
Their flesh, worn by the trade of war, revives
And my mind towards the meaning of it strives.

All's pathos now. The body that was gross,
Rank, ravening, disgusting in the act or in repose,
All fever, filth and sweat, its bestial strength
And bestial decay, by pain and labor grows at length
Fragile and luminous. Poor bare forked animal,
Conscious of his desires and needs and flesh that rise and fall,
Stands in the soft air, tasting after toil
The sweetness of his nakedness: letting the sea-waves coil
Their frothy tongues about his feet, forgets
His hatred of the war, its terrible pressure that begets
That machinery of death and slavery,
Each being a slave and making slaves of others; finds that he
Remembers his proud freedom in a game,
Mocking himself; and comically mimics fear and shame.

He plays with death and animality.
And, reading in the shadows of his pallid flesh, I see
The idea of Michelangelo's cartoon
Of soldiers bathing, breaking off before they were half done
At some sortie of the enemy, an episode
Of the Pisan wars with Florence. I remember how he showed
Their muscular limbs that clamber from the water
And heads that turn across the shoulder, eager for the slaughter,
Forgetful of their bodies that are bare
And hot to buckle on and use the weapons lying there.
—And I think too of the theme another found
When, shadowing men's bodies on a sinister red ground—
Was it Ucello or Pollaiuolo?—

Painted a naked battle: warriors, straddled, hacked the foe,
Dug their bare toes into the soil and slew
The brother-naked man who lay between their feet and drew
His lips back from his teeth in a grimace.

They were Italians who knew war's sorrow and disgrace
And showed the thing suspended, stripped. A theme
Born out of the experience of that horrible extreme
Of war beneath a sky where the air flows
With *Lachrimae Christi*. For that rage, that bitterness, those blows
That hatred of the slain, what could it be
But indirectly or directly a commentary
On the Crucifixion? and the picture burns
With indignation and pity and despair by turns
Because it is the obverse of the scene
Where Christ hangs murdered, stripped, upon the Cross.

I mean,
That is the explanation of its rage.

And we too have our bitterness and pity that engage
Blood, spirit in this war. But night begins,
Night of the mind: who nowadays is conscious of our sins?
Though every human deed concerns our blood,
And even we must know what nobody has understood,
That some great love is over all we do
And that is what has driven us to fury, for so few
Can suffer all the terror of that love:
The terror of that love has set us spinning in this groove
Greasy with our blood.

These dry themselves and dress,
Resume their shirts, forget the fright and shame of nakedness.
Because to love is terrible we prefer
The freedom of our crimes; yet, as I drink the dusky air,
I feel a strange delight that fills me full,
Strange gratitude, as if evil itself were beautiful,
And kiss the wound in thought, while in the west
I watch a streak of red that might have issued from Christ's breast.

AT A PARADE

We watch the only eagles in the world,
How under the crimson flags they have unfurled
They ruffle in furs and plumes, a rod
Bear or a brazen bonnet nod,
And at their side
Under embroidered sashes long swords, ride
Horses dancing under arms
And bosom-friends to their alarms:
Till with those bugles blowing
The space before the wetly glowing
Low-lying palace filled up with that crowd,
Your heart and my heart seem to cry aloud.

And standing together watching you and I
Have thrown our hearts like caps into the sky.
For as I serve you, so I find
I would be another of that kind
And martialize
Luxurious lucid mind and eyes
To celebrate the moving world.
And though a madness is unfurled,
Though rage and greed would be at blows
And Europe's noisier than a bawdy-house,
What else can I be good for but to praise
And to defend the world, even in these days?

And the soldier is also only a kind of tool
And may be dissolute, foul-mouthed or a fool
Yet by that animal expense
Bodily brilliance, insolence
It seems that he
May gain peculiar humility.
Therefore too we must be bold
And say these gild the field they hold
Though serving anything
Commended by a criminal century or king
They cover their breasts and shoulders with bright rills
Of glory. It lies in pools about the horses' heels.

Each is the incorruptible masculine
And each remains, though dipped in blood and sin
The lion coloured like a lady
And riding out at dawn is ready
And understands
Why all rewards are wrung out of his hands
Why he dies and knows alone
The order of what was to be done:
I therefore seize those manners,
And moving with that music under banners
I have preserved the pieties that were used
And all the gilded tissues lost, unloosed.

John Pudney

Squadron Leader, R.A.F. (British)

AFTER BOMBARDMENT

Freedom I never saw in words:
Not spoken in a text which breaks
As vivid as a flight of birds
Or wonder when a child awakes.

Freedom is thumbed by all mankind
Craving to spend the magic pence
Who yearns because the years are blind,
The span of every day immense.

Freedom may pierce the abstract eye
In glimpses where a soil is sweet
Or even here, beneath avenging sky,
After the guns, when men smile in a street.

Normandy, 1944

TO YOU WHO WAIT

To you who wait
The deaf machinery of wars to turn,
With your small dream of love, who are not moved at Fate
Invoked by the resounding voices.

To you who lose
Most precious counted hours, who wait, who burn
A routine light of care, who may not choose
Between today and every slow tomorrow.

You share this soil
So spent, the anguish of the tattered bud,
And lithe corn bent with death-sweat, smears and oil,
Thieving the eyes. Where blast-dazed petals fall,

Where roses lean
Into the death-stench and a trance of dust,
You break into our hearts: you stem each bloody scene
Where force meets force under the sky's shocked arches.

MAP REFERENCE T994724

Spare us this silence after the guns.
Spare us the glasses quivering in the cupboard;
The thin, mean dust which trickles and runs
Over the intimacies, the cradle,
The pot beneath the bed;
The sky's peering in and the sun's bright finger
Upon the dead.

Spare us the momentary relief,
The comforts of ripe corn, the indifferent lark-song
Ascendant from crater-edge, the grief
Which dazed fowls, tame rabbits eating up the rows
Of the kempt gardens where the dead fell with the dew
And the tall bean grows.

Spare us not the pity which still stalks
In the angry shadow of the head's enchantments
Which flesh the lonely skeleton that walks
Warily, killing or being killed,
And afterwards, in this place,
Suffers the peering sky, the sun's bright finger
On a dead face.

Henry Reed

Private, R.A.O.C. (British)

NAMING OF PARTS

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens,
And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see of,
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel,
Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens, their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this
Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it
Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this
Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards
The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:
They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly easy
If you have any strength in your thumb: Like the bolt,
And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of balance,
Which in our case we have not got, and the almond-blossom
Silent in all of the gardens, the bees going backwards and forwards,
For today we have naming of parts.

Keidrych Rhys

Gunner, R.A. (British)

TRAGIC GUILT

No. I'm not an Englishman with a partisan religion.
My roots lie in another region,
Though ranged alongside yours.

Here I sense your stubbornness and your cohesion
And can even feel pride in your recent decision
That anger reassures.

I know no love for disembodied principles, improbable tales.
The strength of the common man was always the strength of Wales,
Unashamed of her race.

May this be also England's rôle to bring to birth.
May she draw opposite new powers from the earth.
Huge Shakespeare has his place.

I have felt in my bones comradeship and pity,
I have seen wonders in an open door blitz city.

Amid tremendous history, new pity.

LETTER TO MY WIFE

I eagerly await your miniature, wish the artist would hurry,
For morning and evening I want to look at the girl I did marry.

I will wear the old-fashioned locket (cum-identity disc) always!
Although this must seem a little sentimental for nowadays.

But after all I'll simply have to hang on to my identity,
Otherwise how carry the sayings and small things for posterity.

It was on the White Cliffs, my own, that we renewed contact,
Your image, flesh, bone, speech, thought, again became a fact.

Fine temper, home, and all unchanged yet stronger than imagination,
Unearthed, conjured—too much with the destructive tools of
reformation!

O marvellous personality—again we *found* each other
A living testimony of honeymoon outings together!

How I cursed the blitz in your hotel room, affecting train and
memory,
O white breath on air, your teeth are still naked pearls assuredly.

Life before meeting you was a drifting chaos, pretty purposeless,
Needing your sturdy Argentine warmth to fire me on, loveless!

After film-dawn halos, a too short union, now we've been nine
months parted
By circles of lust, still threatened but O how amazingly lion-hearted.

I miss your letters terribly when our mails go wrong,
Those days are blank for me, the sky without a song.

You are my front-line love—and always will be—with *ease*—
Oh I can see you at your window in the cottage through the trees.

O ecstasies of courting days, O clouded quarrel-days,
The Fuehrer wants a word with you! the simple life the simple Joy
just stays.

(Vision somewhat tamed maybe by the spirit of youth,
Still I only want you, and peace and a home in the South.)

O My Darling and my own,
Remember the willows by the river in summer,
Remember always our love in wintry weather,
Remember the cottage, the bridge, the flowers, the fields,
O never forget the power love yields and wields.

Whatever happens, remember we strove for a more beautiful world,
When bombs come shrieking down, *pray* men's minds might be
unfurled.

Dick Roberts

Corporal, U.S. Army

DUTY TO DEATH, LD *

See now, dead friend,
Where they have taken you,
The men who persuaded you of patriotism?
First into the clouds and high in glory,
And then let fall your vehicle
And washed its stricken machinery with
The vivid liquids of your body.
And perhaps I follow, less gloriously.
Grubbing in the dust,
Crawling from duty to death
While all the duties of my soul
Go unperformed.

You have been, and be, forevermore;
Have determined the makeup of all that is;
Have instructed Fate
And prevailed upon all the future,
Like all who ever draw a living breath
And cast a shadow in the afternoon;
Like every leaf and stone;
Like every throatsound;
Like every motion of a river reed.

You are gone from all the places
Of the world.
Eternally I might search
With powers of flight and invisibility,
With life and purpose outlasting time
And never find you.

You live as much
As you have ever lived.
In you it was only myself I glimpsed.
In revisited places of meaning
You appear and startle me.

* *"In the Line of Duty"*

There is no great tragedy in death
Which is the end of all tragedy.
How can I be so self-concerned
As to be grief stricken by your death?
You have died and we all knew you would.
We were not deluded that your person
Was undisturbable.

How near is death!
Like the ground I might at any moment
Choose to lie down upon.

Selden Rodman

Master Sergeant, U.S. Army

MAN, NOT HIS ARMS

Man, not his arms, I sing: the heroic dead
Who fell in the charge or the landing operation,
The reckless pilot who grazed the field with his head,
And those whose names are sweet on the lips of the nation,
But also the unheroic, who died in bed,
Or who did not die at all, or who died unseen
Short of the beachhead, trapped in a burning station,
Or caught from behind at the pass of Kasserine.

I sing the hero, who, remembering home,
The faith of children or the trust of wife,
The free town meeting under no guilt dome,
Or the hope of the poor and beaten, gave life for life,
Believing America and spurning Rome,
Who crawled through the field of flowers on a shattered hip
To dig up land mines with a pocket knife,
Or held the controls, commanding "Abandon ship!"

I sing the ranks, those who will never be news,
Serving in barracks or in holds for years
Without promotion; the washed-out pilots; the crews
On the ground; the nameless who polish, or oil the gears,
Or clean the latrines or sweat by the boiling stews;
The file clerks, drivers, night guards, tough M.P.'s;
The inarticulate with their hopes and fears
And the merely useless—sufferers. I sing all these.

I sing war's victims: those who die of fever,
Defective equipment, sunstroke, cold, or drouth;
The victims of mixed signals, of hostile deceiver;
Bridegroom and father, tight around the mouth;
The builders of parkways resigned to the work of the beaver;
Boys who would rather be picking in Oregon's arbors
On convoys stretching from the black-frosted South
To the tideless Mediterranean's marble harbors.

O you, my brothers, homeless as the birds
Fire drove forth to premature migration,
Covering your anguish with the short, hard words
And clutching at the past for compensation—
Do not turn back! The ancient feuds and gods
Like serpents in the hearts of men are curled;
Remember only, for your own salvation,
Your brotherhood, and give it to the world.

March 1943

V-LETTER TO KARL SHAPIRO IN AUSTRALIA

Karl, from your beachhead on that hollow island
Under the world's waist, with its eager people
Whose past is yesterday, and who, like us,
Quarry the future out of hard sensation—
Tell me the score: Are men more nearly brothers
Under an iron heaven? Is the heart
“Made great with shot”—or hard? We soldiers, Karl,
Are lonely men who cannot be alone.
Is Superman still our hero? Or does war,
The inglorious kind, make ranks and races one?

You who have seen the volcanic islands smoke
Unnatural thunder, the golden rivers run
Red from no sunset through the shattered palms,
And could not tell the savage in the rainforest
That civilization was this, but not this only—
Tell me, and tell the rest of us who believe
Against all signs; that something can be done
To stop the meaningless cycle Marx foresaw,
What faith sustains—or whether a second time
A generation of cynics must be born.

Karl, is America the land of promise
The poets hope, the politicians roar
And the radio builds its sordid sales upon?

In crowded camp-towns, hostile to the shame
Of pitiful, unappeasable desire;
In the loud boredom of a thousand barracks
From mammoth Bragg to bonewhite Pensacola,
Jim-crow Huachuca, or this urban fort
Sheltered from politics by its G. I. campus,
Hope is quiescent: neither love nor hate,
Vision of world state nor immaculate village
Troubles our consciences. We train and wait.

If this were all, Karl, O if this were all
I would not write this, but instead compose
The kind of hieroglyph that was once the fashion,
Abstract of words, incestuous riddle: proof
That Art shored up one soul against the world's ruin.
But it is not all. The freedom we once squandered
Like debased currency, is being found
In lack of freedom; discipline is put on
Not like a habit, but a makeshift, proudly.
America, which died of our neglect,
Out of our sufferings can be reborn.
Distance unites us. War engenders love
No less than hate: the edge of what we are
Tuned to a prop's pitch on that terrible thinness.

March 1943

Edwin Rolfe

Private, U.S. Army

NO MAN KNOWS WAR

Needless to catalogue heroes. No man
weighted with rifle, digging with nails in earth,
quickness at the name. Hero's a word for
peacetime. Battle
knows only three realities: enemy, rifle, life.

No man knows war or its meaning who has not
stumbled from tree to tree, desperate for cover,
or dug his face deep in earth, felt the ground pulse with
the ear-breaking fall of death. No man knows war
who never has crouched in his foxhole, hearing
the bullets an inch from his head, nor the zoom of
planes like a Ferris wheel strafing the trenches . . .

War is your comrade struck dead beside you,
his shared cigarette still alive in your lips.

ELEGY FOR OUR DEAD

There is a place where, wisdom won, right recorded,
men move beautifully, striding across fields
whose wheat, wind-marshalled, wanders unguarded
in unprotected places; where earth, revived, folds
all growing things closely to itself: the groves
of bursting olives, the vineyards ripe and heavy with
glowing grapes, the oranges like million suns; and graves
where lie, nurturing all these fields, my friends in death.

With them, deep in coolness, are memories of France and
the exact fields of Belgium, midnight marches in snows—
the single-file caravan high in the Pyrenees: the land
of Spain unfolded before them, dazzling the young Balboas.
This earth is enriched with Atlantic salt, spraying

the live, squinting eyelids, even now, of companions—
with towns of America, towers and hills, sun playing
always, in stone streets, wide fields—all men's dominions.

Honor for them in this lies: that theirs is no special
strange plot of alien earth. Men of all lands here
lie side by side, at peace now after the crucial
torture of combat, bullet and bayonet gone, fear
conquered forever. Yes, knowing it well, they were willing
despite it to clothe their vision with flesh. And their rewards,
not sought for self, live in new faces, smiling,
remembering what they did here. Deeds were their last words.

Alan Ross

S/Lieutenant, R.N.V.R. (British)

MESS DECK CASUALTY

The orange air grows fetid with smoke. The uneasy dark, swollen with hammocks, swinging under arcs of light, throbs with the slow pulse of breathing, the black scenery of engines. Faces of men, harsh with sleeplessness and the heavy lack of air, become grotesque and strained, shuttered from life beneath the occulting hammocked light. Bodies lying on tables and cramped on tilting lockers, slant casually in grace or lie in obscene helpless postures. Behind the eyelids the staring world of dream spreads like a stain—the face, drained of meaning, receding into numbness, blank with shock. Under the naked orange lamp, damp sweat pimples the forehead: the hammock tilts; a thin stream of blood grows dark beneath the bandaged chest, flowing into a black-clotted map like a nerve centre. A toneless cough stabs into the spongy lung, fighting for breath. The black lashes of the eyes close on the unanswered dream, the love-wish struggling like fingers against the slow advancing tide of fear, the heart's perspective reduced to the single, electric stream of pain, the final needle of death. Moves, is sick. The hot silence swings beneath the naked light: at the corner of the mouth, a froth of blood congeals, lying like a black leaf across the sweating face: The body shakes into stillness like a splinter. From the garish obscured bulb a sheet of yellow falls across the lips; the teeth freeze into a grin. The shapeless forms mummied with coats, groan, stir restlessly in sleep, moving towards the private, close-held legend clasped to each, the blue love whose empty arms reach to a dismembered, yellow past the vacant harbours of the heart. Only night eats through the heavy stifling air, the sea lispings against the sweating bulkhead. The watch changes,

and, swearing, someone moves, spits, begins to dress:
the mess deck grows clumsy with shadow, the bulky forms
stooping under hammocks, faces white with airless sleep.
Till, noticing the dead man's face, they stop and cover him,
and cursing, stumble out like ghosts into the frozen dark.

October, 1944

Karl Shapiro

Corporal, U.S. Army, Pacific Area

SCYROS

snuffle and sniff and handkerchief

The doctor punched my vein
The captain called me Cain
Upon my belly sat the sow of fear
With coins on either eye
The President came by
And whispered to the braids what none could hear

High over where the storm
Stood steadfast cruciform
The golden eagle sank in wounded wheels
White negroes laughing still
Crept fiercely on Brazil
Turning the navies upward on their keels

Now one by one the trees
Stripped to their naked knees
To dance upon the heaps of shrunken dead
The roof of England fell
Great Paris tolled her bell
And China stunched her milk and wept for bread

No island singly lay
But lost its name that day
The Ainu dived across the plunging sands
From dawn to dawn to dawn
King George's birds came on
Strafing the tulips from his children's hands

Thus in the classic sea
Southeast from Thessaly
The dynamited mermen washed ashore
And tritons dressed in steel
Trolled heads with rod and reel
And dredged potatoes from the Aegean floor

Hot is the sky and green
Where Germans have been seen
The moon leaks metal on the Atlantic fields
Pink boys in birthday shrouds
Loop lightly through the clouds
Or coast the peaks of Finland on their shields

That prophet year by year
Lay still but could not hear
Where scholars tapped to find his new remains
Gog and Magog ate pork
In vertical New York
And war began next Monday on the Danes.

V-LETTER

I love you first because your face is fair,
Because your eyes Jewish and blue,
Set sweetly with the touch of foreignness
Above the cheekbones, stare rather than dream.
Often your countenance recalls a boy
Blue-eyed and small, whose silent mischief
Tortured his parents and compelled my hate
To wish his ugly death.
Because of this reminder, my soul's trouble,
And for your face, so often beautiful,
I love you, wish you life.

I love you first because you wait, because
For your own sake, I cannot write
Beyond these words. I love you for these words
That sting and creep like insects and leave filth.
I love you for the poverty you cry
And I bend down with tears of steel
That melt your hand like wax, not for this war
The droplets shattering
Those candle-glowing fingers of my joy,
But for your name of agony, my love,
That cakes my mouth with salt.

And all your imperfections and perfections
 And all your magnitude of grace
And all this love explained and unexplained
Is just a breath. I see you woman-size
And this looms larger and more goddess-like
 Than silver goddesses on screens.
I see you in the ugliness of light,
 Yet you are beautiful,
And in the dark of absence your full length
Is such as meets my body to the full
 Though I am starved and huge.

You turn me from these days as from a scene
 Out of an open window far
Where lies the foreign city and the war.
You are my home and in your spacious love
I dream to march as under flaring flags
 Until the door is gently shut.
Give me the tearless lesson of your pride,
 Teach me to live and die
As one deserving anonymity,
The mere devotion of a house to keep
 A woman and a man.

Give me the free and poor inheritance
 Of our own kind, not furniture
Of education, nor the prophet's pose,
The general cause of words, the hero's stance,
The ambitions incommensurable with flesh,
 But the drab makings of a room
Where sometimes in the afternoon of thought
 The brief and blinding flash
May light the enormous chambers of your will
And show the gracious Parthenon that time
 Is ever measured by.

As groceries in a pantry gleam and smile
 Because they are important weights
Bought with the metal minutes of your pay,
So do these hours stand in solid rows,
The dowry for a use in common life.
 I love you first because your years

Lead to my matter-of-fact and simple death
Or to our open marriage,
And I pray nothing for my safety back,
Not even luck, because our love is whole
Whether I live or fail.

TROOP TRAIN

It stops the town we come through. Workers raise
Their oily arms in good salute and grin.
Kids scream as at a circus. Businessmen
Glance hopefully and go their measured way.
And women standing at their dumbstruck door
More slowly wave and seem to warn us back,
As if a tear blinding the course of war
Might once dissolve our iron in their sweet wish.

Fruit of the world, O clustered on ourselves
We hang as from a cornucopia
In total friendliness, with faces bunched
To spray the streets with catcalls and with leers.
A bottle smashes on the moving ties
And eyes fixed on a lady smiling pink
Stretch like a rubber-band and snap and sting
The mouth that wants the drink-of-water kiss.

And on through crummy continents and days,
Deliberate, grimy, slightly drunk we crawl,
The good-bad boys of circumstance and chance,
Whose bucket-helmets bang the empty wall
Where twist the murdered bodies of our packs
Next to the guns that only seem themselves.
And distance like a strap adjusted shrinks,
Tightens across the shoulder and holds firm.

Here is a deck of cards; out of this hand
Dealer, deal me my luck, a pair of bulls,
The right draw to a flush, the one-eyed jack.
Diamonds and hearts are red but spades are black,
And spades are spades and clubs are clovers—black.

But deal me winners, souvenirs of peace.
This stands to reason and arithmetic,
Luck also travels and not all come back.

Trains lead to ships and ships to death or trains,
And trains to death or trucks, and trucks to death,
Or trucks lead to the march, the march to death,
Or that survival which is all our hope;
And death leads back to trucks and trains and ships,
But life leads to the march, O flag! at last
The place of life found after trains and death
—Nightfall of nations brilliant after war.

ELEGY FOR A DEAD SOLDIER

I

A white sheet on the tail-gate of a truck
Becomes an altar; two small candlesticks
Sputter at each side of the crucifix
Laid round with flowers brighter than the blood,
Red as the red of our apocalypse,
Hibiscus that a marching man will pluck
To stick into his rifle or his hat,
And great blue morning-glories pale as lips
That shall no longer taste or kiss or swear.
The wind begins a low magnificat,
The chaplain chats, the palm trees swirl their hair,
The columns come together through the mud.

II

We too are ashes as we watch and hear
The psalm, the sorrow, and the simple praise
Of one whose promised thoughts of other days
Were such as ours, but now wholly destroyed,
The service record of his youth wiped out,
His dream dispersed by shot, must disappear.
What can we feel but wonder at a loss
That seems to point at nothing but the doubt
Which flirts our sense of luck into the ditch?

Reader of Paul who prays beside this fosse,
Shall we believe our eyes or legends rich
With glory and rebirth beyond the void?

III

For this comrade is dead, dead in the war,
A young man out of millions yet to live,
One cut away from all that war can give,
Freedom of self and peace to wander free.
Who mourns in all this sober multitude
Who did not feel the bite of it before
The bullet found its aim? This worthy flesh,
This boy laid in a coffin and reviewed—
Who has not wrapped himself in this same flag,
Heard the light fall of dirt, his wound still fresh,
Felt his eyes closed, and heard the distant brag
Of the last volley of humanity?

IV

By chance I saw him die, stretched on the ground,
A tattooed arm lifted to take the blood
Of someone else sealed in a tin. I stood
During the last delirium that stays
The intelligence a tiny moment more,
And then the strangulation, the last sound.
The end was sudden, like a foolish play,
A stupid fool slamming a foolish door,
The absurd catastrophe, half-prearranged,
And all the decisive things still left to say.
So we disbanded, angrier and unchanged,
Sick with the utter silence of dispraise.

V

We ask for no statistics of the killed,
For nothing political impinges on
This single casualty, or all those gone,
Missing or healing, sinking or dispersed,
Hundreds of thousands counted, millions lost.
More than an accident and less than willed
Is every fall, and this one like the rest.
However others calculate the cost,

To us the final aggregate is *one*,
One with a name, one transferred to the blest;
And though another stoops and takes the gun,
We cannot add the second to the first.

VI

I would not speak for him who could not speak
Unless my fear were true: he was not wronged,
He knew to which decision he belonged
But let it choose itself. Ripe in instinct,
Neither the victim nor the volunteer,
He followed, and the leaders could not seek
Beyond the followers. Much of this he knew;
The journey was a detour that would steer
Into the Lincoln Highway of a land
Remorsely improved, excited, new,
And that was what he wanted. He had planned
To earn and drive. He and the world had winked.

VII

No history deceived him, for he knew
Little of times and armies not his own;
He never felt that peace was but a loan,
Had never questioned the idea of gain.
Beyond the headlines once or twice he saw
The gathering of a power by the few
But could not tell their names; he cast his vote,
Distrusting all the elected but not law.
He laughed at socialism; *on mourrait*
Pour les industriels? He shed his coat
And not for brotherhood, but for his pay.
To him the red flag marked the sewer main.

VIII

Above all else he loathed the homily,
The slogan and the ad. He paid his bill
But not for congressmen at Bunker Hill.
Ideals were few and those there were not made
For conversation. He belonged to church
But never spoke of God. The Christmas tree,
The Easter egg, baptism, he observed,

Never denied the preacher on his perch,
And would not sign Resolved That or Whereas.
Softness he had and hours and nights reserved
For thinking, dressing, dancing to the jazz.
His laugh was real, his manners were homemade.

IX

Of all men poverty pursued him least;
He was ashamed of all the down and out,
Spurned the panhandler like an uneasy doubt,
And saw the unemployed as a vague mass
Incapable of hunger or revolt.
He hated other races, south or east,
And shoved them to the margin of his mind.
He would recall the justice of the Colt,
Take interest in a gang-war like a game.
His ancestry was somewhere far behind
And left him only his peculiar name.
Doors opened, and he recognized no class.

X

His children would have known a heritage,
Just or unjust, the richest in the world,
The quantum of all art and science curled
In the horn of plenty, bursting from the horn,
A people bathed in honey, Paris come,
Vienna transferred with the highest wage,
A World's Fair spread to Phoenix, Jacksonville,
Earth's capitol, the new Byzantium,
Kingdom of man—who knows? Hollow or firm,
No man can ever prophesy until
Out of our death some undiscovered germ,
Whole toleration or pure peace is born.

XI

The time to mourn is short that best becomes
The military dead. We lift and fold the flag,
Lay bare the coffin with its written tag,
And march away. Behind, four others wait
To lift the box, the heaviest of loads.
The anesthetic afternoon benumbs,

Sickens our senses, forces back our talk.
We know that others on tomorrow's roads
Will fall, ourselves perhaps, the man beside,
Over the world the threatened, all who walk;
And could we mark the grave of him who died
We would write this beneath his name and date—

Epitaph

Underneath this wooden cross there lies
A Christian killed in battle. You who read,
Remember that this stranger died in pain;
And passing here, if you can lift your eyes
Upon a peace kept by the human creed,
Know that one soldier has not died in vain.

ELEGY FOR TWO BANJOS

Haul up the flag, you mourners,
Not half-mast but all the way;
The funeral is done and disbanded;
The devil's had the final say.

O mistress and wife too pensive,
Pallbearers and priestly men,
Put your black clothes in the attic,
And get up on your feet again.

Death did his job like a scholar,
A most unusual case,
Death did his job like a gentleman;
He barely disturbed the face.

You packed him a handsome carton,
Set the lid with silver screws;
You dug a dark pit in the graveyard
To tell the white worms the news.

Now you've nothing left to remember,
Nothing but the words he wrote,

But they'll never let you remember,
Only stick like a bone in your throat.

O if I'd been his wife or mistress,
His pallbearer or his parish priest,
I'd have kept him at home forever—
Or as long as bric-a-brac at least.

I would have burned his body
And salvaged a sizeable bone
For a paper-weight or a door-stop
Or a garden flagstone.

I would have heaped the fire
And boiled his beautiful skull.
It was laden like a ship for travels
And now is but an empty hull.

I would have dried it off in linens,
Polished it with a chamois cloth
Till it shone like a brand-new quarter
And felt smooth as the nose of a moth.

Or I'd have hung it out in the garden
Where everything else is alive,
Put a queen-bee in the brain case
So the bees could build a hive.

Maybe I'd have wired the jawbone
With a silver spring beneath,
Set it in the cradle with baby
So baby could rattle the teeth.

O you didn't do right by William
To shove him down that filthy hole,
Throw him a lot of tears and Latin
And a cheap "God bless your soul."

You might as well leave off mourning,
His photograph is getting dim,
So you'd better take a long look at it
For it's all you'll ever see of him.

Haul up the flag you mourners,
Not half-mast but all the way,
The funeral is done and disbanded,
The devil's had the final say.

THE DOME OF SUNDAY

With focus sharp as Flemish-painted face
In film of varnish brightly fixed
And through a polished hand-lens deeply seen,
Sunday at noon through hyaline thin air
Sees down the street,
And in the camera of my eye depicts
Row-houses and row-lives:
Glass after glass, door after door the same,
Face after face the same, the same,
The brutal visibility the same;

As if one life emerging from one house
Would pause, a single image caught between
Two facing mirrors where vision multiplies
Beyond perspective,
A silent clatter in the high-speed eye
Spinning out photo-circulars of sight.

I see slip to the curb the long machines
Out of whose warm and windowed rooms pirouette
Shellacked with silk and light
The hard legs of our women.

Our women are one woman, dressed in black.
The carmine printed mouth
And cheeks as soft as muslin-glass belong
Outright to one dark dressy man
Merely a swagger at her curvy side.

This is their visit to themselves:
All day from porch to porch they weave
A nonsense pattern through the even glare,

Stealing in surfaces
Cold vulgar glances at themselves.

And high up in the heated room all day
I wait behind the plate glass pane for one,
Hot as a voyeur for a glimpse of one,
The vision to blot out this woman's sheen;
All day my sight records expensively
Row-houses and row-lives.

But nothing happens; no diagonal
With melting shadow falls across the curb:
Neither the blinded negress lurching through fatigue,
Nor exiles bleeding from their pores,
Nor that bright bomb slipped lightly from its rack
To splinter every silvered glass and crystal prism,
Witch-bowl and perfume bottle
And billion candle-power dressing-bulb,
No direct hit to smash the shatter-proof
And lodge at last the quivering needle
Clean in the eye of one who stands transfixed
In fascination of her brightness.

William Jay Smith

Lieutenant, U.S. Navy

HOTEL CONTINENTAL

O I feel like the kinks in the paws of the Sphinx!
O I've got those combustible keys!
On goes the phone with a tone all its own:
P—lease! P—lease! P—lease!

The room is a yawn. The room is war.
On the velvet gallop the dice.
Man O'Man, one foot on the bar-
rail, sways with sacrifice.

Where once the star-spangled ocean broke,
now Caesar's cymbals clash;
we speak the French our fathers spoke
and dance the *java vache*.

Laugh, my pigeon, laugh. Your car is ready.
Laugh. Your chauffeur waits without the door.
His hands are clean, his eye is clear and steady.
He drives a Quisling '44.

Laugh, my pigeon, laugh. Lift up the lever.
Our souls are Chinamen along the wall.
They live as long as we (which is forever);
they rise as pure as laughter when we fall.

O I feel like the kinks in the paws of the Sphinx!
O I've got those negotiable knees!
On goes the phone with a tone all its own:
P—lease! P—lease! P—lease!

CONVOY

The ships are fitted, and the convoy sails.
Our course is towards the east and to the sun.
Antennae turn, our only contact whales:
we seek the Jonah which inhabits one.
Airborne the continents above us meet,
below us move the cities which we lean to hear.
The sea unwinds like the ends of Easy Street,
where no one goes straight, but all will come out in the clear

Not like the islander with out-rigged craft,
nor Jack who journeyed high upon the bean,
not singly, no, nor dodging any draft
do we take these liberties! I do not mean
we have been comfortable, or for that matter, clean:
Ask the man struck dead by the life raft somewhere aft.

TODAY I HAVE TOUCHED THE EARTH

Today I have touched the earth and the earth's three quarters,
today on the earth I have lain in the shade of the snail.
I am the voice of these voluminous waters,
I address you from the wardroom of the Whale.

The waves run along on the reef with umbrellas of foam.
The sun climbs the east like the arrow of Monsieur Tell,
while here in His flesh, while here in my fleshly home,
I entertain the leopard-tinted shell.

Today I have touched the earth and the earth's three quarters.
What is the earth if you cannot see it in scale?
What is the earth if it will not walk with the waters?
I address you from the wardroom of the Whale.

Dance, my heart! Dance high on the air like the dove!
Dance like the Cross on the cassock of the south!
I was this day digested by His love.
The world was His word, the realm of His radiant mouth.

3 FOR 25

Downing his drink to toasts of cut-rate jokes,
the sailor on the 10-day leave, the Machinist's Mate
2nd, squares his tousled halo for the folks,
and looks into the camera as at fate.

There where the painted palm tree's tonic sway
recedes, authentic as a tourist folder,
vast bridges spanning a blue bay,
as real as horseshoes float back from his shoulder.

10 days is not enough; but the Machinist's Mate
2nd leaves of his life this urgent pose,
these meerschaum fingers, eyes like dominoes:
and this one act, like all his holiday,
is right only if he remains in black and white
when camera clicks with quick, conclusive fact.

NEO-CLASSICAL POEM—

This daylit doll, this dim divinity,
Who wipes His chin upon His frothy cuff,
Who sits beside you there and combs His curls,
as suspect as a Romanoff;

Who with the inward ease of the ventriloquist
makes His insolence so crystalline,
fumbling the bomber-bracelet on His wrist
to the boogie-woogie of the radar screen:

Is this the Deity of your Devotions,
Lamb of all your Litanies,
is this the Olifant of all the Oceans,
the Salamander of some Seven Seas?

—Go! Waltz in the boulevards with Jinx and Grable.
Back to the coast and prick some banker's wife.
Play a set or two of tennis on the table,
with scores one-Love one-Love and add for Life.

Is it He Who clicked His heels and roundly laughed
and sent the fortress whirling past the sun,
gave you Christ as a fourth upon the raft,
and added a day at each meridian?

Is it He Who promised you the Hall of Flame,
the ivory gunwale and the gilded oar,
to tread the oil and hoist His Holy Name
in the circus colorings of semaphore?

Is it He Who was always hungry when you ate,
and potted gulls like crumbs along the air?
The starving always boast the bluest plate
just as it is the bald who comb their hair.

Is it He Who rose above the ruined Rhine,
the Ganymede and Gremlin of your guilt,
fled among fiddles, one dark valentine,
stuffed in the laurel at His hilt?

With the force of the brute and the lilt of the little lark,
so precious, so baroque, almost archaic,
see how He drives the dolphins down the dark
into the amber sunlight like mosaic.

See how His minions wait Him in the west,
and atomize Him with the Essence of Pearls;
an elegance of egg upon His vest,
He combs His turquoise curls.

Is it for Him the brightest suns have set?
Is it for Him the proudest cities burn?
Still in our minds His jewels pirouette,
still in our hearts His cold propellers turn.

Is this the Deity of your Devotions,
Lamb of all your Litanies,
is this the Olifant of all the Oceans,
the Salamander of some Seven Seas?

Advance, advance and be recognized!
speaks God, the Dove, from the golden limb.
And we advance. Is Love disguised?
He is. As you imagined Him.

Donald A. Stauffer

Captain, Air Unit, U.S. Marine Corps

TIME ZONES FOR FORTY-FOUR

DUMBO RESCUE REPORT: THE WEATHER WAS DIRTY
TILL WE LEFT THE TOWERING CUMULO-STRATUS AFT.
WE SIGHTED ONE FIVE FIVE EAST TIME LOVE TWELVE THIRTY
DEAD PILOT ADRIFT IN RAFT.

Twelve thirty love: Follow the track of the sun
To soldiers high in the Mindanao hills
Who (half past ten) haven't learned that their war is done
And live their share of ills.

"The war is done!" the Indian patriots cry.
"Fight for no freedom that the British deny us!"
(It's just before dawn.) Their argument not to die
Holds not a shade of bias.

Never to die is the least of the Russian worries
As shoulder to brotherly shoulder they face the west
And launch a quick night thrust through the blizzard flurries,
Knowing worst weather is best.

The blizzard flurries sweep seaward down from the Pole.
(Now it's the night before, and cold on the drink.)
The Boston skipper is captain of his soul
But his ship is going to sink.

The captains of coal and the minor organizers
Fight, though the nation fail, to preserve their places,
And play, in the fray between late and early risers,
(It's early evening) their aces.

Late and early risers are tugged from the pier.
Some of the soldiers sing past the Golden Gate.
The sun is westering. This, or another year?
We'll be back in '48.

Another year, or day, or era, I wonder.
Twelve thirty again. The captain turned and laughed.
His plane was ready. He had no time to ponder
Dead pilot adrift in raft.

THE BULLDOZER

The jungle is the frame for the machine
To highlight strange and metal mintings.
Trees silhouette, against their black and green,
Those steely glintings.

Who could forget, in this Pacific glade,
Looking at half-track, bolt, and girder,
The careless competence of that great blade
To mould or murder?

A young bulldozer in the Treasuries
Went in with troops, as boats were stranding,
While Jap machine-gun nests by lispings seas
Held up the landing

The driver bounced his baby to the shore,
Rampant down ramp, an iron wonder.
Then the new blade struck once and struck no more
And chopped them under.

There, and from Africa to Kiska Bay,
The big and small machines turned makers,
Slashing and battering out their right of way
From terrible acres.

The banyans fell with all their airy arms,
Assaulted by the grunting dozers.
No land's most secret and most savage charms
Could set them posers.

They gouged and shoved, raised dikes and channelled drains.
Bottomless swamps they filled with coral.
And the new dazzling airstrips took the planes
To point the moral.

“A thousand coolies armed with pick and spade,
With our Bushido spirit in it,”
The Japs complain, “do less than that one blade
Does in a minute.”

Bare feet and fists and bending backs are done
Before the new machine's strong leaping.
The runways smoothed, the idler in the sun
Returns to sleeping.

Short spurts, dull waits, far journeys on the flats,
Then the long vistas of reposing.
It's true most of the life of bulls and cats
Is spent in dozing.

Building or breaking fills the urgent hour
After complex, long preparation.
Yet its few vivid bursts disclose the power
To make a nation.

Dromes built, against the jungle's black and green
Wheels, engine, nuts and gears turn dusty.
The polished silver blade of the machine
Grows slowly rusty.

The cycle of this modern god of war
To some may not appear inviting.
They may not hold the end worth waiting for:
Short, but exciting.

"Demechanize!" the Middle-Agers say.
"Limit your wars to teams at duelling!
Ten men with spears and spirit of fair play
Is much less gruelling."

If they could meet a medieval lord,
Mounted (the best he could) on charger,
Perhaps he'd trade his steed for their new Ford,
Or something larger.

Again, the Back-to-Nature clan maintain
Civilizations always bungle.
They, to the cunning of the hand and brain,
Prefer the jungle.

Give them the peace of parasitic trees,
The full-fed crocodiles and wombats.
Reclined on flowers they crush, let them at ease
Blink mortal combats.

Most nihilist of all, Cities of God
Rise in man's hopes to lofty towers,
Where men of good will, purged from this vile sod,
Hymn through the hours.

Foolish and proud, they spurn the universe,
Denying (since it pains them) evil.
They better God, who, fault of something worse,
Endures the devil.

Worthless the puzzled or the injured brow.
The world's here. Better to receive it.
For, brother, this is war, and this is now.
Take it or leave it!

Mechanic complication in the fog!
Tremendous shape that's worth the waiting!
I'd rather be a cog, than log or dog,
In what's creating.

Get thee behind me, Buddha! Through the frost,
The heat, the turning world, the hail,
I promise this machine will not be lost
For want of this one nail.

THE LEMMINGS

A philosophical poem

Let readers say (description or abuse),
"Pure were his morals, though his verse was loose."
The technical end I blame on Robert Frost,
On Butler, Skelton, and others whose names I've lost,
And, though this debt isn't very hard to find,
I blame it on W. H. Auden—he won't mind—
On Catullus, and Robert Bridges, I am afraid,
And really a host of others whose names I've mislaid:
For just as a Cavalier lyric shows good breeding
A reflective poem must demonstrate wide reading.

In such verse, too, a poet is at a loss if he
Doesn't remind the reader he knows philosophy.
Provided only they see that this poem is deep,
I don't care how many people it puts to sleep.
The special subject is lemmings, the pity of lemmings.
(Whenever I use that word I shall skip the rhyme,
And I think I'll have to use it time after time.)
If I knew what a lemming was, it would help a lot,
For I certainly can't list all things which it is NOT.
But sympathy shall make up for lack of science,
And ignorance be replaced by self-reliance.
After all, this is less like a monograph than a chat:
It is only a poem—philosophical, at that.
It will not be so long as Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*,
And barely as long as Juvenal's smallest *satura*.
Though briefness seem unphilosophical to some,
I think that's the way philosophy ought to come.
I shall view the result with something akin to pride
If I make you *feel* the lemmings from the inside.

This is the end of the proem
And the beginning of the poem.

.

At a sharp, mysterious call, as though in a dream,
The lemmings move, and down to the ocean they stream.
From the Urals, and the Carpathians, and the plains
Of Prussia, or Lapland, on they come in trains.
Or secretly, through the silent forests, the hordes
Rush to the sea in the tallest of Norway's fjords.
For them, the whole world beckons and is on fire,
So add what geographical names you desire:
To say the Ganges, Peru, the Cape of Good Hope,
Though it blur our accuracy, increases our scope.
And here I shall use T. S. Eliot's famed device
Of allusion to gain intensity—it's nice!
Read over Browning's *Piper of Hamelin*, please,
Read it slowly, with care, and at your ease,
And wherever he talks about either rats or mice
Just substitute lemmings. Isn't *that* a device?
You will then have sizes and colors of all sorts

And grotesque detail that fascinates as it distorts,
And all of the lemmings streaming in grave glee—
Not after the Piper, mind, but toward the sea.

We've now saved a hundred lines by referring to Browning
And have got to the crucial part where the lemmings start drowning.
Each one making his certain and positive lunge,
Into the black and freezing waters they plunge.
And from their noses, the ripples in endless V's
Complicate webs and woofs on the flux of the seas.
Like flocks of starlings, or minnows in lucent shoals,
Infinite atoms move toward communal goals.
The northern night is above, and the water beneath,
(How far off now is the nest on the rock-strewn heath!)
And all are swimming together in regular tread
As the strokes of their feet keep pulsing their noses ahead.
Beyond, and straight, and sure, and together they swim.
Where they are when the sun looks over the ocean's rim
Nobody knows. I would like to say, if I dare,
That the point of this poem is: *Nobody ought to care.*
So far I could have prettied this up a lot
If this had been a descriptive poem. It's not.
Or I might have given you facts that were terrific,
Provided my aim were solely scientific.
As it is, unless I hear some better suggestions,
We will open this poem to philosophical questions.

But one thing first: I admit I admire the lemmings.
Together plunging far out to sea by night—
How express and admirable! how lemming! how right!
That one act only I know in the lemmings' history;
And although its end may always remain a mystery,
The lemmings fill me with gratitude and cheer
For acting one act that is so sure and clear.
There must be a thousand species of rodents and stoats,
Fieldmice, moles, muskrats, hedgehogs, mink, dwarf goats,
That live the humdrum life of the seasons through:
Gray dawns, gray fear, gray sleep, and little to do.
Even Noah forgot them, above or under the ground.
But we remember the lemmings, because they drowned.
A species famous abroad for a single act

Wins glory that less energetic fauna have lacked.
How various beasts are bigger, stronger, older,
More popular, quicker on trigger, longer, bolder;
But in praise of the lemmings, by all beasts this is allowed:
No other landlubbers swim out to sea in a crowd.
Here let us cease this unreasoning panegyric
And back to our deep and philosophical lyric.

If the lemmings unite to swim out to sea and die,
The inevitable and perplexing question is *Why?*
We might as well face it squarely and on the spot
Without a flippant or cynical asking *Why not?*

(a) Perhaps the lemming race is by nature joyous
And cannot conceive of the ocean flood as noxious.

(b) Their cosmic outlook, perhaps, is far from wide
So that they know of waves, but ignore the tide,
And do not believe that it's leagues from this side to that side.

(c) Some people think that the race as a whole is feckless
And kills itself off for the pleasure of being reckless.

(d) Still more maintain that the lemming brain is blighted;

(e) While some physiologists hold that the creature's nearsighted.

(f) Surroundings and habit, say others, have made them fools:

The lemmings come from countries of lakes and of pools;
They cannot adapt to new places, they are so fond,
And jump in the ocean as if it could be but a pond.

(g) One theory runs that deep in the past of the race
On Atlantis the lemmings were happy all over the place,
And, when that continent sank at some black touch of magic,
The end of the lemmings was comprehensively tragic.

Ancestral mourning now leads them shorewards to weep
And they find the golden age thousand fathoms deep.

This theory, though, I shan't even bother to mention,
For it bears in itself the marks of a febrile invention.

And blaming one's gloom on the dead—on a lot of dead, too—
Is one of the things that a gentleman doesn't do.

(h) A further hypothesis leads to many confusions
Because it supposes the lemmings are conscious Malthusians,
And if these wee beasts have practised his laws for so long
Then Malthus and countless lemmings can't be wrong.

It holds that lemmings, viewed in their breeding habits,
Are as sanguine, redundant, prolific, and careless as rabbits,

And knowing that population outstrips supply,
 A certain proportion resolves, quite wisely, to die.
 This sort of thing should appeal to G. B. Shaw:
 Good sense, you see, no fuss, and community law.
 The unemployed, unwanted, unloved, and unwed,
 Swim out to ocean, and never a tear is shed;
 Or if a tear falls, it mixes quick with the brine
 And loses all personal sense of yours and mine.
 The Greek youth shipped for the Minotaur's delectation
 Is a more romantic means of saving a nation;
 But I much prefer this classical lemming way
 (As Vigny might put it) of "Nages, et meurs sans parler."
 It avoids the melodramatically pathetic
 And isn't, like Jude the Obscure's hanged children, frenetic;
 Yet Hardy's words fit, for the lemmings, as well as any,
 And perhaps the last thought of each lemming is "*WE WAS TOO
 MANY.*"

All of these explanations that don't explain
 You may, with my kindest permission, throw down the drain.
 They cannot illumine, or mar, in the least degree
 The simple fact of the lemmings and the sea.
 I sometimes think we'd be further out of the wood
 If we didn't believe our brains were so frightfully good.
 The last infirmity of the noble mind
 Is its faith that the noble mind leaves all else behind.
 To believe anything which is not the product of reason
 Is, to the human race in its latest development, treason.
 And thanks to the Russels, the Huxleys, the Deweys and Shaws,
 We'll all soon be rescued from Superstition's jaws.
 Those ultimate secrets of mystery or of sorrow
 That we don't grasp today, will be clear as crystal tomorrow.
 The fear and the ecstasies that our grandfathers share
 Come from another world that isn't there.
 Let us endure, our new wise men say, for a season,
 For all will be clarified soon in the light of pure reason.

But the lemmings' acts may be past reach of our brain,
 Perhaps we had better accept what we can't explain.
 Instincts within us are fixed so central and certain
 That our tampering minds cannot pull aside the curtain.

And still, though we prove that it should or it shouldn't be,
The lemmings continue their progress out to sea.
I know this amounts almost to accepting God
And know also today such belief is most certainly odd.
Yet I would prefer, when we look at human behavior,
If we must be saved, to have God—not man—for a savior.
Give us a bit less pride and a little more trust:
We but guess we are terribly clever; we know we are dust.
Grace is a ware which should be on the front of our shelves,
And we have most grace when we don't try to make it ourselves.
After all, reflective verse shouldn't give the answers.
It should merely set the questions moving like dancers,
And should leave us, where we began, with the excellent notion
Of the lemmings moving in unison toward the ocean.

Stephen Stepanchev

Lieutenant, Supreme Headquarters, A.E.F.

STRENGTH TO WAR

Dear stranger, reading this small, true book
By a simple man who loved much and wasn't loved,
Merging your own life with the lines on this page,
Lines that remind you of some frightening shore,
Cold rains, shipwreck, and loud winds and waves,
Stirring your lonely mind with brutal images
That conjure loves forgotten, fears disclaimed,
Joining your pulse with mine, tasting my blood,
The salt, salt blood of a tortured, common man,
What can I say, stranger, what say of war
To limber fear-stiff fingers, give one strength
Against the exploding years, the enclosing dark?

It is indeed night and cold. Wind-blown mist
Spins from the river, shrouds valley and hill-top,
Binding my eyes. My post: three blocks in circuit.
My law: the safety of others: a guard's aim.
My boots make sounds in the gravel where I walk,
My rifle jiggles the shoulder gas mask binding,
My leggings rustle to unseen forest leaves.
But my pulse, too, strikes loud at my wakeful ears,
Loud as the irate colonel and the clamoring world,
And I think a soldier's thoughts of time foregone,
Of fervor of an apple branch in June,
And a lover's hand brushing my casual sleeve.
How kill the brown-haired image, how end the desperate need?
Who'll smirk at the eye clouded, the mouth shaken,
The gentle hand wavering at the gun?
Dear stranger, there is loss, forever loss,
And what we add to life we later subtract
In bitterness and age and friendlessness.
A man earns strength to war only by dying.

NO FURLOUGH

Furlough in heart and hand, the soldier at last walks
Homeward streets past elms and gray, keeling gates,
Past childhood's nervous stairways, past alley and hall,
Chalked, still, with familiar obscenities,
And hears the wide, echoed sound of a dog's
Anguished bark, of the spare chatter of sparrows,
Of the gurgle of street runlets, and pad of shoes,
And somehow his blood seems loud, and this world dead
In the superimposed montage of guns rattling,
Trucks lumbering, foot soldiers shouting
Under the brutal sun in the dusty wheat-fields.
And even his warm, round-faced mother seems
Remote in her wet kiss, her salving words,
And the rouged, pencil-cyebrowed sister quaint
And innocent in the memory of camp whores,
And the kid brother boring in his fervor for flying,
And the balding father all clicking teeth and politics,
All of it somehow faded and untrue,
And a new homesickness evolves as he wanders out
To the Chevrolet still parked by the leaf-strewn drive
And takes the dead highway for a straightening spin.

Can he hope for a full return and refuse to know time
Whose eyes are the sun's, whose breath was sold and foresworn,
Whose pulse was wound long ago and fixed like a clock,
Whose loss is already numbered among the lost?

O man, eternal soldier, lonely friend,
There is no respite from day, no furlough from dying.

INNER BROTHER

Rain falls briskly on my worn shelter-half
Through green, rough camouflage of erratic vines,
In desolate reminder of my own hammering pulse
And the stir in my German-dark soul, whose twisting shapes

Are mind's airplanes cavorting across thundering skies:
To what end, Sir, to whose applauding hands?
Is my inner brother still unyielding, intent
On leaving my days stripped, my hopes blasted?
Oh I cannot cry sadness to any fighting live one,
Or speak of impure need and obsessing sin,
Here where a factual foe crouches in the wood,
Clicking his gun in readiness, coughing awake.
So I turn to my M-1 rifle and take it apart—
The trigger housing group, the barrel, the spring—
And gently oil the pins and replace them again
And stare at the hand-smooth piece with ironic grin,
Remembering how I learned to name its parts
To savage imprecations of a corporal's hate,
Recalling the lessoned feats of the rifle range,
Where I pierced the silhouetted target man
With elaborate notion of windage and shifted height.
And now I can say I'm scientist to my gun's working,
For I know its intricate nature and precise use,
And I turn to the forward hours confident of my aim
And confident of the oh so personalized foe
Rustling the grass blades where we made Tom's grave.
But oh for a like science, a like aim, and like gun
To take my troubling, grisly, inner brother!

Gervase Stewart (1920-1941)

Sub-Lieutenant, Fleet Air Arm (British)

POEM

(Written just before the author was killed in action)

I burn for England with a living flame
In the uncandled darkness of the night.
I share with her the fault, who share her name,
And to her light I add my lesser light.
She has my arm, who had my father's arm,
Who shall not have my unborn children's arm.

I burn for England, even as she burns
In living flame, that when her peace is come
Flame shall destroy whoever seeks to turn
Her sacrifice to profit—and the homes
Of those who fought—to wreckage,
In a war for freedom, who were never free.

POEM

I take four devils with me when I ride
My animal of muscle and of love,
To match the demons grinning in my steed
Who thumb their noses when I make a move,
Who prick my body with their little pins
To make me bleed, who finger all my sins.

I trick six spirits to me when I brave
The seas her body shows me when she smiles,
To match the spirits hiding in her breasts,
Who laugh at me and shape my heart with files,
Whose silver hammers aim their little blows
To smash the fragile bulbs within my blood.

I take ten thousand chances when I ride
My untrained horse to race against her own,
I feel her tawny creature at my side
Who drives my devils and my spirits home,
Who jeers, and turning when he makes the post,
Takes off the prize, who is no more than ghost.

RED CROSS NURSES

(For M. Barnes)

Theirs is a white and a green life, a smooth
Circled walled theatre one hundred times burnished:
Reflections in chromium: theirs is a life
Of two large eyes gazing between strips of white.

Theirs is a tireless methodical existence,
A passionless period of fingering thin edges,
A hissing of steam and a tinkling of small things
Not crashing the silence but stilling the silence.

Theirs the creating, the moulding, the sculpting,
The cutting, the purging, the sewing, the healing,
The dullness of glove touching glove, and the rising
Of pulse against rubber, the sterilisation.

Theirs is the look in the eyes of the dying,
They the confessors absolving wild glances,
Theirs is the spasmodic trembling, the crying,
They, the ice in the burning, the heat in the freezing.

Theirs is the full life, the white heat of living,
Theirs is the offer of service unbidden,
Pricking each pore, freeing bones, muscles, sinews,
Seeing, feeling and hearing the things which are hidden.

Randall Swingler

Corporal, British Army

THEY LIVE

In your hesitant moments, remember Cornford and Fox
Looking across the valleys and the romantic rocks
Not even moonlight could make remote or magic,
Nothing nostalgic, nothing tragic
By the proximity of death:
No, but for them the trenched ridges
The machine-gun nested ledges
Were a concrete form compelled
By the same simple will,
History's pattern of struggle: by whose breath
They fought, and died as it happened,
But wholly to live, our impulse and tradition.

Surely they knew as they wrote
That freedom is but wholeness;
For one alone a thing impossible,
For who shall be whole except mankind is whole?
A thing therefore for which they fought
And fighting found, and left as a light for us
To shame our pettiness, our indecisions,
To fuse by its certainty our divisions
And make us greater than we are
By showing what we might be
And by their young and unregretful star
To stab us with courage and confidence
Daily and nightly.

LETTER I

The midnight streets as I walk back
Are half in white and half in black,
White in the light that night repeats,
Black-roofed and floored in day's defeat.

And black the shadows of my thought
Stand up against the white retort
Of all the brilliance I have known
Beside you in this stricken town.

This war will keep me waking long
To wrestle with the constant wrong
While heart and reason disagree,
Either impatient to be free,

Free of the curse that checks us here,
My fatalism and your fear,
Whose black denial intervenes
Like the angelic sword between.

Such are the knots of guilt and sin
Our history is tangled in
And cannot be untied again
Until our world is whole and sane.

This battle which they wage in me,
Desire and Necessity,
Can never be resolved before
Mankind has won the greater war.

Because the soil from which we're reared
Is poisoned with the rot of years
Our simple will cannot evade
The twisted root of fear and pride.

Therefore the love you make in me
Begets more vehemence to free
The world whose nets constrain us still
From loving with a single will.

LETTER VIII

On the first day of snow, my train
Shuffles to London through the coated air.
Every sound is a thud on a deafened ear.
Sight too is muffled, for the long fields drift

Like wool into a woollen sky. The soft
Cope of cold oppresses every move
Like a cathedral silence. Trees in white gloves
Make decadent gestures. In a white calm I pass
Between two actions in my sealed compartment.
Suppose I were going to death, it would be like this.
I mean, suppose they struck: for the time being
Our world were frozen under mad repression,
The people defeated by their own despair,
And the champions of clarity everywhere
Herded away in trains to be shot and buried:
We should look out on the world as I do now,
Our valid work invisible under the snow:
Knowing it was over for us. We should have the same
Calm that I now enjoy. For action moves us
Like waves against the shore, forever outward,
Wilfully implicated in the natural movement.
But when stillness intervenes, it is to you
That I return, my solid ground of love
Where clarity has become articulate
In every detail: the sensible interest
In the immediate object finds a true
Unforced and unidealised delight.
Yes, we have formed the nucleus of our world
Which shall become the world, where freedom is
The understanding of our own desires,
The knowledge of our power; the active world
Is an enlargement of this. Love's one desire
Is to make whole, to stop at no division.
So what our love must liberate in us
Is power for action, the necessity
To make the world whole, that we may be whole.
Love needs no safety-catch. Security
Lies in our understanding. So, my dear,
In every intervening hour
To you I return as to my springs of power.
Love gets more children than grow in the womb,
More than the envious snow or the frost of fear
Can ever scotch; and such a generation
Of power to permeate the world
That death himself brings nothing to an end.

Julian Symons

Trooper, Royal Armoured Corps (British)

THE SECOND MAN

Reading the headlines in the revolutionary
Paper I see suddenly the landscape
Through the window, green complicated trees, stream
On which sits permanently a paper swan,
Grass and whirring birds, all the elaborate
Mechanical items, laid out like a stageset:
The words in the paper are real and I know their meaning.

And yet my mind creates
No willing parallel for these events:
The public cynicism, apathy
Of a decaying Empire, insults of privilege, greed
Of the American paw, all these
Have power to move much less than the small coin
Of my dead life. I am aware
Of all the small concessions and contractions
By which we are ourselves, the gestures,
Retreats and hopes, odd components
Making the quiet years. And knowing this
Corrupt, a life supported by
The bludgeon of the police, which no specious
Or sentimental word can justify,
I still desire it.

How often I could wish that second man,
My shadow, touching every act,
This poem, reading, or a game of cards,
With his hard bright contempt, were gone.
O in the visible world of trees and girls
Permanently to live; and not to see
The private virtue and the public good
As incompatible.

REFLECTIONS IN BED

*That time of revolution being come
At which the Fortunate Islands should be joined . . .*
Put down the book: consider, consider always
The time of year, the state of health, the weather.
The month, June. Heart, rapid and irregular.
The day, fine: on Richmond river-bank
Talked to two girls. Later read Hardy:
Went to the cinema: prepared for death.
These are the affects of a revolution.
These are the sophistries of revolution.

The alert man lolls in bed waiting for bombs.
Cats and trains cry in the night. There are
More things in heaven and earth than we can hold.
The trams run away. The trains run away. Their thunder
Making a separate voice. And if in bed
Another body moves

Another hand and voice

Under the hand the velvet face of love,
A voice as warm and tender as a wound

Unripe for revolution or for death.

HOSPITAL OBSERVATION

Feeling the useless arm
At my left side, damaged and not in war,
Watching the patients in their blues pass,
The white iron bedsteads and enamelled nurses,
The permanent and deadly parade of days,
I cannot help thinking: O these thirty years
Of life gone away and left so little,
The failures of the body or the mind,
Mere rubbish from the receding tide.

This corner of a war
Permits belief in a locality
And character: but the ungenerous air
Is not conspicuous for its kindness to
Our lives. Touching my arm I see
The gap stretched out between our lives and hopes,
An intellectual generation
Withered:

It is for us,
The future: and yet like a disease
Evades our diagnosis. If I could give power to
My burning thoughts! This ink turn acid and the pen
Become a gun: pointed against the murderers,
The corrupt class, the scum
Of a top-heavy civilisation:
If I could extinguish the voice that says
Man can endure corruption and be happy.

It is quiet
In the ward: sunlight on the wooden floor
Floods; there are flowers and ferns in bowls. The wind
blows through
The window beside me, fresh and cool.

MR. SYMONS AT RICHMOND,
MR. POPE AT TWICKENHAM

At Richmond the people walked along by the river,
The pleasure-boats drew up beside the bank;
The apparatus of contentment
Was obvious and disturbing.

For the soldiers, slick and different in uniform,
Showed up the general failure; their blunt
Heavy look revelation
Of the truthfulness lacking

In these lives wrapped smoothly like a bandage
Round the outside of events; while the bone
Grows corrupt, still the covering
Flesh is washed clean and shiny,

Until the gangrene spreads and the necessary useless
Amputation is performed; the mortified flesh
 Turns green, the smell of suburban
 Living grows, and is killing.

At Richmond the people walked along by the river.
I thought of the people: and I thought too
 Of Twickenham where the malicious
 Dwarf was dressed up in buckram,

Where his alchemy of ink turned love into envy
And desire into wit: where fixed with the sharp
 And terrible knife of his hatred
 There wriggled and shuddered

All those whose health offended his sickness, the drinkers
And the sexual performers, Dennis and Cibber;
 Theobald, the mild friendly scholar
 Who knew too much about Shakespeare.

In all of them he saw his own weakness reflected.
He saw his lost genius, with power like the sun.
 His life moved to darkness, the menacing
 Claws clapping and closing.

The pursuit of his enemies was relentless and fearful
Until they gave in; and then he was kind.
 The small bony hand from its agony
 Stroked them and was gentle.

And as the weak spirit got revenge for its torture
His actions became more virtuous, more friendly, more good.
 He died in almost complete self-deceit,
 Who had talked of self-knowledge,

Saying: "I have always wondered at human vanity,"
But then: "What great arm is coming out of the wall?"
 And throwing himself out of bed he took the
 Last sacrament kneeling.

At Richmond the people walked along by the river,
And I walked with the people and was part of them
 And yet something different. I felt the ripple
 Of life and death on the river,

I thought of Pope, I walked on the difficult
Narrow towpath that runs between Virtue and Death
And thought in the sunset, *Which is the lesser
Evil? Is it living or dying?*

*My sorrow is every man's, who requires so little
More than immediate happiness, immediate love.
Must I look at injustice? Is any other
World real? Like a feather*

Night fell. The sun died. The people dispersed
And left me alone with the crooked passionate ghost,
Thinking deceit and friendship and malice
By the river at Richmond.

PUB

The glasses are raised, the voices drift into laughter,
The clock hands have stopped, the beer in the hands of the soldiers
Is blond, the faces are calm and the fingers can feel
The wet touch of glasses, the glasses print rings on the table,
The smoke rings curl and go up and dissolve near the ceiling,
This moment exists and is real.

What is reality? Do not ask that. At this moment
Look at the butterfly eyes of the girls, watch the barmaid's
Precision in pouring a Scotch, and remember this day,
This day at this moment you were no longer an island,
People were friendly, the clock in the hands of the soldiers
For this moment had nothing to say.

And nothing to say and the glasses are raised, we are happy
Drinking through time, and a world that is gentle and helpless
Survives in the pub and goes up in the smoke of our breath,
The regulars doze in the corner, the talkers are fluent;
Look now in the faces of those you love and remember
That you are not thinking of death.

But thinking of death as the lights go out and the glasses
Are lowered, the people go out and the evening

Goes out, ah, goes out like a light and leaves you alone,
As the heart goes out, the door opens out into darkness,
The foot takes a step, and the moment, the moment of falling
Is here, you go down like a stone,

Are you able to meet the disaster, able to meet the
Cold air of the street and the touch of corruption, the rotting
Fingers that murder your own in the grip of love?
Can you bear to find hateful the faces you once thought were lovely,
Can you bear to find comfort alone in the evil and stunted,
Can you bear to abandon the dove?

The houses are shut and the people go home, we are left in
Our island of pain, the clocks start to move and the powerful
To act, there is nothing now, nothing at all
To be done: for the trouble is real: and the verdict is final
Against us. The clocks go round faster and faster. And fast as confetti
The days are beginning to fall.

AND THE WORLD'S FACE

And the world's face, the gentle face
Of trees and hills irremediably marked
By war . . . And all those other faces
That say *O we shall never be the same*

Looking straight into a soldier's glass eye
(The bed next me in hospital) I saw
A *thing* expressionless and mute. His hand
Also damaged, a spring on his boot.
Merely to note

These details, destruction of love by impersonal
Planes and guns, jingle of egotism, and
The rich still sliding in their limousines,
Churchill returning with his oranges,
To note is enough, enough.
All the alleviations of the news,
The dope that soothes our sickly consciences,

Are nothing. The man next to me turns
His eye (the good one), gives a grin and says
They tell me we shall win the bloody war.

FOR THE DEPRESSED

For the depressed who are also the defeated
What happens is bound to appear comic
If they wish to preserve their dignity
And are not among the great self-deceivers.

Appearances then become altered
In a manner truly poetic: thus:
“How infinite are the chromatic
Possibilities of the falling sky.”

“My wife an antelope with the head
Of a gazelle.” “Today I move from my
Department to another and a bigger
Department.” “Death is the Ace of Spades.”
“Today in our street a bomb

Scrambled four people to the shape of eggs.”
In the devastated air
These lives have a certain serenity
As of those who are already dead.

On the skyline of their thought
Are seen no mirages;
They watch with clear eyes disaster
Advance by easy stages.

Therefore:
This is your appropriate position if
You are not an active participant
In the war between classes, but are one of
The depressed who are also the defeated.

FOR MY WIFE

Sitting at evening in the warm grass
I look at the barracks cradled between hills.
Purring along the sky the fighters pass.
A daze of heat fills
Up my mind against the usual fears.
I think of these last two years

Stamped permanently upon our wavering lives.
I think of you. The very face of love
Speaks, and tells me what love gives:
This power to see and move
Outside ourselves, these trees and this green view:
As I, alone and idle here, see you,

So easily laughing and so quickly happy
Or quickly sad, for whom the natural
Events of life are tidal like the sea:
For whom the world is all
Simple, made up exclusively of people:
Now, although each church steeple

Reveals the power of idols, every action
Involves its opposite and must disclose
A painful birth of bureaucratic faction,
Today when every rose
Shows up its worm, I more than ever preserve
This radical and single love we serve.

And I present this love now as a symbol
Of our best hopes, and weigh this good we've known
Against the times when we betray and dissemble;
Now in this place alone
I offer unaffected thanks that we,
In spite of our time, being together are happy.

And in the future that we move towards, I trust
That whatever fails at least this may survive
As compensation for our end of dust,
This love, that is alive
And vivid in a world of falsehood,
That, where so much is doubtful, certainly is good.

GLADSTONE

"It is so easy to write, but to write honestly nearly impossible."

—GLADSTONE: Diary 1896.

The images break upon a sad day.
I think of a friend recently killed
Whose death leaves me without understanding,
Bitterness or anger. The delicate hours
Wash over my head like waves of bells
Clanging. I look up to see
The great stone presence of the orator.

He wavers like a dream in front of the window
And through him I see the trees in bud.
His raised hand asks for silence, he fills
The room with an odour of purity.
The spotlight is focused, music plays,
I sit forward expectant, his voice begins.

I forget what he means but remember the words,
Or lose the words but remember the meaning.
I forget, I forget. The voice goes on,
Brilliant, tireless, unendurable,
The phrases cohere and separate
And become indistinct, they form a web
Of words that envelop me, the dropped
Phrases are appropriate as a song:

*Though everything I did was always wrong
My aims were virtuous, my will was strong*

*I had no vanity but simply knew
Those who opposed me were not good or true*

*When I got up to speak all the ideal
And abstract thoughts took flesh and were made real*

*Only sometimes at night I heard a voice
That said man's fate does not result from choice,
And economy of force is what destroys.*

In the cold watch of early spring
His words and image hang in the room,

That ghastly white-haired phantom of
Another time, outside the trees
Waving slowly in the breeze
And thoughts of my friend who died
For a cause in which he did not believe,
All these make up a pattern against which
I oppose in my own life gestures
And thought's free movement merely. For my friend,
Killed in the third year of the second capitalist war
There are now no Liberal ghosts and no reproaches,
But for me the spring advances and the unlimited
Areas of conflict remain outside, the problems of action
And honesty are still unreconciled.

SUNDAY, JULY 14th: A FINE DAY AT THE BATHS

Examine the mirror closely, and your face.
The mask is yellow and unsanguine. Bone
Pushes at flesh. The cheeks: high.
The shape: oval. The look: sad.
Days in their movement cross like railway lines
The porous skin: nose, important junction;
Ears, receiving depot; eyes, weak power stations;
The whole, with its heaped hills, refuse, scabs, a map of the dead.

At the Baths the women languish
In sunlight and most of anguish
Is put away, here a curtain
Is drawn over the uncertain
Future, the blue water
Shines with girls' laughter,
Happiness is rubbed slowly
In with the oil, nearly
Touching the heart. But quiet
And still is desire
And none acts like his sire.

Perhaps it is all irrelevant: amazement, indignation, despair.
Perhaps the hand of Time daily passing over us
Has come to a stop, it is possible to assess
Our lives, the gap between desire and action,
In final terms, so that one will say ceaselessly,
With life like a kid-covered drumstick tapping the eyeballs:
“This is my life which is uselessly
Moving, I now know the meaning
Of life which once seemed full of meaning
But is now I discover this moving
Of fools in a circle whose wishing
Is folly and only the flashing
Of Time like a camera shutter
Makes sense.

And only forgiving makes sense.”

But these are not final terms
Or any terms at all, this is merely
The wonderful futility of the angels in which life equals death,
Desire is the negation of desire, fulfilment and failure are the same.
It is better to look at the weather.

July the fourteenth. A beautiful morning. Cirrus
Scudding through heaven. Flat on the back
Yellow-face watches the sky, examines hands,
Rolls over like dog on fat stomach to watch the divers
Scything through water, the raised falling spray,
Arms stretching incalculably. O joy
Is obvious surely, can easily be touched
In this thick sunlight that burns like glass?
Stamp of sun is left lying across
The bodies that move dumbly, cased in warmth.
But reflect. Reflect.

No individual action has meaning, joyful or terrible:
At the same time you cannot judge humanity by your own sliding
scale.

Have these lives which move easily to a bell or a ball of events
Any significance? Anything more than charm in the sun?
Does the bomb contain anything more than itself? Is it possibly also
A refuge an escape and a wish?

The falling spray is subtilized in vapour,
The spring-heeled bathers, splendid in sunlight,

Donald Thompson

Gunner, R.A. (British)

ON THE RELATIVE MERIT OF FRIEND AND FOE, BEING DEAD

Young skull which the wind scrapes, which the sand
Makes smooth, within your echoing grin
Where the breeze, breathing through the orbit's sound-
Vent, idly keens, once curled a curious brain
Whose convolutions intricately wrought
Diversity of pleasure, pain, fear, thought.

Here, when the flesh was firm, there stood the ear
Fashioned to hoist disturbances of air,
To differentiate the shriek and crack
Of bombs, the formal counterpoint, the low
Whisper and scuffle under the haystack.

These shattered teeth once sheltered under pride
Of lips that pressed to kiss, pursed to deride.
At the wind's mouthpiece, here the eager eye
Assessed the sun's light, the hills' stride,
Dance of sea and leaf, whiteness of thigh.

I found you, half-buried in the sand, and bare,
Hollow, dull as stone; beside you lay
Two helmets, peeled by the scavenging sun;
One theirs, one ours. But as to which you wore,
No indication.

Dunstan Thompson

Corporal, U.S. Army

THIS LONELINESS FOR YOU IS LIKE THE WOUND

This loneliness for you is like the wound
That keeps the soldier patient in his bed,
Smiling to soothe the general on his round
Of visits to the somehow not yet dead;
Who, after he has pinned a cross above
The bullet-bearing heart, when told that this
Is one who held the hill, bends down to give
Folly a diffident embarrassed kiss.
But once that medaled moment passes, O,
Disaster, charging on the fever chart,
Wins the last battle, takes the heights, and he
Succumbs before his reinforcements start.
Yet now, when death is not a metaphor,
Who dares to say that love is like the war?

IN ALL THE ARGOSY OF YOUR BRIGHT HAIR

Whom I lay down for dead rises up in blood,
Drawn over water after me. His wavering
Football echoes from the ocean floor. Blow,
Ye winds, a roundabout. These bully sailors flood
My eyes with tears, treacheries. But his voice shivering
North in lamentation is all I now know—
Whose million miles, once worth gales to be glad,
Tell me last look was best photograph I had.

When that damask duke took my heart for hound,
I dogged him with praises, with poems, a beggar's homage.
His blue eyes, fencing like a dance of swords,

Ringed me from foemen, were night lights. I found
He turned my head from death's entrancing image,
Gold in the desert sun, who sang: "What words
You want, I have." He saved me from my own hand
And the five assassins nervous for the grandstand.

My whole life in gratitude does him no good,
Whose happiness was dancebands, beer, and baseball,
Talked love to be polite. But the soldier boy
Grows up, goes after the goddess in the barbed-wire wood
Who sells him secrets for a firing squad. This tall
Young man, this blond young man, his mother's joy,
Must kill her first, his father next. He shall ride
To the top of the hill where three thieves died.

The whores of Wardour Street, the Soho whores:
"Give us a light, dearie." But I have no match.
Now the inconsolable year hazes with twilight:
Only the cold phantasmal rose burns out-of-doors;
Inside the lamps are lit. If I should watch
All every night, I'd see no ghost. My light
Fingered friend stole the world away. O my heirs,
You of the equal sadness, give him your prayers.

· LARGO

For William Abrahams

Of those whom I have known, the few and fatal friends,
All were ambiguous, deceitful, not to trust:
But like attracts its like, no doubt; and mirrors must
Be faithful to the image that they see. Light bends
 Only the spectrum in the glass:
 Prime colors are the ones which pass
 The less distorted. Friendship ends
In hatred or in love, ambivalence of lust:
Either, like Hamlet, haunted, doting on the least
Reflection of remorse; or else, like Richard, lost
 In vanity. The frozen hands
 That hold the mirror make demands;
And flexing fingers clutch the vision in a vise.

Each one betrays himself: the ghostly glazer understands
Why he must work in ice.

All friends are false but you are true: the paradox
Is perfect tense in present time, whose parallel
Extends to meeting point; where, more than friends, we fell
Together on the other side of love; where clocks
And mirrors were reversed to show
Ourselves as only we could know;
Where all the doors had secret locks
With double keys; and where the sliding panel, well
Concealed, gave us our exit through the palace wall.
There we have come and gone: twin kings, who roam at will
Behind the court, behind the backs
Of consort queens, behind the racks
On which their favorites lie who told them what to do.
For every cupid with a garland round the throne still lacks
The look I give to you.

The goddess who presided at our birth was first
Of those in fancy clothes fate made us hate to fight:
The Greeks with gifts, good looks, so clever, so polite,
Like lovers quick to charm, disarming, too well versed
In violence to wear weapons while
They take a city for a smile.
By doomed ancestral voices cursed
To wander from the womb, their claws plucked out our sight,
Who nighttime thinking we are followed down the street
By blind men like ourselves, turn round again, and wait,
Only to hear the steps go past
Us standing lonely there, at last
Aware how we have failed; are now the Trojan fool
For all the arty Hellenistic tarts in plaster cast:
The ones who always rule.

We are alone with every sailor lost at sea
Whose drowning is repeated day by day. The sound
Of bells from buoys mourning sunken ships rings round
Us, warning away the launch that journeys you and me
On last Cytherean trips in spring.
There the rocks are where sirens sing
Like nightingales of death. But we,

Hearing excitements, music for the ear, have bound
Our voyage to find its ending where the sterile sand
Spends pearls and coral on a skull. The sailing wind
Is with us now and then: blows high
As halcyon clouds across the sky:
Falls fast to doldrums while the moon is also young,
Untided, half to harvest whole. See how our sirens die
Before their song is sung.

What we have always wanted, never had, the ease,
The fame of athletes, such happy heroes at a game,
Beloved by every likely lad, is not the same
As what we have: these measured methods how to please
An indolent and doubtful boy,
Who plays at darts, breaks for a toy
The sometime valued heart. Why seize
The moment in the garden, on the stair, to blame
Our nameless Eros for his daring? Too little time
Is left for love. When we come back, what welcome home
Will he award our wounded eyes?
What uniform be his disguise
In dreams, when sleeping sentries always march away
Once more to war? Now is our novelty: we may surprise
The faun at end of day.

Make no mistake, my soldier. Listen: bugle calls
Revoke your leisure like a leave, invade your peace
With orders on the run, and, loud as bombs, police
Your life for death. The poet's blood-brick tower falls:
Even his vanity is gone,
Which leaves the loser all alone.
Not private poems, but public brawls
Demand his drumbeat history, the pulse that must increase
Until his heart is ransomed from its jewel. Revise
Your verse. Consider what king's killer did to those
Who wrote their way between the shells
That last delusive time. Farewells
Are folly to our serpent queen. She will not sign
Discharge of conscience for a masterpiece, but, hissing, tells
Failure in every line.

We are the mountaineers who perish on the slopes
Of heaven high and perfect Himalayan peak:
Exhausted by the cold, we can no longer speak
To one another—only signal by the ropes.
Those best before us have, alas,
Plunged through a gentian-blue crevasse:
The snow-blind flaw. Their glacial hopes
Shine as a stream of desperate stars, icebound, and bleak,
That mock their nimbused glory from a frigid lake.
Where we stand now, they stood much farther: climbing like
Legendary guides. But traps
Were waiting for their last collapse:
Inviting visions from the moon world air—misplace
A step to follow, dance to death. They fell, so we, perhaps,
May do as well with grace.

Now noble guests depart for good, wearing our loss
Like flowers. O Damon, decked with asphodel, who moves
Among the shadow dwellers. But he shall hear the hooves
Of unicorns at gallop, see them, coursing, toss
Their fluted horns above the cool
Unpoisoned waters in love's pool,
And, kneeling, lay their heads across
A beatific virgin's breast. The day approves
His passage: sunlight on the secret river gives
Bright benediction to his boat. Elysian waves
Bear him, the hero, far from us
To join the gods. Illustrious!
No words may worship him. The laurel is not all
That withers at the roots, since we, lamenting him, are thus
Autumnal for his fall.

Armed, say you? Armed, my lord. So, likewise, you and I,
Who with the butchered ghost must stalk the battlements,
Shall watch—cold-comfort guards—how lonely lie the tents
Where strangers sleep together just before they die.
Look where their banners in the air
Are half-staff hung. The cockcrow dare
Of dawn is mourning in the sky.
Our thoughts like bayonets blood time. What precedents
Of passion shall we use to brave the coward? Once

Bombs are as roses, will he kiss the black-heart prince?
Honor, more heavy than the sea,
May overwhelm both you and me
To give no quarter choice at all: gay boys, whom war
Won janizary; youths, who flung away their shields. So we
Are *mort à Singapore*.

Narcissus, doubled in the melting mirror, smiles
To see himself outfaced by tears, and, sorrowing, hands
His ace of love to harlequin of hearts, who stands
The distant edge of laughter. Time's joker still compiles
Trick score of triumph, trumps the queen
To play his knave of emeralds. Green
Gamester reflects the water guiles
Of palming, reads the gambled cards, and then demands
Another pack to shuffle. But the glass partner bends
The fate five fingers round a saint's stigmata, wounds
By dealing diamonds from his nails.
No marveled metaphor avails
To vantage this beloved impersonator twin,
Whose coronet, crown crystal, qualifies a peer. My voice fails.
In your name poems begin.

ARTICLES OF WAR

I

The dead young man stood up in his grave:
"Grieve, grieve for me," he said. "I was brave
As the best of you successful few
Who followed your hero home from war,
Haloed with laurel leaves that grew
Like legends and curled like snakes your hair.
I was there—but not to live, not to save
Even the life-given love I gave.

O wave, wave to me across the loss
Of laughter, and, after you pass, toss
Me what are more than flowers in your smile;
While I, death's dandy, string these tears

For pearls on unstrung years that while
Away no daytime fame like yours.
The mask of memory greengrows the moss:
But where the worms work—there is my source.

You, false to me then, be true instead
Now when the stone crown crushes my head,
Be the king's friends when no king reigns
Save in the exiled grave, be the bell
That rings from hell my famous thanes,
Be court, be kingdom, be my most of all,
Be mindful of me in the loveless bed.”
The dead young man went back to the dead.

II

Fell forward in the west, as far as forward fell,
Red star, the blood star, O zodiac of death's farewell:
Like lucklost plane spun also all
My heart: like parachute was peace
To flower a foolish wish
For you, who over airways ever call
To landing field of love where no planes crash,
Where the bombs cease:
I wished your star of war no time of crime to tell.

When your ship sailed, O Almirante, my Marvel of Peru,
South through archipelagoes of grief I followed you,
Where snakes like pearls coiled undersea
Equators round drowned albatross
Of loss—leviathan
As loneliness was Amazon to me:
The viceroy boys, meridian in green,
Saw my Atlantics cross
Themselves for your imperial Pacific view.

Hunter who haunts the dawn consorting unicorn
Was echo tally-ho to sally forth when faun
Returned like triumph to the fern
And forest pool of fall: was gay
As gala ghost in spring:
Took up the chase with grace, looked out to earn

That tapestry of scene where queens lie long
In dalliance for a day:
You held him happy, heard halloo of hunting horn.

And, O as music then, you were like dancing, psalm
King entrancing, slingshot shepherd boy, whose calm
Of tears was smiles to overwhelm
The face of longing, who with a kiss
Trapped no elaborate lures
For swift or starling, but, my darling, an elm
Tree tower to bower the birds of paradise:
What words I had were yours
When love's regalia, orb, and scepter crowned your palm.

Not the Hawaiian horror, no, nor the scream of doom
Time radioed, when air raid struck each college room,
Put Johnny on the spot: his name,
Already listed like the lost
Pale sailors with their ships,
Leads off those elegiac dead who claim
Tomorrow for their sorrow, who laugh at last
No longer then, whose lips
With kisses should, my wonder, O be flowers to bloom
Before the unknown lover's tomb.

III

The boy who brought me beauty brought me death;
Like laughter he came after me, came through
The dew of danger to come down to earth.

Not as I dreamed he seemed, but as a stranger
Met at a railway rendezvous—a new
Announcer on the deadly nightshade hour.

But strong as anger and powered from every finger,
Skyhigh his hand commanded me to flower
My dragon tower with love's heroic rose.

Who throws the flame, corona crests his name
Like lilac Lucifer? who flaring goes,
Galaxy of glitter, hailing stars in hell?

I could tell as well the tiger to be tame
As ask this prince of risk how now he fell:
His secret is more brazen than a bell.

My ace of swords is words away from doom;
And I am made a merry maypole groom:
A jack of hearts, life's fumbling tumbling fool.

All my immediates are here: the fear
Of failure follows Narcissus from the pool
Cool as a death's-head to his bed of glass.

Alas, the leaves are red that feed on blood,
Are torn by thorns to valentine the grass:
My garden grows when winter snows are near.

But now is not for fancy dancing doubts
When war shouts down dead aeroplanes, down flood
Of fliers flapping wings like eagle scouts.

This is the kiss of peace, my dove of death,
To weave like laurel through your olive wreath:
Now strike the hour and let time's towers break the earth.

IV

Whirled in the waltz when by the bagpipe skirled,
Our fun was done with laughter, went after tears
And terror—war's era, like a searchlight curled
With night around the sound of planes, appears
O as love above the falling years.

Not you nor I are drawn by dawn, who sight
The bright before the morning moon of sorrow:
West, while the dragons over Asia fight,
East, as the swans of Europe die, we borrow
Time whose clocks and mirrors mock tomorrow.

Revolvers fire their salvos: poems like a kiss,
The instant whisper pledging peace, outrage
Not the heart already, but the mouth to miss
The pulse of peril when the lips engage:
Death is the chance we take to come of age.

Whether alone with loneliness, or gay
At drinks in the cabaret of fallen angels,
Our doom is easy through the room: there to stay,
Lazy, voluptuous, waiting—equate the angles,
Springs like the lion and like the leopard mangles.

Our season of success has every minute hands
To gesture haste—no words to waste, and shows,
A finger on the danger, where our stranger stands
Ready to rifle us of luck: the devil knows
How many marvels we could still propose.

But if the specter on the stair is there
At all, the sunlight on his hair shall cherish
Green crowns of flowers: though powerless queens despair
Of honor, gold is the mold for kings who perish
Like Lucifer with hell for passion's parish.

So we are lost, by careless history filed
As smiles and memories for the famous friend:
Still we, chancing romantics, must be heiled
With Hitler by the human omens of our end:
Even our souls forgiven, ourselves pretend.

Suppose you had by heart the stressed heroic lines,
To act the part—elected, had Hamlet's choices,
Would you choose well? and I—say fame defines
My poems with those whose seraphim rejoices,
Would I be graced with such celestial voices?

No: we are children wastered by the war,
Idle mollicoddles, mothers' darlings, fools
Who fancy aunts to air their summer seashore:
In short, the lads who love their lovely schools:
Murder is horror: like love breaks all the rules.

There's little left, and what is left is leaving
As fast as trains we missed, or beauties kissed:
Check cashed, and, canceled, bill: no use deceiving
Ourselves that we are final on death's general list.
Like time is nothing more for me to tell:
Yet, at this moment, O I wish you well.

At the end, at the end, there is time,
Like the past, like the past, to be mourned
Over and over again, but the time
Is so short, is so short, I am warned
O to spend with a friend my last time.

So with life I would have you be gay
As the carnival waltz at a dance,
All glitter, all lights, always gay
Like laughter, champagne, a romance
With the one who has fun being gay.

May the talk, may the joke, may the kiss
Still stay for a day, for a week,
While the smile on the face that you kiss
Stays still as a place, when you speak
Not a word to be heard but a kiss.

At the end, at the end, there is love
To mock time in the mirror, the clock,
Which I turn back, returning like love
Is returned by the tide to the rock,
O to send to a friend my last love.

John Thompson, Jr.

Sergeant, U.S. Air Forces

A LOVE FOR PATSY

See the little mauderer
Stretch out on the grass!
His heart is burst asunder
The pieces cry Alas.

Upright, fat pink pieces
Of fluffy cloud float overhead.
The little facets of his eyes
Split by salty tears, so tired

Of seeing pieces of the world,
Close, and rustling grass,
Caws of an old unpleasant bird
Are sounds that say Alas;

They float like notes in the funny paper,
Round notes with sharp little tails.
Oh I'm blue, the supine moper
Says, I'm trapped in the toils

Of Patsy's black black hair.
Her hair is like the cool dry night
That waves through the window-bar
Where a moody jailbird sits apart

Shuffling his broken heart. I'm sad
As I can be. Her black
Black hair can never be compared
To dull dichotomic

Trees or prickly grass, inflated
Clouds, even a great
One draped on the sun. Over-rated
Senseless things to stare at,

One here one there they're strewn,
Impinging pieces left out of
The world. Her eyes are green!
Oh oh, he says, I die of love.

See the weeping little wretch
He rolls in a frenzy!
In all the world no two things match
But the green eyes of Patsy.

BIRTHDAY POEM, NOVEMBER 4th

As in your innocent eyes last night
The sapphire's star flared softly over
Relics and demons, a carnival flight
Led by the ape and elephant lover
Tipping a tin can flooded with fright,

As on your eyelids, on our quilt,
Its thin light froze
The punctual moon in a rakish tilt
Waxed to first quarter, our clock's hands rose,
At midnight met in a little tin lilt.

These flourishes of heaven and earth
Left your face like a child's intent
Only on breath. All of our worth
I dreamed of, poking for a portent
The twenty-fifth night of your birth.

One night, sombre, exhausted, sinking
Through time like a stone, you saw heaven.
"God doesn't care you love me," saying
"God doesn't care about that," in an even
Breath you were asleep. And thinking

For the first time then of Judgement
I recognized your words. You told
Me what a hard heaven meant

And in my fear I had to hold
Myself like a diver in the current

That flows to keep us all apart
And, I saw then, would cast us up
At last to hear with a stopped heart
By the kelp, blanched wood, sloshing tide scup,
God say: "Alone, as at the start."

I looked at the moon, its tides growled.
But I fell down its beams; your face
Caught them all. Your drenched hair cowed
Your head, awash in the dark; a trace
Of light curled down where darkness prowled

Like ripples on a water flower.
Your shoulder floated, you could have been
A drowned girl where the tides lower.
But I thought on the swells of a green
Stream we sailed, bells hailed the hour.

Your day is here, and eager now
In our red and white Mexican chair
You blow the candles which wouldn't allow
Any candy mottoes; and you whisper
Wishes so simple they laugh at a vow.

Henry Treece

Flight Lieutenant, R.A.F. (British)

PRAYER IN TIME OF WAR

In whitest hour of pain the iron air
Turns back the edge of words like knives of hope.
Frail music from the mouth of mortal man
Fades in the interstellar space between
The eye that sees the wound, the heart that knows:
And oceanic splendours of delight
Shrink to a dewdrop on a pauper's lips.
The child of love creeps back into the womb.

Black Angel, come you down! Oh Purge of God,
By shroud of pestilence make pure the mind,
Strike dead the running panther of desire
That in despair the poem put on wings,
That letting out the viper from the veins
Man rock the mountain with his two bare hands!

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE BIRD

In the beginning was the bird,
A spume of feathers on the face of time,
Man's model for destruction, God's defence.

Before man, a bird, a feather before time,
And music growing outward into space,
The feathered shears cutting dreams in air.

Before birds, a God, a Nothing with a shape
More horrible than mountains or the Plague,
A Voice as large as fate, a tongue of bronze.

Before this, O no before was there.
Where? Among the placeless atoms, mad
As tale the maggot makes locked in the skull.

And so I state a bird. For sanity
My brain's lips blow the tumbled plume.
I see it prophesy the path winds take.

THE CRIMSON CHERRY TREE

There is no sweeter sight, I swear, in Heaven
Than blossom on the cherry trees by Clee.
Ah dainty brides, you dance on through my dreams
And in the town bring memory of a breeze
That blew from Corvedale, across the valley that
Must have run red with agony when Owen spoke,
Torturing the air about his council-chair
With shapes of fiery dragons flaming, wolves
That ran through city gates to bring despair
Upon the tow-haired marchers, tearing sheep
And leaving foul the water-holes. I feel
The failure of a people when that wind
Howls through my heart and shows me Caradoc
Heaped high with lads who should have brought their songs
Right to the walls of Ludlow, over Severn,
Regaining the green pastures with a word.

Ah, cherry-tree, so lissom in the wind,
Matter for poets and the love-sick mad,
I see your virgin blossom splashed with blood,
Bright red against the white, and at your feet
The gentle lord who walked without a sword,
Believing tales of peace among the hills,
Trusting the word, the signatory name,
Forgetting the black seasons of a race.

THE DYKE-BUILDER

On the seventh day the storm lay dead,
The god who built the dyke strolled out to see
Blind men, blind windows, widows and the daft,
And the cracked shore carpeted with gulls.

On the ninth day no sunset red
Daubed the damp stubble: peacock blue, bright harmony
Of gold and purple laced the sky, and soft
Ripe as a plum with joy danced the quick girls.

But on the eleventh day the dead
Looked from their priest-holes, seeing only sea,
And the green shark-cradles with their swift
Cruel fingers setting the ocean's curls.

BIRDWATCHER

Between decision and ensuing act
Tosses a world of pain. Hope's brittle twig
Swings in the muscle's bitter wind, and soul,
Like frightened bird, clamps down his claw
And, wings shut fast about him, waits the fall.
Below, there sits the fox, whose name is death;
Above, a plum hangs loose, which is delight.
And in the meantime the intolerable wind
Blows faith and fear in alternating bursts.
The lonely watcher sheltered under the rock
Smiles at the obvious end. The bird is blind.
To-morrow crows will pick his rattling wings.
And higher up the hill a man in red
Will blood his boy and carry home the brush.

THE HEART'S WILD GEESE

Heart must always come again to home,
Like the wild geese, who wheel their way through time
Back to the timeless pool and homely sedge.
These who went questing, screaming to the edge
Of man's small world, over the edge some say,
Have seen the iceberg's glory, seen the way
The coloured sun hangs curtains in the sky;
The barren coves where ancient whales still lie
Covered with barnacles, as old as Spain,
Living the glorious bloody days again,
When dragon-prowed boats first burst through their dream.

All this the wild geese see, and their strange scream
Sounds back along the centuries. They know
Where palaces lie buried in the snow;
In passing, their sharp eyes have often snatched
At coral-courts, where rituals unwatched
By any other eye save gull's are kept
By weed-green seamen who have safely slept
Three-hundred years a thousand leagues from home.
And after all these marvels still they come,
The feathered faithful, landing on the mere
As heart returns to home, year upon year.

WALKING AT NIGHT

Thus I would walk abroad when gentle night
Puts on her friend's cool cloak and bids me come,
Walk among beds of lightly sleeping flowers,
Budded in silver dreams of friendliness.

And I would lie among the dainty herbs,
Like catmint, parsley or exquisite thyme,
To watch the late bird, twittering, hurry home
Across the moon's great watchful eye, to love . . .

These things, like dreams of princesses and pearls,
Come to me more as iron days grate on;
The brush of blood paints not a ruined world,
But thyme and parsley underneath the moon.

IN THE THIRD YEAR OF WAR

I dream now of green places,
And the gentle kine
Wading knee-deep in rushes;

I dream of singing birds,
And Summer rain,
And gracious, homely words.

But I wake to bitter winds,
And blown sand's whine
Across forgotten lands;

And empty skies at night,
And cold star-shine
Where lonely spirits meet.

I feel all this, my dear,
Alone, my love, alone
With all the old fear.

I dream now there is no ending,
No golden, breathless dawn;
Only seeking, seeking without finding.

BALLAD

Oh, come my joy, my soldier boy,
With your golden buttons, your scarlet coat,
Oh let me play with your twinkling sword
And sail away in your wonderful boat!

The soldier came and took the boy.
Together they marched the dusty roads.
Instead of war, they sang at Fairs,
And mended old chairs with river reeds.

The boy put on a little black patch
And learned to sing on a tearful note;
The soldier sold his twinkling sword
To buy a crutch and a jet-black flute.

And when the summer sun rode high
They laughed the length of the shining day;
But when the robin stood in the hedge
The little lad's courage drained away.

Oh soldier, my soldier, take me home
To the nut-brown cottage under the hill.
My mother is waiting, I'm certain sure;
She's far too old to draw at the well!

As snowflakes fell the boy spoke so,
For twenty years, ah twenty years;
But a look in the soldier's eyes said no,
And the roads of England were wet with tears.

One morning, waking on the moors,
The lad laughed aloud at the corpse at his side.
He buried the soldier under a stone,
But kept the flute to soothe his pride.

The days dragged on and he came to a town,
Where he got a red jacket for chopping wood;
And meeting a madman by the way,
He bartered the flute for a twinkling sword.

And so he walked the width of the land
With a warlike air and a jaunty word,
Looking out for a likely lad
With the head of a fool and the heart of a bard.

Bertram Warr (1917-1943)

Sergeant R.A.F. (Canadian)

WORKING CLASS

We have heard no nightingales singing
In cool, dim lanes, where evening
Comes like a procession through the isles at passion-tide,
Filling the church with quiet prayer dressed in white.
We have known no hills where sea-winds sweep in thyme perfume
And crush it against our nostrils as we stand by hump-backed trees.

We have felt no willow leaves pluck us timidly
As we pass on slack rivers;
A kiss, and a stealing away, like a lover who dares no more.
Lovely words, flowering out of lovely experience,
Although not ours. They butt like dough against our senses:
For we are the walkers on pavement,
Who go grey-faced and given-up through the rain;
With our twice-turned collars crinkled,
And the patches bunched coarsely in our crotches.
What is it we seek? Have we not progressed?
Only see our great cities.

They have gashed the lands with cities
And gone away afraid when the wounds turned blue.
Beauty has crept into the shelves of squat buildings
To stare out strangely at us from the pages of Keats,
And the wan nostalgic Georgian leaves.
These are our birthright, smoke and angry steel,
And stern rows of stone, and wheels.
We inherit our churches, and the red-necked men
Who eat oysters, and stand up to talk at us in the approved manner,
Making eloquent appeals to the conscience of every wage-earner.
And we have our politicians, who think poorly of us,
And who start back with chaos in their pale old eyes
Whimpering, "That is not what we wanted. No,
It was not to have gone that way."
They are very old, but we have been very ill,
And cannot yet send them away.

But there are things that matter still,
Creation yet within us;
Elate nights of love, bread and the kids,
And the cheek of the woman next door,
Thoughts that glitter sometimes like a ruby on a mud-flat,
Dreams that writhe deep down, reminding us of our blood.

Though the cities straddle the land like giants,
Holding us away,
We know they will topple some day,
And will lie over the land dissolving and giving off gases.
And a wind will spring up to carry the smells away,
And the earth will suck off liquids and crumbling flesh,
And on the bleached bones, in clean sunlight, we shall begin to build.

Vernon Watkins

Sergeant, R.A.F. (British)

THE SHOOTING OF WERFEL

'Werfel has been shot in Paris.'—(Newspaper Report)

Werfel dead? Hark. The forest is empty.
The myth of light, the lithe, fortuitous shadow
Is changed to dust, to a whirl of rustling leaves.
Winter hovers above the shivering seed.

His early words creep back through the crisp, dead leaves:
'As great you are as death looks little before you';
'What sweeter joy on Earth than be wounded and say nothing!'
—Werfel, who sought in each the return of the Saviour.

Dead. Dead. A voice from the skull's great cavern
Breathes, 'I forgive you. Forget me. This is Werfel.'
Will the woman carrying the bag pause, will the child turn from his
game?
Yet his stopped heart is here, a magnet for silence.

Werfel in exile under the huge, inhuman wheels, caressing the curled
Frail leaf, so different from Rilke's that is like the skin of a pear,
Listening to the trunks of trees in the forest of evocation,
Werfel who knew the colour of the leaves, their falling.

How all his words followed an unknown needle!
He was drawn to the unborn from tyranny, persecution,
Driven from Prague, Vienna,
At last to Paris, the place of Heine's exile.

Found there in Paris, in a corner, alone with all ages,
Child of infinite space with the ages in his hand:
They will kill you, child, with a rifle-butt.
Arise. Shine. They will shoot you through the eyes.

O God, the atom has split in Werfel's brain!
The room is rigid with the death of his brain.
O small, diminished wall of their jealous fury
Propping the chaste stars of his huge horizons!

Ah calculating bullets against the artist
Driven from the shoulder, piercing blind windows
Draped from night's terror of whirling, flaming wheels,
They have struck: the lamp is a skull.

Killed. Now clash the unbelievable cymbals.
O two worlds! O clash of two worlds!
They have bandaged their own eyes. Rigid with ecstasy
They leave him, bleeding to death on the god-stained ground.

Their minds had returned to iron forms, but he had put forth
Antlers, like those invisible ones of Moses,
His lofty forehead, his eyes
Beautiful as a stag's that see no dogs for the god.

'That once this life was mine! That once this life was mine!
That once those pines stood up in my blood's meadows!
That once this life was mine!' Forget him, deformed shadows,
Reel back from him. The dust is drinking wine.

THE SPOILS OF WAR

The world is weaned from this one dead by the thread of a shawl,
How little a pin
Unfastening the fold and fuse of light in Lucifer's fall;
The world is weaned from a point in the estuary of the grail,

This pin, this point over and under the Bristol Channel's wailing,
Piercing the sky carried in the breast, flung to the maniac grin
Of brains and shattered windows. A mad child sucks at her wall.

She sprang, luminous on a wish, to the trivial
Tread of her gallows-drop, reaching for a cushion for her child in the
shelter to sleep on,
Crossed her own tombstone, then all the stars ran in
And the world shot back like a ball;
Dropping from nowhere through a whirlwind of skies and eyes,
Casting the vesture and tidings of those calamities,
To a shrouded, most mute place, to her inmost call.

And the pavings, crying they were crossed, ring out
In a skipping-rope world of to-morrow's names and games,
That they were crossed, crossed, certainly crossed by the same,
Same feet. O gag those echoes down, lest the blood-stains shout.

Cover the crypt of her footprint, running from the sleepless sheltered
one,
Pitched into light, under the wind and whine of bombs.
When the pavings flew up to the stars in a volley of tombs.
Night is burnt white in the dirt of a street in Manselton.

Many run past her, and five stoop over her, the faceless, breastless one,
The steeples unpinned from her holy shadow, in the dead position.
Wild weddings, peals of bells in their hard, hard eyes proclaim a
desertion.
Wounded to the death of Earth, she forgives those restless ones.
Divorced from her darling, O at last no ropes are rung.
Look on her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young.

DISCOVERIES

The poles are flying where the two eyes set:
America has not found Columbus yet.

Ptolemy's planets, playing fast and loose,
Foretell the wisdom of Copernicus.

Dante calls Primum Mobile, the First Cause:
'Love that moves the world and the other stars.'

Great Galileo, twisted by the rack,
Groans the bright sun from heaven, then breathes it back.

Blake, on the world alighting, holds the skies,
And all the stars shine down through human eyes.

Donne sees those stars, yet will not let them lie:
'We're tapers, too, and at our own cost die.'

The shroud-lamp catches. Lips are smiling there.
'Les flammes—déjà?'—The world dies, or Voltaire.

Swift, a cold mourner at his burial-rite,
Burns to the world's heart like a meteorite.

Beethoven deaf, in deafness hearing all,
Unwinds all music from sound's funeral.

Three prophets fall, the litter of one night,
Blind Milton gazes in fixed deeps of light.

Beggar of those Minute Particulars,
Yeats lights again the turmoil of the stars.

Motionless motion! Come, Tiresias,
The eternal flies, what's passing cannot pass.

'Solace in flight,' old Heraclitus cries;
Light changing to Von Hügel's butterflies.

Rilke bears all, thinks like a tree, believes,
Sinks in the hand that bears the falling leaves.

The stars! The signs! Great Angelo hurls them back.
His whirling ceiling draws the zodiac.

The pulse of Keats testing the axiom;
The second music when the sound is dumb.

The Christian Paradox, bringing its great reward
By loss; the moment known to Kierkegaard.

MUSIC OF COLOURS—WHITE BLOSSOM

White blossom, white, white shell; the Nazarene
Walking in the ear; white touched by souls
Who know the music by which white is seen,
Blinding white, from strings and aureoles,
Until that is not white, seen at the two poles,
Nor white the Scythian hills, nor Marlowe's queen.

The spray looked white until this snowfall.
Now the foam is grey, the wave is dull.
Call nothing white again, we were deceived.
The flood of Noah dies, the rainbow is lived.
Yet from the deluge of illusions an unknown colour is saved.

White must die black, to be born white again
From the womb of sounds, the inscrutable grain,
From the crushed, dark fibre, breaking in pain.

The bud of the apple is already forming there.
The cherry-bud, too, is firm, and behind it the pear
Conspires with the racing cloud. I shall not look.
The rainbow is diving through the wide-open book
Past the rustling paper of birch, the sorceries of bark.

Buds in April, on the waiting branch,
Starrily opening, light raindrops drench,
Swinging from world to world when starlings sweep,
Where they alight in air, are white asleep.
They will not break, not break, until you say
White is not white again, nor may may.

White flowers die soonest, die into that chaste
Bride-bed of the moon, their lives laid waste.
Lilies of Solomon, taken by the gust,
Sigh, make way. And the dark forest
Haunts the lowly crib near Solomon's dust,
Rocked to the end of majesty, warmed by the low beast,
Locked in the liberty of his tremendous rest.

If there is white, or has been white, it must have been
When His eyes looked down and made the leper clean.
White will not be, apart, though the trees try
Spirals of blossom, their green conspiracy.
She who touched His garment saw no white tree.

Lovers speak of Venus, and the white doves,
Jubilant, the white girl, myth's whiteness, Jove's,
Of Leda, the swan, whitest of his loves.
Lust imagines him, web-footed Jupiter, great down
Of thundering light; love's yearning pulls him down

On the white swan-breast, the magical lawn,
Involved in plumage, mastered by the veins of dawn.

In the churchyard the yew is neither green nor black.
I know nothing of Earth or colour until I know I lack
Original white, by which the ravishing bird looks wan.
The mound of dust is nearer, white of mute dust that dies
In the soundfall's great light, the music in the eyes,
Transfiguring whiteness into shadows gone,
Utterly secret. I know you, black swan.

Edward Weismiller

Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps

TO THE WOMAN IN BOND STREET STATION

Madam, you are right; the fight was a great pity.
Two soldiers against a third, an ally—perhaps
No worse could befall, as you feel, in this tense city.

Violence broke out so sharply: sudden fear
Fell on the watchers, who recoiled, and gasped,
And did not recall the girl who had disappeared.

Certainly the boy alone was very young.
It was brutal to smash at him so with the torch. But, madam,
Though what I mean, and would say, is not on my tongue,

It was late; all three are gone now, home to their places,
Their hatreds dimmed. And those who today are damned
Are not such furious boys with blood on their faces.

England; February, 1944

THE TRAIL

We who have come all ways into the city,
Over the cratered roads, down the scorched hills,
Would be omitted from the ritual
That builds legends where we have killed.

We see the great house open by the river,
Candles still set, that never pierced the gloom;
The jeweled lady sprawled indifferent
In her bright, acrid room;

The roadside Christ, in wood, modelling torture;
The clouded eyes looking below His grief;

The scattered children in the summer orchard
Under the raked leaves;

The steel; the tangling walls. Then we are gone,
Our ears stopped to the eloquence of death
In cities that the sun will turn to bone
And the late rain to earth.

The stone-eyed birds will pace the dusty fountain,
The sun cast the dog's shadow in the square,
The wind from the deserted mountain
Long puzzle the empty air;

And you will come, historian and traveler,
And speak our names, and say we did not fail,
And say: The monster here fled from his cavern;
Here: here is his trail.

France; August, 1944

Part III

War Poems by the Civilian Poets

THE SECOND COMING

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

Conrad Aiken

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

(from "*The Soldier*")

In the new city of marble and bright stone,
the city named for a captain: in the capital:
under the solemn echoing dome, in the still tomb,
lies an unknown soldier.

(Concord: Valley Forge: the Wilderness:
Antietam: Gettysburg: Shiloh)

In the brown city,
old and shabby, by the muddy Thames, in the gaunt avenue
where Romans blessed with Latin the oyster and primrose,
the stone shaft speaks of another. Those who pass
bare their heads in the rain, pausing to listen.

(Hastings: Blenheim: Waterloo:
Trafalgar: Balaklava: Gallipoli)

Across grey water, red poppies on cliffs of chalk,
hidden under the arch, in the city of light,
the city beloved of Abelard, rests a third,
nameless as those, but the fluttering flame
substituting for a name.

Three unknown soldiers:
three, let us say, out of many. On the proud arch
names shine like stars, the names of battles and victories;
but never the name of man, you, the unknown.
Down there runs the river, under dark walls of rock,
parapets of rock, stone steps that green to the water.
There they fished up in the twilight another unknown,
the one they call *L'Inconnue de la Seine*: drowned hands,
drowned hair, drowned eyes: masked like marble she listens
to the drip-drop secret of silence; and the pale eyelids
enclose and disclose what they know, the illusion
found like fire under Lethe. Devotion here sainted,

the love here deathless. The strong purpose turns
from the daggered lamplight, from the little light to the lesser,
from stone to stone stepping, from the next-to-the-last
heartbeat and footstep even to the sacred, the last.
Love: devotion: sacrifice: death: can we call her unknown
who was not unknown to herself? whose love lives still
as if death itself were alive and divine?

And you, the soldier:
you who are dead: is it not so with you?
Love: devotion: sacrifice: death: can we call you unknown,
you who knew what you did? The soldier is crystal:
crystal of man: clear heart, clear duty, clear purpose.
No soldier can be unknown. Only he is unknown
who is unknown to himself.

And you others, the living:
whatever your names are: Smith, Jones, Harris:
captain or corporal, private or top kick:
you who are now our hands, our arms, our hearts,
but most of all our arms, our shield: you who were once
something else—high-rigger, salesman, stone-mason,
soda-jerker or desk-man, broker or clerk in a store:
bear this in mind: you are neither alone nor unknown:
but one of ourselves, as we are yourselves. Bear it in mind
that we too are there, on the beach, in the field,
at mess or at drill; share with you discomfort, annoyance,
wet, pain, squalor, and filth. Bear it in mind
that before all else, from the very beginning,
we too were soldiers, we were all soldiers.

This is our virtue:
seed in our hearts from the ones who perished before us:
that we should guard against every foeman
our lands, our faiths, our homes. From generation to generation:
man the unconquerable: you yourself: man the soldier.

Drums: eagles: drums: the crowds praying, the crowds watching:
the dead march softly touched, tears and pride for the one
who will never again give back his stand of arms,
the stand of arms that he chose for himself. The hero
lives in our watchful hearts.

Yes, but remember,
as he in our hearts would wish to remember,
even now, when oak-leaves wither, and the generous bugles
praise him for the last time, remember also
those other heroes, his too and ours, who live and die
in another and deadlier warfare, the war of the spirit,
the war that wars beyond war itself. Shall we justify war?
Shall we justify life? Speak now, dead soldier;
after the mourning bugles, the perishing oak-leaves;
shall we justify life?

And under your hand,
look, at the page of blood the book falls open,
and you read what you know already, the name of your heart,
the name and number appear and vanish once, and once only,
in a moment of anguish. All men learn thus,
we come to our deaths like this, the mouth filled with blood,
and even as we read of life accepted and given,
and ourselves given and accepted,

the wings grow, the wings spread,
the page deepens and darkens, darkens then brightens,
serene shines the self, and beyond it, serener, the selfless.
Man's mind is a world, a sky full of stars, it embraces
the past and the future. O deep, deep and secret
that miracle changing all, the light in the heart
impartible, implicit, the light in the hawthorn, the light
immane that works to flower in the dream, and pleads
on the bloody page! "How strange, men of Athens,
my conduct would be, if I, who obeyed the command
at Delium and Potidaea and stood at my post
no less than my fellows, if now, when I hear
this summons, to search in myself and in others for knowledge,
I forsook my post, fearing death! For sweet is that voice
as the flute in the ears of the mystic; and I must obey.
No evil afflicts the good man, living or dying.
Let us be of good heart about dying."

Remember the sail at Sunium—
far down through fog at the cliff's edge seen,
curved and small as a gull's wing, beating
like death's wing out of the sunlight—

remember the sail
that southward bore, past bird-voiced Dungeness,
another, steadfast under a steadfast star,
who steered to Rome, and to death foreknown, a soldier
marching against a battery—

remember him,
above shorn fields, and the harvest at Heiligenstadt,
who listened to silence, the first slow snowflake of silence.
“One standing beside me said that he heard in the distance
a sound of fluting, and I heard nothing. One standing beside me
said that he heard in the distance a shepherd’s song,
and I heard nothing.”

The agony of growing and knowing,
the agony and ecstasy and death of being and seeing,
genius of knowledge, that accepts, and makes all things good.
Violence: anger: hatred: power: the light changes, the light alters,
the long light falls through adverse time, man’s mind
becomes crystal, man’s heart becomes crystal, even as the soldier
is crystal, was always crystal.

And the will turns
upward, up the spiral of light, ever to the brighter
stairway and doorway of light, unblinded seeking
the threshold of light itself, from the next-to-the-last
heartbeat and perception of pain and light even
to the unknown last, lost in the flame-sheath
of flowering glory, sheathed to unsheathe, unfolding
in love, implicit, impartible. The clear heart
invisible and indivisible in its own clearness
thou lookest upon, thou lookest into, O divine
guest and ghost of mankind, of whom mankind is the guest—
guest and ghost, diviner and divined: thou knowest,
which is to say that we too know, at last
sheathed and unsheathed in knowledge, the love of earth
beyond man’s love of himself, the love of life
in the simple knowing of death, the love of knowledge
in the knowing of pain.

In the last war of all,
we conquer ourselves. Look home from the desert, soldier:
to the regenerate desert of the heart come home:
and know that this too needs heroes, and endurance, and ardor.

W. H. Auden

SPAIN

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the diffusion
 Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;
Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny climates.

Yesterday the assessment of insurance by cards,
The divination of water; yesterday the invention
 Of cartwheels and clocks, the taming of
Horses. Yesterday the bustling world of the navigators.

Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants,
The fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the valley,
 The chapel built in the forest;
Yesterday the carving of angels and alarming gargoyles.

The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;
Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
 And the miraculous cure at the fountain;
Yesterday the Sabbath of witches; but to-day the struggle.

Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines,
The construction of railways in the colonial desert;
 Yesterday the classic lecture
On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle.

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greece,
The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;
 Yesterday the prayer to the sunset
And the adoration of madmen. But to-day the struggle.

As the poet whispers, startled among the pines,
Or where the loose waterfall sings compact, or upright
 On the crag by the leaning tower:
'O my vision. O send me the luck of the sailor.'

And the investigator peers through his instruments
At the inhuman provinces, the virile bacillus
Or enormous Jupiter finished:
'But the lives of my friends. I inquire. I inquire.'

And the poor in their fireless lodgings, dropping the sheets
Of the evening paper: 'Our day is our loss, O show us
History the operator, the
Organiser, Time the refreshing river.'

And the nations combine each cry, invoking the life
That shapes the individual belly and orders
The private nocturnal terror:
'Did you not found the city state of the sponge,
'Raise the vast military empires of the shark
And the tiger, establish the robin's plucky canton?
Intervene. O descend as a dove or
A furious papa or a mild engineer, but descend.'

And the life, if it answers at all, replies from the heart
And the eyes and the lungs, from the shops and squares of the city:
'O no, I am not the mover;
Not to-day; not to you. To you, I'm the

'Yes-man, the bar-companion, the easily-duped;
I am whatever you do. I am your vow to be
Good, your humorous story.
I am your business voice. I am your marriage.

'What's your proposal? To build the just city? I will.
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic
Death? Very well, I accept, for
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain.'

Many have heard it on remote peninsulas,
On sleepy plains, in the aberrant fisherman's islands
Or the corrupt heart of the city,
Have heard and migrated like gulls or the seeds of a flower.

They clung like birds to the long expresses that lurch
Through the unjust lands, through the night, through the alpine
tunnel;

They floated over the oceans;
They walked the passes. All presented their lives.

On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
 Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe;
 On that tableland scored by rivers,
 Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of our fever
 Are precise and alive. For the fears which made us respond
 To the medicine ad. and the brochure of winter cruises
 Have become invading battalions;
 And our faces, the institute-face, the chain-store, the ruin
 Are projecting their greed as the firing squad and the bomb.
 Madrid is the heart. Our moments of tenderness blossom
 As the ambulance and the sandbag;
 Our hours of friendship into a people's army.
 To-morrow, perhaps the future. The research on fatigue
 And the movements of packers; the gradual exploring of all the
 Octaves of radiation;
 To-morrow the enlarging of consciousness by diet and breathing.
 To-morrow the rediscovery of romantic love,
 The photographing of ravens; all the fun under
 Liberty's masterful shadow;
 To-morrow the hour of the pageant-master and the musician,
 The beautiful roar of the chorus under the dome;
 To-morrow the exchanging of tips on the breeding of terriers,
 The eager election of chairmen
 By the sudden forest of hands. But to-day the struggle.
 To-morrow, for the young, the poets exploding like bombs,
 The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;
 To-morrow the bicycle races
 Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the struggle.
 To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,
 The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;
 To-day the expending of powers
 On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.
 To-day the makeshift consolations: the shared cigarette,
 The cards in the candlelit barn, and the scraping concert,
 The masculine jokes; to-day the
 Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting.

The stars are dead. The animals will not look.
We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and
History to the defeated
May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.

AUGUST FOR THE PEOPLE

August for the people and their favourite islands.
Daily the steamers sidle up to meet
The effusive welcome of the pier, and soon
The luxuriant life of the steep stone valleys
The sallow oval faces of the city
Begot in passion or good-natured habit
Are caught by waiting coaches, or laid bare
Beside the indiscriminating sea.

Lulled by the light they live their dreams of freedom,
May climb the old road twisting to the moors,
Play leapfrog, enter cafés, wear
The tigerish blazer and the dove-like shoe.
The yachts upon the little lake are theirs,
The gulls ask for them, and to them the band
Makes its tremendous statements; they control
The complicated apparatus of amusement.

All types that can intrigue the writer's fancy
Or sensuality approves are here.
And I each meal-time with the families
The animal brother and his serious sister,
Or after breakfast on the urned steps watching
The defeated and disfigured marching by
Have thought of you, Christopher, and wished beside me
Your squat spruce body and enormous head.

Nine years ago upon that southern island
Where the wild Tennyson became a fossil,
Half-boys, we spoke of books, and praised
The acid and austere, behind us only
The stuccoed suburb and expensive school.

Scented our turf, the distant baying
Nice decoration to the artist's wish
Yet fast the deer was flying through the wood.

Our hopes were set still on the spies career,
Prizing the glasses and the old felt hat
And all the secrets we discovered were
Extraordinary and false; for this one coughed
And it was gasworks coke, and that one laughed
And it was snow in bedrooms; many wore wigs
The coastguard signalled messages of love,
The enemy were sighted from the norman tower.

Five summers pass and now we watch
The Baltic from a balcony: the word is love.
Surely one fearless kiss would cure
The million fevers, a stroking brush
The insensitive refuse from the burning core
Was there a dragon who had closed the works
While the starved city fed it with the Jews?
Then love would tame it with his trainer's look.

Pardon the studied taste that could refuse
The golf-house quick one and the rector's tea;
Pardon the nerves the thrushes could not soothe,
Yet answered promptly the no-subtler lure
To private joking in a panelled room.
The solitary vitality of tramps and madmen,
Believed the whisper in the double bed,
Pardon for these and every flabby fancy.

For now the moulding images of growth
That made our interest and us, are gone
Louder to-day the wireless roars
Its warnings and its lies, and it's impossible
Among the well-shaped cosily to flit,
Or longer to desire about our lives
The beautiful loneliness of the banks, or find
The stores and resignations of the frozen plains.

The close-set eyes of mother's boy
Saw nothing to be done; we look again
See scandal praying with her sharp knees up

And virtue stood at Weeping Cross
And Courage to his leaking ship appointed
Slim Truth dismissed without a character
And gaga Falsehood highly recommended
The green thumb to the ledger knuckled down.

Greed showing shamelessly her naked money
And all love's wandering eloquence debased
To a collector's slang. Smartness in furs
And Beauty scratching miserably for food.
Honour self-sacrificed for Calculation
And reason stoned by mediocrity.
Freedom by power shamefully maltreated
And Justice exiled till Saint Geoffrey's Day.

So in this hour of crisis and dismay
What better than your strict and adult pen
Can warn us from the colours and the consolations,
The showy arid works, reveal
The squalid shadow of academy and garden,
Make action urgent and its nature clear?
Who give us nearer insight to resist
The expanding fear, the savaging disaster.

This then my birthday wish for you, as now
From the narrow window of my fourth floor room
I smoke into the night, and watch reflections.
Stretch in the harbour. In the houses
The little pianos are closed, and a clock strikes.
And all sway forward on the dangerous flood
Of history that never sleeps or dies,
And, held one moment, burns the hand.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire

Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,

Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
"I *will* be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work,"
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain

Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupour lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

“THE JEW WRECKED IN THE GERMAN CELL”

How he survived them they could never understand:
Had they not beggared him themselves to prove
They could not live without their dogmas or their land?
No worlds they drove him from were ever big enough:
How *could* it be the earth the Unconfined
Meant when It bade them set no limits to their love?
And he fulfilled the rôle for which he was designed:
On heat with fear, he drew their terrors to him,
And was a godsend to the lowest of mankind.
Till there was no place left where they could still pursue him
Except the exile which he called his Race.
But, envying him even that, they plunged right through him
Into a land of mirrors without time or space,
And all they had to strike now was the human face.

BALLAD

O what is that sound which so thrills the ear
Down in the valley drumming, drumming?
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,
The soldiers coming.

O what is that light I see flashing so clear
Over the distance brightly, brightly?
Only the sun on their weapons, dear,
As they step lightly.

O what are they doing with all that gear;
What are they doing this morning, this morning?
Only the usual maneuvers, dear,
Or perhaps a warning.

O why have they left the road down there;
Why are they suddenly wheeling, wheeling?
Perhaps a change in the orders, dear;
Why are you kneeling?

O haven't they stopped for the doctor's care;
Haven't they reined their horses, their horses?
Why, they are none of them wounded, dear,
None of these forces.

O is it the parson they want, with white hair;
Is it the parson, is it, is it?
No, they are passing his gateway, dear,
Without a visit.

O it must be the farmer who lives so near,
It must be the farmer, so cunning, cunning;
They have passed the farm already, dear,
And now they are running.

O where are you going? stay with me here.
Were the vows you swore me deceiving, deceiving?
No, I promised to love you, my dear,
But I must be leaving.

O it's broken the lock and splintered the door,
O it's the gate where they're turning, turning;
Their feet are heavy on the floor
And their eyes are burning.

IF ON ACCOUNT OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION

If on account of the political situation,
There are quite a number of homes without roofs, and men
Lying about in the countryside neither drunk nor asleep,
If all sailings have been cancelled till further notice,
If it's unwise now to say much in letters, and if,
Under the subnormal temperatures prevailing,
The two sexes are at present the weak and the strong,
That is not at all unusual for this time of year.
If that were all we should know how to manage. Flood, fire,
The dessiccation of grasslands, restraint of princes,
Piracy on the high seas, physical pain and fiscal grief,
These after all are our familiar tribulations,
And we have been through them all before, many, many times.
As events which belong to the natural world where
The occupation of space is the real and final fact
And time turns round itself in an obedient circle,
They occur again and again but only to pass
Again and again into their formal opposites,
From sword to ploughshare, coffin to cradle, war to work,
So that, taking the bad with the good, the pattern composed
By ten thousand odd things that can possibly happen
Is permanent in a general average way.

Till lately we knew of no other, and between us we seemed
To have what it took—the adrenal courage of the tiger,
The chameleon's discretion, the modesty of the doe,
Or the fern's devotion to spatial necessity:
To practice one's peculiar civic virtue was not
So impossible after all; to cut our losses
And bury our dead was really quite easy: That was why

We were always able to say: "We are children of God,
And our Father has never forsaken His people."

But then we were children: That was a moment ago,
Before an outrageous novelty had been introduced
Into our lives. Why were we never warned? Perhaps we were.
Perhaps that mysterious noise at the back of the brain
We noticed on certain occasions—sitting alone
In the waiting room of the country junction, looking
Up at the toilet window—was not indigestion
But this Horror starting already to scratch Its way in?
Just how, just when It succeeded we shall never know:
We can only say that now It is there and that nothing
We learned before It was there is now of the slightest use,
For nothing like It has happened before. It's as if
We had left our house for five minutes to mail a letter,
And during that time the living room had changed places
With the room behind the mirror over the fireplace;
It's as if, waking up with a start, we discovered
Ourselves stretched out flat on the floor, watching our shadow
Sleepily stretching itself at the window. I mean
That the world of space where events reoccur is still there,
Only now it's no longer real; the real one is nowhere
Where time never moves and nothing can ever happen:
I mean that although there's a person we know all about
Still bearing our name and loving himself as before,
That person has become a fiction; our true existence
Is decided by no one and has no importance to love.

That is why we despair; that is why we would welcome
The nursery bogey or the winecellar ghost, why even
The violent howling of winter and war has become
Like a juke-box tune that we dare not stop. We are afraid
Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare
Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void.
This is the Abomination. This is the wrath of God.

George Barker

MUNICH ELEGY NO. 1

Those occasions involving the veering of axles
When the wheel's bloody spikes like Arabian armaments
Release Passchendaele on us because it is time, bring
Also with blood to the breast the boon to the bosom:
I saw it happen, had near me the gun and the tear.
Those occasions are all elegiac. The wheel and the wish
Turn in a turtle the chaos of life. It is death,
Death like roulette turning our wish to its will.

I see a scene with a smother of snow over Love.
I know Spring will arise and later the swallow return;
I know, but my torso stands bogged in a load of time,
Like Love lying under the smother of our death and our
Dread. How soon shall the Spring bird arise and the
Summer bells hum with the murmur of our name?

Soon, soon,
Soon the green room goes blue with the last autumn.

I sip at suicide in bedrooms or dare pessimistic stars,
Keep pigeons with messages or make tame apes
Commemorate in mime the master me who must go;
Or commit crimes of rage or rape to ease the ache:
I promise these cannot precipitate fate. No,
To-morrow it is not, it is not to-day, it is not
Wednesday or Thursday. It is the greatest day.

That morning not the rose shall rise or dog dance,
Kings with conscience and queens with child sleep long,
For duty is useless; the soldier and sailor glance
Down at their guns with a grin, but they are wrong.
The dodo shall rule for a moment, and the Thames
Remember. Invalids and paralytics shall sing
'No more, no more!'

I shall hear the ceremony of heaven and God's roar.

What awaits is the veer of the lever and wheel
When the hands cross at midnight and noon, and the future
Sweeps on with a sigh—but on this occasion Time
Swells like a wave at a wall and bursts to eternity.
I await when the engine of lilies and lakes and love
Reaching its peak of power blows me sky high, and I
Come down to rest
On the shape I made in the ground where I used to lie.

O widow, do not weep, do not weep! Or wife
Cry in the corner of the window with a child by—
Look how Tottenham and the Cotswolds, with
More mass than a man, lie easy under the sky,
Also awaiting change they cannot understand.
'I have heaven a haven in my hand,' say,
Like the boy
Cornering butterflies or nothing in cupped hands.

The tragedy is Time foreshadowing its climax.
Thus in the stage of time the minor moth is small
But prophesies the Fokker with marvellous wings
Mottled with my sun's gold and your son's blood.
The crazy anthropoid crawls on time's original
That casts his giant on the contemporary scene:
That spreadeagled shadow
Covers with horror the green Abyssinian meadow.

Lovers on Sunday in the rear seats of cinemas
Kiss deep and dark, for is it the last kiss?
Children sailing on swings in municipal parks
Swing high, swing high into the reach of the sky,
Leave, leave the sad star that is about to die.
Laugh, my comedians, who may not laugh again—
Soon, soon,
Soon Jeremiah Job will be walking among men.

TO ANY MEMBER OF MY GENERATION

What is it you remember?—the summer mornings
Down by the river at Richmond with a girl,
And as you kissed, clumsy in bathing costumes,
History guffawed in a rosebush. What a warning!—

If only we had known, if only we had known.
And when you looked in mirrors was this meaning
Plain as the pain in the centre of a pearl?
Horrible tomorrow in God-damning postures
Making absurd the past we cannot disown.

Whenever we kissed we cocked the future's rifles
And from our wild-oat words like dragons' teeth
Death underfoot now arises: when we were gay,
Dancing together in what we hoped was life
Who was it in our arms but the whores of death
Whom we have found in our beds to-day, to-day?

THREE MEMORIAL SONNETS

*(For two young seamen lost overboard in a
storm in Mid-Pacific, January, 1940)*

The seagull, spreadeagled, splayed on the wind,
Span backwards shrieking, belly facing upward,
Fled backwards with a gimlet in its heart
To see the two youths swimming hand in hand
Through green eternity. O swept overboard
Not could the thirty-foot jaws them part,
On the flouncing skirts that swept them over
Separate what death pronounced was love.

I saw them, the hand flapping like a flag,
And another like a dolphin with a child
Supporting him. Was I the shape of Jesus
When to me hopeward their eyeballs swivelled,

Saw I was standing in the posture of vague
Horror, oh paralyzed with mere pity's peace?

II

From thorax of storms the voices of verbs
Shall call to me without sound, like the vowel
Round which cyclones rage, to nurse my nerve,
My shaken, my broken, my oh I shall grovel
Heart. I taste sea swilling in my bowels,
As now I sit shivering in the swing of waves
Like a face in a bubble. As the hull heaves
I and my mind go walking over hell.
The greedy bitch with sailors in her guts,
Green as a dream and formidable as God,
Spitting at stars, gnawing at shores, mad, randy,
Riots with us on her abdomen and puts
Eternity in our cabins, pitches our pod
To the mouth of the death for which no one is ready.

III

At midday they looked up and saw their death
Standing up overhead as loud as thunder
As white as angels and formidable as God:
Then, then the shock, the last gasp of breath,
As grazing the bulwarks they swept over and under,
All the green arms around them that load
Their eyes, their ears, their stomachs with eternal,
Whirled away in a white pool to the stern.
But the most possible of all miracles
Is that the useful tear that did not fall
From the corner of their eyes, was the prize,
The flowers, the gifts, the crystal sepulcher,
The funeral contribution and memorial,
The perfect and non-existent obsequies.

TRIUMPHAL ODE MCMXXXIX

Through the green tassels of the weeper tree,
When idle in the evening I walk down by the river,
Risen to its zenith in my pessimism's heaven
I see the red star tremendous in the South—
Turning the Thames an aorta of war, turning
Red the left cheek of Venus, and my gaze
Forward to autumn through the gases' haze.

Then at my side I hear the tree weep
Its sweat of tears like pearls into the water,
With the sound of drums and the nasal trumpet
Muffled by grief to an echo; no, not the weeper
Is a green tree but my mother in a hood
Leaning over the years intervening between
Belgium's bugle and the Polish disaster.

Or at my feet summer sheds its blood
In sacrificial glory on my senses' altar,
Blazing Time's aisle with Helianthus standards,
Hanging the tombs with poppies: Time shall have tombs,
Time shall have too many tombs for summer's banners
To ornament with the oriflammes of its blossoms.

Over my head the lonely lark spins
Dizzy with cadenzas trailing from the tail feathers,
Goes up for joy and comes down for pleasure,
A shuttlecock of rapture,
No longer lonely among the clouds, no longer
Chases its echoes up the sky's corridor—
The roar of the thousand horses of the bomber
Is louder among the clouds of its own anger.

Against my knee the fern brushes its fans
Or nods its osprey crests against my hand,
Like a tame creature made quiet by its name:
I move among its plumes, and as I stand
Autumn comes over and renders into flame
The general green: the white feathers, tinged
Are singed by the red star with absurd shame.

And at my cheek the southern zephyr,
Coy as a curl, makes its amorous comments,
Remembered from moments over the Coast of Azure,

When like a dove it hovered over the lovers:
And I could listen, but the kisses of my leisure,
As, with eyes closed, I stoop to meet that mouth—
Then my lids will not lift from the dead seizure
Struck on my senses by Mars in the South.

Then at my face the shower of rain
Stardusts me with a handful of its brilliants,
Flecking my lashes like worlds: the violence
Of winds may shake them, but only fall for pain.
Temperate is the weather of all other worlds,
But ours is red at morning, as the dawn
Comes glittering with obituaries; on the wolds
The rain falls from the other worlds that mourn
To see the pain.

To see the pain I cannot raise my gaze
Forwards towards the autumnal calendar,
Where, like a figure numbering the days,
Bleeds a flesh wound down the face of paper
Commemorating the catastrophe of the future.

Nor can I sleep, for in my sleep
At my left side, nearest to the heart,
Press close the rows of everlasting sleepers
Laid on the bed by the mad hand of hate
With a bag of dirt in their mouths. O keep
Quieter their sleep than mine, not loud with planes,
Nor let them hear in the booth of their deep
Silence, the ringing bells of pain
Rolling and tolling all night and all day.

Yet we shall enter the time of ghosts,
Where those once known hang about in corners
Whispering to us their praises of the past,
The picnics, the gay dances, the sweet stories;
And I among them, jostling their shoulder-bones,
Feel on the back of my hand the evening mist
Of their mourning fall, or drop its water stones
To crush their memories.

This is the year that must be memorable
Not for its crop of corn or its fine weather,
Not for its anniversaries but rather

Memorable for the terrible star in the South,
The badge of war. Slow, slow the stellar cycles,
To give us longer the minutes of our youth
And hold the kiss of Psyche
Under the glare of Mars in a time of ruth.
Truth is the mirage after which we labour
Through wastes of pain under destruction's star,
Which, though we cannot reach or in it harbour,
Teaches us that our resting-place is far
Further than New Zealand or a nebula.

SONNET TO MY MOTHER

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,
Under the window where I often found her
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,
Irresistible as Rabelais but most tender for
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her,—
She is a procession no one can follow after
But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber or condescend
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain
Whom only faith can move, and so I send
O all my faith and all my love to tell her
That she will move from mourning into morning.

John Berryman

THE MOON AND THE NIGHT AND THE MEN

On the night of the Belgian surrender the moon rose
Late, a delayed moon, and a violent moon
For the English or the American beholder,
The French beholder. It was a cold night,
People put on their wraps, the troops were cold
No doubt, despite the calendar, no doubt
Numbers of refugees coughed, and the sight
Or sound of some killed others. A cold night.

On Outer Drive there was an accident:
A stupid well-intentioned man turned sharp
Right and abruptly he became an angel
Fingering an unfamiliar harp,
Or screamed in hell, or was nothing at all.
Do not imagine this is unimportant.
He was a part of the night, part of the land,
Part of the bitter and exhausted ground
Out of which memory grows.

Michael and I
Stared at each other over chess, and spoke
As little as possible, and drank and played.
The chessmen caught in the European eye,
Neither of us I think had a free look
Although the game was fair. The move one made
It was difficult at last to keep one's mind on.
'Hurt and unhappy' said the man in London.
We said to each other, The time is coming near
When none shall have books or music, none his dear,
And only a fool will speak aloud his mind.
History is approaching a speechless end,
As Henry Adams said. Adams was right.

All this occurred on the night when Leopold
Completed the treachery four years before
Begun—or was he well-intentioned, more
Roadmaker to hell than king? At any rate,
The moon came up late and the night was cold,
Many men died—although we know the fate
Of none, nor of anyone, and the war
Goes on, and the heart in the breast of man is cold.

CONVERSATION

Whether the moorings are invisible
Or gone, we said we could not tell.
But argument held one thing sure
That none of us that night could well endure:
The ship is locked with fog, no man aboard
Can see what he is moving toward,
There's little food, less love, no sleep,
The sea is dark and we are told it's deep.

Where is an officer who knows this coast?
If all such men long since have faced
Downward, one summon. Who knows how,
With what fidelity his voice heard now
Could shout directions from the ocean's floor?
Traditional characters no more
Their learned simple parts rehearse,
But bed them down at last from the time's curse.

A broken log fell out upon the hearth,
The flaming harbinger come forth
Of holocausts that night and day
Shrivel from the mind its sovereignty.
We watched the embers cool; those embers brought
To one man there the failing thought
Of cities stripped of knowledge, men,
Our continent a wilderness again.

These are conclusions of the night, we said;
And drank, and were not satisfied.
The fire died down, smoke in the air
Assumed the alarming postures of our fear;
The overhead horror, in the padded room
The man who cannot tell his name,
The guns and enemies that face
Into this delicate and dangerous place.

John Peale Bishop

THE RETURN

Night and we heard heavy and cadenced hoofbeats
Of troops departing; the last cohorts left
By the North Gate. That night some listened late
Leaning their eyelids toward Septentrion.

Morning flared and the young tore down the trophies
And warring ornaments: arches were strong
And in the sun but stone; no longer conquest
Circled our columns; all our state was down

In fragments. In the dust, old men with tufted
Eyebrows whiter than sunbaked faces gulped
As it fell. But they no more than we remembered
The old sea-fights, the soldiers' names and sculptors'.

We did not know the end was coming: nor why
It came; only that long before the end
Were many wanted to die. Then vultures starved
And sailed more slowly in the sky.

We still had taxes. Salt was high. The soldiers
Gone. Now there was much drinking and lewd
Houses all night loud with riot. But only
For a time. Soon the taverns had no roofs.

Strangely it was the young, the almost boys,
Who first abandoned hope; the old still lived
A little, at last a little lived in eyes.
It was the young whose child did not survive.

Some slept beneath the simulacra, until
The gods' faces froze. Then was fear.
Some had response in dreams, but morning restored
Interrogation. Then O then, O ruins!

Temples of Neptune invaded by the sea
And dolphins streaked like streams sportive
As sunlight rode and over the rushing floors
The sea unfurled and what was blue raced silver.

E. E. Cummings

IT WAS A GOODLY CO

it was a goodly co
which paid to make man free
(for man is enslaved by a dread dizziz
and the sooner it's over the sooner to biz
don't ask me what it's pliz)

then up rose bishop budge from kew
a anglican was who
(with a rag and a bone and a hank of hair)'d
he picked up a thousand pounds or two
and he smote the monster merde

then up rose pride and up rose pelf
and ghibelline and guelph
and ladios and laddios
(on radios and raddios)
did save man from himself

ye duskiest despot's goldenest gal
did wring that dragon's tail
(for men must loaf and women must lay)
and she gave him a desdemonial
that took his breath away

all history oped her teeming womb
said demon for to doom
yea (fresh complexions being oke
with him) one william shakespeare broke
the silence of the tomb

then up rose mr lipshits pres
(who always nothing says)
and he kisséd the general menedjerr
and they smokéd a robert burns cigerr
to the god of things like they err

WHAT IF A MUCH OF A WHICH OF A WIND

what if a much of a which of a wind
gives the truth to summer's lie;
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
and yanks immortal stars awry?
Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
(blow friend to fiend: blow space to time)
—when skies are hanged and oceans drowned,
the single secret will still be man

what if a keen of a lean wind flays
screaming hills with sleet and snow:
strangles valleys by ropes of thing
and stifles forests in white ago?
Blow hope to terror; blow seeing to blind
(blow pity to envy and soul to mind)
—whose hearts are mountains, roots are trees,
it's they shall cry hello to the spring

what if a dawn of a doom of a dream
bites this universe in two,
peels forever out of his grave
and sprinkles nowhere with me and you?
Blow soon to never and never to twice
(blow life to isn't: blow death to was)
—all nothing's only our hugest home;
the most who die, the more we live

ALL IGNORANCE TOBOGGANS INTO KNOW

all ignorance toboggans into know
and trudges up to ignorance again:
but winter's not forever, even snow
melts; and if spring should spoil the game, what then?

all history's a winter sport or three:
but were it five, i'd still insist that all
history is too small for even me;
for me and you, exceedingly too small.

Swoop (shrill collective myth) into thy grave
merely to toil the scale to shrillerness
per every madge and mabel dick and dave
—tomorrow is our permanent address

and there they'll scarcely find us (if they do,
we'll move away still further: into now)

LIFE IS MORE TRUE

life is more true than reason will deceive
(more secret or than madness did reveal)
deeper is life than lose: higher than have
—but beauty is more each than living's all

multiplied with infinity sans if
the mightest meditations of mankind
cancelled are by one merely opening leaf
(beyond whose nearness there is no beyond)

or does some littler bird than eyes can learn
look up to silence and completely sing?
futures are obsolete; pasts are unborn
(here less than nothing's more than everything)

death, as men call him, ends what they call men
—but beauty is more now than dying's when

PLATO TOLD

plato told

him:he couldn't
believe it (jesus

told him;he
wouldn't believe
it)lao

tsze
certainly told
him, and general
(yes

mam)
sherman;
and even
(believe it
or

not)you
told him:i told
him;we told him
(he didn't believe it,no

sir)it took
a nipponized bit of
the old sixth

avenue
el;in the top of his head:to tell
him

Gene Derwood

THE INNOCENT

Beautiful always the littoral line,
Jointure of ocean and earth where globe winds lean
Over the lace whence Venus rose, the sands
From which little-less-than-gods flung history's sail,
 Round wave, round shell, and myth-bound lands.

Pacific soft touches the gold beachhead,
Sand swells to a nectarine mound fringed with red,
The mound a shoulder freckle-fretted, pale
As sand, except for the pulse-ravished blood,
 A young lad simply, newly dead.

His skin dipped golden on last summer's shore
As far past now as light years; life's no more
To this fruit of land whereon Columbus stood
Proving the global arc of earth, and trade.
 The boy reached farther, and has stayed.

While on Atlantic shores a hotel fair
Most sumptuous lords it in the stern sea air,
Built for the kings of gold their richened gladness
Now houses it the surgeon laying knots
 In organs of pain and madness.

Here innocently a-thought the while he rots
An old man stone-set in the stoppéd sun
Counts nothing placid on his inside done,
The cones of light seared from his eaglet eyes
 Last year, when he was twenty-one.

Talk, talk, within his silent gullet whirrs
Like spider-netted, spider-bitten flies.
Now to his childhood cat, now to a *they*
Ghostly as iceberg space, worn boy avers
 "Great causes made night of my day.

“Morning’s love was mine with sun-savage hair,
It was for love I trained to fight the best.
The turbulent harmonics of my rare,
My sexual-burnished youth in discord dumb
Fail, but not to give me rest.

“O velvet kitten is it you who claw
My sutured throat or *they* who wood-like numb
Desire itself within my burnt out maw,
My war-sucked eyes; or you, what enemy?
Let any cormorant seize the womb.

“Your god-lost hatred has what regimen
To hide from what you do? but helpful bid
Not us in dreams be hid for in dreams’ sea
Can you conceal crime’s personal origin
And gorge, if so you did?

“O she, who was my second and my peace,
She who was my touch’s wonder and shore,
Avower of high love that could not cease,
Conviction of my god and heaven’s poor,
Her death was of the wound of life.

“I pass a cipher from my night-dropped shade:
The terrible fertility of strife
That loves the unborn but wants the born unmade.
O she, whose womb was opened for my son,
Died, split with shock, for nature’s fun.

“A moment’s marriage for a child and child,
The parade, a gun-burst and a telegram
Cry all the rocks of love’s sierra falling
In pain the massive heart laboring and tolling,
The startled dainty soul defiled.

“Defiled and dead. Worst pain soonest forgotten
They say, you do; melodious morning’s crime
To learn from those who have the child begotten.
Heroes are always young, called up from gardens,
It is innocence that hardens.

“After the wound, the softening fears, the love,
But late. The majesty of god is lost.
Treading the living flesh chaos from above
Mates with the demon chaos of below.
 We shine with unseasonable frost.

“The narrowing circle of the Azimuth
Tautens like rawhide round the human floe,
Insectuous fliers charge at the moon. My youth
In my child too will rise threatening the sun
 Till littorals of space are won.

“In rains of atomic fire my hope is forward,
This tainted race will burn as burnt my gold
My stamen’s sunny dust, my sweetling word,
My withering arm and tired mouth struck old,
 The insect whirr on harmless sedge.

“But spring, but sunny beaches rich with girls!
Definite diver strong at the sea’s edge,
O he who his peace-dappled body hurls
At all adventure, would that he were I.
 Life, life, you will not let me die.”

William Empson

SONNET

Not wrongly moved by this dismaying scene
The thinkers like the nations getting caught
Joined in the organising that they fought
To scorch all earth of all but one machine.

It can be swung, is what these hoppers mean,
For all the loony hooters can be bought
On the small ball. It can then all be taught
And reconverted to be kind and clean.

A more heartening fact about the cultures of man
Is their appalling stubbornness. The sea
Is always calm three fathoms down. The gigan-
tic anthropological circus riotously
Holds open all its booths. The pigmy plan
Is one note each and the tune goes out free.

Kenneth Fearing

CONFESSION OVERHEARD IN A SUBWAY

You will ask how I came to be eavesdropping, in the first place.
The answer is, I was not.

The man who confessed to these several crimes (call him John Doe)
spoke into my right ear on a crowded subway train, while the man
whom he addressed (call him Richard Roe) stood at my left.

Thus, I stood between them, and they talked, or sometimes shouted,
quite literally straight through me.

How could I help but overhear?

Perhaps I might have gone away to some other strap. But the aisles
were full.

Besides, I felt, for some reason, curious.

"I do not deny my guilt," said John Doe. "My own, first, and after
that my guilty knowledge of still further guilt.

I have counterfeited often, and successfully.

I have been guilty of ignorance and talking with conviction. Of intol-
erable wisdom and keeping silent.

Through carelessness, or cowardice, I have shortened the lives of bet-
ter men. And the name for that is murder.

All my life I have been a receiver of stolen goods."

"Personally, I always mind my own business," said Richard Roe.

"Sensible people don't get into those scrapes."

I was not the only one who overheard this confession.

Several businessmen, bound for home, and housewives and mechanics,
were within easy earshot.

A policeman sitting in front of us did not lift his eyes, at the mention
of murder, from his paper.

Why should I be the one to report these crimes?

You will understand why this letter to your paper is anonymous. I
will sign it: Public Spirited Citizen, and hope that it cannot be
traced.

But all the evidence, if there is any clamor for it, can be substantiated.
I have heard the same confession many times since, in different places.
And now that I think of it, I had heard it many times before.

“Guilt,” said John, “is always and everywhere nothing less than guilt. I have always, at all times, been a willing accomplice of the crass and the crude.

I have overheard, daily, the smallest details of conspiracies against the human race, vast in their ultimate scope, and conspired, daily, to launch my own.

You have heard of innocent men who died in the chair. It was my avarice that threw the switch.

I helped, and I do not deny it, to nail that guy to the cross, and shall continue to help.

Look into my eyes, you can see the guilt.

Look at my face, my hair, my very clothing, you will see guilt written plainly everywhere.

Guilt of the flesh. Of the soul. Of eating, when others do not. Of breathing and laughing and sleeping.

I am guilty of what? Of guilt. Guilty of guilt, that is all, and enough.”

Richard Roe looked at his wristwatch and said: “We’ll be twenty minutes late.

After dinner we might take in a show.”

Now, who will bring Joe Doe to justice, for his measureless crimes?

I do not, personally, wish to be involved.

Such nakedness of the soul belongs in some other province, probably the executioner’s.

And who will bring the blunt and upright Richard Roe to the accuser’s stand, where he belongs?

Or will he deny and deny his partnership?

I have done my duty, as a public spirited citizen, in any case.

Robert Frost

THE GIFT OUTRIGHT

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.

A SOLDIER

He is that fallen lance that lies as hurled,
That lies unlifted now, come dew, come rust,
But still lies pointed as it plowed the dust.
If we who sight along it round the world,
See nothing worthy to have been its mark,
It is because like men we look too near,
Forgetting that as fitted to the sphere,
Our missiles always make too short an arc:
They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect
The curve of earth, and striking, break their own;
They make us cringe for metal-point on stone.
But this we know, the obstacle that checked
And tripped the body, shot the spirit on
Further than target ever showed or shone.

THE LESSON FOR TODAY

If this uncertain age in which we dwell
Were really as dark as I hear sages tell,
And I convinced that they were really sages,
I should not curse myself with it to hell,
But leaving not the chair I long have sat in,
I should betake me back ten thousand pages
To the world's undebatably dark ages,
And getting up my medieval Latin,
Seek converse common cause and brotherhood
(By all that's liberal—I should, I should)
With poets who could calmly take the fate
Of being born at once too early and late,
And for these reasons kept from being great.
Yet singing but Dione in the wood
And *ver aspergit terram floribus*
They slowly led old Latin verse to rhyme
And to forget the ancient lengths of time,
And so began the modern world for us.

I'd say, O Master of the Palace School,
You were not Charles' nor anybody's fool:
Tell me as pedagogue to pedagogue,
You did not know that since King Charles did rule
You had no chance but to be minor, did you?
Your light was spent perhaps as in a fog
That at once kept you burning low and hid you.
The age may very well have been to blame
For your not having won to Virgil's fame.
But no one ever heard you make the claim.
You would not think you knew enough to judge
The age when full upon you. That's my point.
We have today and I could call their name
Who know exactly what is out of joint
To make their verse and their excuses lame.
They've tried to grasp with too much social fact
Too large a situation. You and I
Would be afraid if we should comprehend
And get outside of too much bad statistics
Our muscles never could again contract:

We never could recover human shape,
But must live lives out mentally agape,
Or die of philosophical distension.
That's how we feel—and we're no special mystics.

We can't appraise the time in which we act.
But for the folly of it, let's pretend
We know enough to know it for adverse.
One more millennium's about to end.
Let's celebrate the event, my distant friend,
In publicly disputing which is worse,
The present age or your age. You and I
As schoolmen of repute should qualify
To wage a fine scholastical contention
As to whose age deserves the lower mark,
Or should I say the higher one, for dark.
I can just hear the way you make it go:
There's always something to be sorry for,
A sordid peace or an outrageous war.
Yes, yes, of course. We have the same convention.
The groundwork of all faith is human woe.
It was well worth preliminary mention.
There's nothing but injustice to be had,
No choice is left a poet, you might add,
But how to take the curse, tragic or comic.
It was well worth preliminary mention.
But let's get on to where our cases part,
If part they do. Let me propose a start.
(We're rivals in the badness of our case,
Remember, and must keep a solemn face.)
Space ails us moderns: we are sick with space.
Its contemplation makes us out as small
As a brief epidemic of microbes
That in a good glass may be seen to crawl
The patina of this the least of globes.
But have we there the advantage after all?
You were belittled into vilest worms
God hardly tolerated with his feet;
Which comes to the same thing in different terms.
We both are the belittled human race,
One as compared with God and one with space.

I had thought ours the more profound disgrace;
But doubtless this was only my conceit.
The cloister and the observatory saint
Take comfort in about the same complaint.
So science and religion really meet.

I can just hear you call your Palace class:
Come learn the Latin Eheu for alas.
You may not want to use it and you may.
O paladins, the lesson for today
Is how to be unhappy yet polite.
And at the summons Roland, Olivier,
And every sheepish paladin and peer,
Being already more than proved in fight,
Sits down in school to try if he can write
Like Horace in the true Horatian vein,
Yet like a Christian disciplined to bend
His mind to thinking always of the end.
Memento mori and obey the Lord.
Art and religion love the somber chord.
Earth's a hard place in which to save the soul,
And could it be brought under state control,
So automatically we all were saved,
Its separateness from Heaven could be waived;
It might as well at once be kingdom-come.
(Perhaps it will be next millennium.)

But these are universals, not confined
To any one time, place, or human kind.
We're either nothing or a God's regret.
As ever when philosophers are met,
No matter where they stoutly mean to get,
Nor what particulars they reason from,
They are philosophers, and from old habit
They end up in the universal Whole
As unoriginal as any rabbit.

One age is like another for the soul.
I'm telling you. You haven't said a thing,
Unless I put it in your mouth to say.
I'm having the whole argument my way—

But in your favor—please to tell your King—
In having granted you all ages shine
With equal darkness, yours as dark as mine.
I'm liberal. You, you aristocrat
Won't know exactly what I mean by that.
I mean so altruistically moral
I never take my own side in a quarrel.
I'd lay my hand on his hand on his staff,
Lean back and have my confidential laugh,
And tell him I had read his Epitaph.

It sent me to the graves the other day.
The only other there was far away
Across the landscape with a watering pot
At his devotions in a special plot.
And he was there resuscitating flowers
(Make no mistake about its being bones);
But I was only there to read the stones
To see what on the whole they had to say
About how long a man may think to live,
Which is becoming my concern of late.
And very wide the choice they seemed to give;
The ages ranging all the way from hours
To months and years and many many years.
One man had lived one hundred years and eight.
But though we all may be inclined to wait
And follow some development of state,
Or see what comes of science and invention,
There is a limit to our time extension.
We all are doomed to broken-off careers,
And so's the nation, so's the total race.
The earth itself is liable to the fate
Of meaninglessly being broken off.
(And hence so many literary tears
At which my inclination is to scoff.)
I may have wept that any should have died
Or missed their chance, or not have been their best,
Or been their riches, fame, or love denied;
On me as much as any is the jest.
I take my incompleteness with the rest.
God bless himself can no one else be blessed.

I hold your doctrine of Memento Mori.
And were an epitaph to be my story
I'd have a short one ready for my own.
I would have written of me on my stone:
I had a lover's quarrel with the world.

Robert Graves

THE FALLEN TOWER OF SILOAM

Should the building totter, run for an archway!
We were there already—already the collapse
Powdered the air with chalk, and shrieking
Of old men crushed under the fallen beams
Dwindled to comic yelps. How not terrible
When the event outran the alarm
And suddenly we were free—

Free to forget how grim it stood,
That tower, and what great fissures ran
Up the west wall, how rotten the underpinning
At the southeastern angle. Satire
Had whirled a gentle wind around it,
As if to buttress the worn masonry;
Yet we, waiting, had abstained from satire.

It behoved us, indeed, as poets
To be silent in Siloam, to foretell
No visible calamity. Though kings
Were crowned and gold coin minted still and horses
Still munched at nose-bags in the public streets,
All such sad emblems were to be condoned:
An old wives' tale, not ours.

Geoffrey Grigson

MEETING BY THE GJULIKA MEADOW

He had in his hand a red plant
Picked near the snow under
The suspicious frontier, when we met
By the Gjulika meadow.

And he spoke slowly in English,
And the black thunder bucked about
And the hard rain decidedly hit
Round the broken hut,

And he made a fire, the Slovene
With the off-white face,
Where it was still dry under
The pines: and he took

Out a black and bent copper
Coffee-pot, and sugar, and
Some bread, with garlic. The rain-drops
Fried in the fire

And we were warm and wet,
And sipped at the very hot
Coffee (the Slovene learnt his
English at Boston)

And talked under the thunder
About Europe, about dealing
In furs, about thunder, about rain
And the invisible trout

In the silk-blue Sava, and
About Europe again, and frontiers.
His Zagreb boots were thin, and
He was taking the plant

Picked by the snow under the
Nervous frontier to his lovely
Daughter underneath in the farm,
Who was crippled

By her mother's sin (what sin?),
He said. We talked of Europe,
Europe; and the immature frogs
Slipped in the wet grass.

The thunder was sneering, and
In the lower woods we enjoyed
The lemon sun again, and the scent
And magenta of cyclamens.

(1936)

UCCELLO ON THE HEATH

Watch, please, this painted ballet of the fed:
The rubbish boxes on the green are red,
The sniffing dogs approach, side-step, retreat,
Homburgs and fur coats enter from the street.

Given one picture-gallery glance,
They plait a formal and a harmless dance,
Go up, and go across, and down,
Into these black trees touched with brown:

And yet analysis reveals the actual set,
The umbrella changing to the bayonet,
The simple time splitting to rallying cries,
The Grunts, Greeds, Fears and Enmities.

Gross winds now roaring in their ears,
These Coats and Homburgs, Enmities and Fears,
These red, these grey, these black upon the green
Stab to the guts in a rich battle-scene.

(1937)

JUNE IN WILTSHIRE

In the green hedge tall and thick
As a mound sounds a dove sounds a dove—
O round, round your grey front in my hand,
In my hands, in my heart,
But the dove sounds still and sounds,
In the smooth hedge thick and still as a mound.

In the hedge where he sounds the white petal
Blows round, blows around,
Flutters and fails in the sun
To the numb, cracked, ant-ridden ground
But the cool dove sounds and still sounds
In the bland hedge thick as a mound.

(1940)

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE HEART

Who must be blamed for the young head
On the pavement in the shape of blood,
But the whole heart of man?

The giant cloud shines on all,
The innocent table holds up the just
And evil document:

Who must be blamed? The young head
And the vile aimers hand,
And the whole heart they share,

The wide landscape, which holds houses,
Slaughter houses, the worm, adder
And the berry, caves,

Open and secret waters, museums
With the fossils of love and stuffed
Birds of law, all

Plants, nettles to fumitory, choked
Ditch; and all beyond footstep
To the coloured edge:

Who must you blame? The young head
And the vile aimer's hand
And the whole heart of man.

(1941)

UNDER THE CLIFF

This is where the scarlet lords-and-ladies
Glitter erect in the wet angle of the hedges
And shrivel soon,

And again the bland leaves curl and colour,
Seeds are black in their deep sockets, and another
Shrivelling moon

Half-lights the calmer times of indecision,
Rain damps down the summer's middle-class ambition,
And very soon

A stale and unconvinced denial of defeat
Mutters, with pauses, from the elder hedge its weak
Self-pitying tune:

Toads pause, the handsome slugs will hide
And the caught bee dry and fade inside
The emptied room.

(1942)

THE FOUR

A blinded parson gingering down the neo-Gothic steps,
A white stick hanging in his tender hand—
An image of this land.

Outside the town, dahlias dividing from potato stems,
The speckled head part of a cast-iron bed—
An image of the dead.

On Bryher, shining maggots mining a stranded
Dolphin's head, half in the Atlantic sand—
An image of this land.

My board-room-sleekened Machiavel: "Argue with no-one's
Principles," he said, "Walk round instead"—
An image of the dead.

(1944)

Robinson Jeffers

THE STARS GO OVER THE LONELY OCEAN

Unhappy about some far off things
That are not my affair, wandering
Along the coast and up the lean ridges,
I saw in the evening
The stars go over the lonely ocean,
And a black-maned wild boar
Plowing with his snout on Mal Paso Mountain.

The old monster snuffled, "Here are sweet roots,
Fat grubs, slick beetles and sprouted acorns.
The best nation in Europe has fallen,
And that is Finland,
But the stars go over the lonely ocean,"
The old black-bristled boar,
Tearing the sod on Mal Paso Mountain.

"The world's in a bad way, my man,
And bound to be worse before it mends;
Better lie up in the mountain here
Four or five centuries,
While the stars go over the lonely ocean,"
Said the old father of wild pigs,
Plowing the fallow on Mal Paso Mountain.

"Keep clear of the dupes that talk democracy
And the dogs that bark revolution,
Drunk with talk, liars and believers.
I believe in my tusks.
Long live freedom and damn the ideologies,"
Said the gamey black-maned wild boar
Tusking the turf on Mal Paso Mountain.

I SHALL LAUGH PURELY

Turn from that girl
Your fixed blue eyes.
Boy-slender she is,
And a face as beautiful as a hawk's face.
History passes like falling rocks.

I am old as a stone,
But she is beautiful.
War is coming.
All the fine boys will go off to war.
History passes like falling rocks.

Oh, that one's to marry
Another old man;
You won't be helped
When your tall sons go away to war.
History falls on your head like rocks.

Keep a straight mind
In the evil time.
In the mad-dog time
Why may not an old man run mad?
History falls like rocks in the dark,
All will be worse confounded soon.

II

Count the glories of this time,
Count that girl's beauty, then count England,
Bleeding, at bay, magnificent,
At last a lion,
For all will be worse confounded soon.

Count that girl's beauty, count the coast-range,
The steep rock that stops the Pacific,
Count the surf on its precipice,
The hawks in its air,
For all will be worse confounded soon.

Count its eagles and wild boars,
Count the great blue-black winter storms,

Heavy rain and the hurricane,
Get them by heart,
For all will be worse confounded soon.

Count no human thing but only
England's great fight and that girl's beauty,
History passes like falling
Rocks in the dark,
And all will be worse confounded soon.

III

But this, I steadily assure you, is not the world's end,
Nor even the end of a civilization. It is not so late as you think: give
nature time.

These wars will end, and I shall lead a troupe of shaky old men
through Europe and America,
Old drunkards, worn-out lechers; fallen dictators, cast kings, a dis-
graced president; some cashiered generals
And collapsed millionaires: we shall enact a play, I shall announce to
the audience:
"All will be worse confounded soon."

We shall beware of wild dogs in Europe, and of the police in armed
imperial America:—

For all that pain was mainly a shift of power:—we shall enact our
play: "Oh Christian era,
Make a good end," but first I announce to our audiences: "This play
is prophetic, it will be centuries.

This play does not represent the world's end,
But only the fall of a civilization. It is not so late as you think: give
nature time."

In Europe we shall beware of starving dogs and political commissars,
and of the police in America.

We shall rant on our makeshift stages in our cracked voices: "Oh
Christian era,
Era of chivalry and the barbarians and the machines, era of science
and the saints,

When you go down make a good sunset.
Never linger superfluous, old and holy and paralytic like India,
Go down in conclusive war and a great red sunset, great age go down,
For all will be worse confounded soon."

We shall tour to the last verge and the open Pacific, we shall sit on the
 yellow cliffs at Hurricane Point
 And watch the centaurs come from the sea; their splayed hooves
 plunge and stutter on the tide-rocks, watch them swarm up,
 The hairy and foamy flanks, the naked destructive shoulders, the
 brutal faces and the bent bows,
 Horde after horde under the screaming gulls: my old men will cough
 in the fog and baa like sheep,
 "Here comes the end of a civilization. Give nature time,"
 And spit, and make lewd jokes. But I shall laugh purely,
 Remembering what old enthusiast named a girl's beauty and England's
 battle
 Among the lights of his time: she being by then a dyed hag, or more
 likely
 One of those embalmer-fingered smiles in the subsoil; and England
 will be
 Not admirable. I shall laugh purely, knowing the next age
 Lives on not-human beauty, waiting on circumstance and its April,
 weaving its winter chrysalis;
 Thin snow falls on historical rocks.

MAY-JUNE, 1940

Foreseen for so many years: these evils, this monstrous violence, these
 massive agonies: no easier to bear.
 We saw them with slow stone strides approach, everyone saw them;
 we closed our eyes against them, we looked
 And they had come nearer. We ate and drank and slept, they came
 nearer. Sometimes we laughed, they were nearer. Now
 They are here. And now a blind man foresees what follows them:
 degradation, famine, recovery and so forth, and the
 Epidemic manias: but not enough death to serve us, not enough death.
 It would be better for men
 To be few and live far apart, where none could infect another; then
 slowly the sanity of field and mountain
 And the cold ocean and glittering stars might enter their minds.
Another
 dream, another dream.

We shall have to accept certain limitations
In future, and abandon some humane dreams; only hard-minded,
sleepless and realist can ride this rock-slide
To new fields down the dark mountain; and we shall have to perceive
that these insanities are normal;
We shall have to perceive that battle is a burning flower or like a huge
music, and the dive-bomber's screaming orgasm
As beautiful as other passions; and that death and life are not serious
alternatives. One has known all these things
For many years: there is greater and darker to know
In the next hundred.

And why do you cry, my dear, why do you cry?
It is all in the whirling circles of time.
If millions are born millions must die,
If England goes down and Germany up
The stronger dog will still be on top,
All in the turning of time.
If civilization goes down, that
Would be an event to contemplate.
It will not be in our time, alas my dear,
It will not be in our time.

BLACK-OUT

The war that we have carefully for years provoked
Comes on us unprepared, amazed and indignant. Our warships are
shot
Like sitting ducks and our planes like nest-birds, both our coasts
ridiculously panicked,
And our leaders make orations. This is the people
That hopes to impose on the whole planetary world
An American peace.

(Oh, we'll win our war. My money on amazed Gulliver
And his horse-pistols.)

Meanwhile our prudent officers
Have cleared the coast-long ocean of ships and fishing-craft, the sky
of planes, the windows of light: these clearings

Make a strange beauty. Watch the wide sea, there is nothing human,
the gulls have it. Watch the wide sky,
All day clean of machines, only at dawn and dusk a military hawk
passes
High on patrol. Walk at night on the shore,
The pretty firefly spangle that used to line it
Perfectly silent, shut are the shops, mouse-dark the houses.
Here the prehuman dignity of night
Stands, as it was and will be again. Oh beautiful
Darkness and silence, the two eyes that see God. Great staring eyes.

FOURTH ACT

Because you are simple people, kindly and romantic, and set your
trust in a leader and believed lies;
Because you are humble, and overvalued the rat-run historical tombs
of Europe: you have been betrayed

A second time into folly. Now fight, be valiant, be cruel, bloody and
remorseless, quit you like men.
To fight in a needless war is evil, evil the valor, evil the victory: to be
beaten would be worse.

But fear nothing, the little land-frontiered nations are out of date, the
island-empires dissolve,
Only solid continents now can support the oceans of bombers, the
enormous globe of the sky.

It is scene one act four of the tragic farce *The Political Animal*. Its
hero reaches his apogee
And ravages the whole planet; not even the insects, only perhaps
bacteria, were ever so powerful.

Not a good play, but you can see the author's intention: to disgust
and shock. The tragic theme
Is patriotism; the clowning is massacre. He wishes to turn humanity
outward from its obsession

In humanity, *a riveder le stelle*. He will have to pile on horrors, he will
not convince you
In a thousand years; but the whole affair is only a hare-brained episode
in the life of the planet.

EAGLE VALOR, CHICKEN MIND

Unhappy country what wings you have. Even here,
Nothing important to protect, and ocean-far from the nearest enemy,
what a cloud
Of bombers amazes the coast mountain, what a hornet-swarm of
fighters,
And day and night the guns practising.
Unhappy, eagle wings and beak, chicken brain.
Weep (it is frequent in human affairs) weep for the terrible magnifi-
cence of the means
The ridiculous incompetence of the reasons, the bloody and shabby
Pathos of the result.

CALM AND FULL THE OCEAN

Calm and full the ocean under the cool dark sky; quiet rocks and the
birds fishing; the night-herons
Have come home to their wood . . . while east and west in Europe
and Asia and the islands unimaginable agonies
Consume mankind. Not a few thousand but uncounted millions, not
a day but years, pain, fear, sick hatred,
Famine that dries the children to little bones and huge eyes, high
explosive that fountains dirt, flesh and bone-splinters.
Sane and intact the seasons pursue their course, autumn slopes to
December, the rains will fall,
And the grass flourish, with flowers in it: as if man's world were
perfectly separate from nature's, private and mad.
But that's not true; even the P-38s and the so-called Liberators are as
natural as horse-flies;
It is only that man, his griefs and rages, are not what they seem to
man, not great and shattering, but really
Too small to produce any disturbance. This is good. This is the truth
and the mercy. Grant that the murdered
Cities leave marks in the earth for a certain time, like fossil rain-pits in
shale, equally beautiful.

THE EYE

The Atlantic is a stormy moat, and the Mediterranean,
The blue pool in the old garden,
More than five thousand years has drunk sacrifice
Of ships and blood and shines in the sun; but here the Pacific:
The ships, planes, wars are perfectly irrelevant.
Neither our present blood-feud with the brave dwarfs
Nor any future world-quarrel of westering
And eastering man, the bloody migrations, greed of power, battle-
falcons,
Are a mote of dust in the great scale-pan.
Here from this mountain shore, headland beyond stormy headland
plunging like dolphins through the gray sea-smoke
Into pale sea, look west at the hill of water: it is half the planet: this
dome, this half-globe, this bulging
Eyeball of water, arched over to Asia,
Australia and white Antarctica: those are the eyelids that never close;
this is the staring unsleeping
Eye of the earth, and what it watches is not our wars.

CASSANDRA

The mad girl with the staring eyes and long white fingers
-looked in the stones of the wall,
The storm-wrack hair and the screeching mouth: does it matter,
Cassandra,
Whether the people believe
Your bitter fountain? Truly men hate the truth, they'd liefer
Meet a tiger on the road.
Therefore the poets honey their truth with lying; but religion-
-enders and political men
Pour from the barrel, new lies on the old, and are praised for kindly
Wisdom. Poor bitch be wise.
No: you'll still mumble in a corner a crust of truth, to men
And gods disgusting. —You and I, Cassandra.

Seán Jennett

CYCLE

I

It is on the sea and under the waves of the sea,
in the barren desert and the fertile valley,
in holes of the ground where the maggot channels,
and in the air with the gannet and the eagle;
it is fashioned in obdurate iron, steel are its sinews,
and it is merciless and strong of purpose;
it houses in the madness of the heart
where the blood suckles and the nerves are curled in fear
and the cancer swells and ramifies;
and in the convolutions of the brain,
the shadowy mind, it thrusts the legion seed
that labours into agony and hate
and the loud hosts of death.

II

I was a labourer in the smoky valley,
within the walls, the tall dark walls of the mills,
where the hills go up to the wild moor.
I was a dog of the dales, broad was my speech,
and my ways were not the smooth ways of the south,
but hard and used to keener weather.
All week I worked among the looms
while the cloth slacked out and the shuttles clacked
swiftly, as the woof was shot through the warp
and through my brain dim with the webs of years.
All week I was the servant of the loom,
chained to the steel for promise of meagre coin,
six days a week, but Sunday comes
soon, and I am my master for the waking day
that found me with my whippet on the moor.
O my faithful lass! Soft was her fell;
her eyes were as deep pools stained with peat,
shafted with light; and intelligent.
She was long in the body, but strong of limb and rib,

and her muscles moved under the skin
like currents in a bay of the river.
She was swift as the wind or as the summer swallow,
and I would pit her with the local dogs,
backing her swiftness with my sweaty coin,
and many a shilling have I won with her
to spend on some wet evening in a pub
or buy the tickets at the picture palace
when I took out the girl I meant to marry—
but that is all forgotten with the flesh.
I was a labourer in the smoky valley:
I am a brittle bone projecting from the sand.

III

See how he sucks at the dug of my moony breast,
the full sweet orb of his day fond for his lips,
and he hangs there under the swollen globe,
clamping his fingers about my thumb
and pushing my arm with his eager feet
as he pushed in my belly a month ago.
O suck, my little one, and after suck sleep sound,
for the night is full of the burden of fear
and the day is loud with avenging engines of war,
and you are the flower of my love and the rose of life.
O suck and sleep, suck and sleep,
suck at my breast and sleep on my cradled arm:
four changing seasons I give to your flesh,
but the years are yours, and the years are sharp.

IV

He came with the roll of side-drums and the blast of bugles
and the march of soldiers and the thunder of iron wheels;
and the rigid hedges and the dead walls by the way
blossomed with faces. In a dream I saw them,
from the house top and from the four winds.
I saw the pale cheeks of clerks and the bloated jowls of publicans,
and painted harlots and innocents from school,
labourers in greasy suits, rich men at windows;
and a fence of soldiers, armed and stiff, held back
the uncomprehending, massive public face
as the waters of the Red Sea were parted and held

by the ten fingers of a partial and peculiar god:
and among them I saw the exultation of triumph
and the dark, hopeless terror of the children of Shem.

He is as a god, huge and fearful in thought;
his limbs are iron and his voice is the roar of guns;
and his eyes are as a bayonet of shining steel
on which he has spitted my soul.

His feet are armies that crush the rotten lily;
they strike fire from the flinty stone in the way
and it consumes the dwellings of men,
the work of their hands, and their defeated limbs.

I am the daughter of man, in this time of death
giving birth in torment and terror, and suckling my child
that he in his turn in the ripe womb
shall sow the seed of love and continuing life:
and what have I, or my child, or my child's child
to do with war, that will not pass us by?

v

A hangman's rope is in my sinewed wrist,
whose cord, obedient to a distant brain,
pulls the cold trigger of the rifle back,
or drives the bomber through the black sky
over the crouching, nervous city;
or fires torpedoes through the secret sea
where in my blood the stricken ship is drowned.
My eyes are laced with burning brands
and by their flame the pyre is lit
that turns to sullen ash contagious tongues
and all the subjects of contagion,
the grown man doubting and the womb-walled child,
the adolescent full of dreams of glory, and
the dotard suckling at his knuckle-bones.

I am the enemy, I am the instrument
of my country, used to being used.
In the ordinary way I am afraid of death,
afraid to kill, afraid of being killed:
but this is war. My country is at stake:
its manner of life, which is my manner;

its language, which is the tongue I speak;
its customs, which are my customs;
and its people, which is myself.

VI

Suddenly at night the bombers came
in the hard, reverberating bowl of the sky,
destroying the factory and the tall cathedral,
the dock, the warehouse, and the railway station,
the rich house in the leafy avenue,
and the shouldering tenements of the narrow streets
and the bodies and souls of men.

I sought my son among the smoking stones
where I had crouched with him clutched at my breast
until the bomb burst and the building shuttered down
and the dark came and severed my son from me.

I cried out with a voice harsh in my throat

My son, I have lost my son.

And charred faces stared at me with pity
and I saw the city burning about me
and the flash of guns on the dark smoke
and I heard bombs burst in the fire and in my heart,
but no one came to seek my son.

I besought a man who ran among the rubble
shouting and stumbling, to stay and find my son,
but he said, There is fire in my eyes and I am blind.
And the red hollow shells in the white face
glared at the black sky and the hard ice of the stars
where still the burden of engines nagged in the brass
bowl of night, and the stiff white searchlights stalked;
while bombs raged down, streeling into the city,
and the guns mumbled and barked at the thunderous sky.
And the fire blossomed among the black bones of the street
and rushed across the stones and took my son.

VII

The tongues of dust trumpet from the grave,
from the desert grinding grain on yellow grain,
from the lush meadow, the arable land, and the secret wood,
from the narrow sea and from the deep ocean,

from the dumb stones of the ruined city:
cry with harsh tongues from the mouths of men
who were strong, and are dust;
from the lips of women
who were beautiful, and are dust;
from the eyes of children
who loved glory, and are dust.

The dry bone and the rotten bone and the bone stripped by the sea
and the bone articulated in the living body
in the dumb tunnels of the marrow shout
to the dead, Despair;
to the living, Fear;
and to the child conceived in the unborn womb
War.

James Laughlin

A LETTER TO HITLER

Last winter we were
short of firewood and

it was good and cold
so we used a lot of

old books that were
in the attic just old

novels nobody would
ever want to read but

we found they made
plenty of heat and

twice they set the
chimney afire when

a burning page went
up with the draft and

we found they would
smoulder a long time

after you thought the
fire was all out and

then suddenly burst
into flame and another

thing they made ashes
that wouldn't stay in

the grate but floated
out all over the room!

Archibald MacLeish

DISCOVERY OF THIS TIME

Not by the Poets.

Nobody borrowed a couple of dogs and a gun and
Packed out: keeping the evening forward:
Keeping the thrush to the left hand of the sun:
Following wandering water: building cover in
Four foot of wet snow in the underbrush:
Bringing the evidence back in a bag—a plover—a
Large bird: killed on the nest and no name for it.

No one set out for it. Nobody looked for the way here.

Not by Philosophers.

Nobody sat to a map of the
Whole world: measured the drift of the stars: of
Letters in bottles: figured the flight of the lapwing:
Marked the compass courses on the chart—
“Here will be islands.”

“Here will be those shores.”

“Coast will show here where the dolphins are.”

Nobody figured it out on a fine morning
Propped on a wine-butt by a windy sea
With a lit pipe and a lead stub and a board's end. . . .

(And they sailed and there was log wood on the sea.)

Not by the Conquerors either.

Nobody led us here.
Nobody lined us up in a town field:
Shipped us in barges: fought at the stormy head:
Marched on for three days in the desert:
Encountered the elephants: beat them; buried the dead in a

Closed ring:

And the next night to the west of us
Sea gulls over the sand: the wings numberless.

There are Leaders enough and they say what a mouth says but
None of them led us here!

Trekked to the site of it . . .

No man beat the drum . . .

Marked the shore and the harbors . . .

We came by ourselves.

We looked and we had come.

There was one day and we walked from our lives and we stood here.
There was one day and we moved out—the neighborhood
Selling the farms: leaving the stock in the paddock:
Leaving the key in the lock and the cake on the table:
Letting the door slam: the tap drip . . .

There was one day and we looked and we had come here.

No one discovered it. No one intended it either.
There were all of us—all together—and we came.

THE YOUNG DEAD SOLDIERS

To Richard Myers

The young dead soldiers do not speak.
Nevertheless they are heard in the still houses.
(Who has not heard them?)

They have a silence that speaks for them at night
And when the clock counts.

They say,
We were young. We have died. Remember us.

They say,
We have done what we could
But until it is finished it is not done.

They say,
We have given our lives
But until it is finished no one can know what our lives gave.

They say,
Our deaths are not ours,
They are yours,
They will mean what you make them.

They say,
Whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope
Or for nothing
We cannot say.
It is you who must say this.

They say,
We leave you our deaths,
Give them their meaning,
Give them an end to the war and a true peace,
Give them a victory that ends the war and a peace afterwards,
Give them their meaning.

We were young, they say.
We have died.
Remember us.

THE TOO-LATE BORN

We too, we too, descending once again
The hills of our own land, we too have heard
Far off— Ah, que ce cor a longue haleine—
The horn of Roland in the passages of Spain,
The first, the second blast, the failing third,
And with the third turned back and climbed once more
The steep road southward, and heard faint the sound
Of swords, of horses, the disastrous war,
And crossed the dark defile at last, and found
At Roncevaux upon the darkening plain
The dead against the dead and on the silent ground
The silent slain—

Louis MacNeice

AMONG THESE TURF-STACKS

Among these turf-stacks graze no iron horses
Such as stalk such as champ in towns and the soul of crowds,
Here is no mass-production of neat thoughts
No canvas shrouds for the mind nor any black hearses:
The peasant shambles on his boots like hooves
Without thinking at all or wanting to run in grooves.

But those who lack the peasant's conspirators
The tawny mountain, the unregarded buttress,
Will feel the need of a fortress against ideas and against the
Shuddering insidious shock of the theory-vendors
The little sardine men crammed in a monster toy
Who tilt their aggregate beast against our crumbling Troy.

For we are obsolete who like the lesser things,
Who play in corners with looking-glasses and beads;
It is better we should go quickly, go into Asia
Or any other tunnel where the world recedes,
Or turn blind wantons like the gulls who scream
And rip the edge off any ideal or dream.

AUTUMN JOURNAL VII

Conferences, adjournments, ultimatums,
Flights in the air, castles in the air,
The autopsy of treaties, dynamite under the bridges,
The end of *laissez faire*.
After the warm days the rain comes pimpling
The paving stones with white
And with the rain the national conscience, creeping,
Seeping through the night.
And in the sodden park on Sunday protest
Meetings assembled not, as so often, now

Merely to advertise some patent panacea
 But simply to avow
 The need to hold the ditch; a bare avowal
 That may perhaps imply
 Death at the doors in a week but perhaps in the long run
 Exposure of the lie.
 Think of a number, double it, treble it, square it,
 And sponge it out
 And repeat *ad lib.* and mark the slate with crosses;
 There is no time to doubt
 If the puzzle really has an answer. Hitler yells on the wireless,
 The night is damp and still
 And I hear dull blows on wood outside my window;
 They are cutting down the trees on Primrose Hill.
 The wood is white like the roast flesh of chicken,
 Each tree falling like a closing fan;
 No more looking at the view from seats beneath the branches,
 Everything is going to plan;
 They want the crest of this hill for anti-aircraft,
 The guns will take the view
 And searchlights probe the heavens for bacilli
 With narrow wands of blue.
 And the rain came on as I watched the territorials
 Sawing and chopping and pulling on ropes like a team
 In a village tug-of-war; and I found my dog had vanished
 And thought 'this is the end of the old régime,'
 But found the police had got her at St. John's Wood station
 And fetched her in the rain and went for a cup
 Of coffee to an all-night shelter and heard a taxi-driver
 Say 'It turns me up
 When I see these soldiers in lorries'—rumble of tumbrils
 Drums in the trees
 Breaking the eardrums of the ravished dryads—
 It turns me up; a coffee, please.
 And as I go out I see a windscreen-wiper
 In an empty car
 Wiping away like mad and I feel astounded
 That things have gone so far.
 And I come back here to my flat and wonder whether
 From now on I need take

The trouble to go out choosing stuff for curtains
 As I don't know anyone to make
 Curtains quickly. Rather one should quickly
 Stop the cracks for gas or dig a trench
 And take one's paltry measures against the coming
 Of the unknown Uebermensch.
 But one—meaning I—is bored, am bored, the issue
 Involving principle but bound in fact
 To squander principle in panic and self-deception—
 Accessories after the act,
 So that all we foresee is rivers in spate sprouting
 With drowning hands
 And men like dead frogs floating till the rivers
 Lose themselves in the sands.
 And we who have been brought up to think of 'Gallant Belgium'
 As so much blague
 Are now preparing again to essay good through evil
 For the sake of Prague;
 And must, we suppose, become uncritical, vindictive,
 And must, in order to beat
 The enemy, model ourselves upon the enemy,
 A howling radio for our paraclete.
 The night continues wet, the axe keeps falling,
 The hill grows bald and bleak,
 No longer one of the sights of London but maybe
 We shall have fireworks here by this day week.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM READING ROOM

Under the hive-like dome the stooping haunted readers
 Go up and down the alleys, tap the cells of knowledge—
 Honey and wax, the accumulation of years—
 Some on commission, some for the love of learning,
 Some because they have nothing better to do
 Or because they hope these walls of books will deaden
 The drumming of the demon in their ears.

Cranks, hacks, poverty-stricken scholars,
In pince-nez, period hats or romantic beards
And cherishing their hobby or their doom.
Some are too much alive and some are asleep
Hanging like bars in a world of inverted values,
Folded up in themselves in a world which is safe and silent:
This is the British Museum Reading Room.

Out on the steps in the sun the pigeons are courting,
Puffing their ruffs and sweeping their tails or taking
A sun-bath at their ease
And under the totem poles—the ancient terror—
Between the enormous fluted Ionic columns
There seeps from heavily jowled or hawk-like foreign faces
The guttural sorrow of the refugees.

REFUGEES

With prune-dark eyes, thick lips, jostling each other
These, disinterred from Europe, throng the deck
To watch their hope heave up in steel and concrete
Powerful but delicate as a swan's neck,

Thinking, each of them, the worst is over
And we do not want any more to be prominent or rich,
Only to be ourselves, to be unmolested
And make ends meet—an ideal surely which

Here if anywhere is feasible. Their glances
Like wavering antennae feel
Around the sliding limber towers of Wall Street
And count the numbered docks and gingerly steal

Into the hinterland of their own future
Behind this excessive annunciation of towers,
Tracking their future selves through a continent of strangeness.
The liner moves to the magnet; the quay flowers

With faces of people's friends. But these are mostly
Friendless and all they look to meet

Is a secretary who holds his levée among ledgers,
Tells them to take a chair and wait. . . .

And meanwhile the city will go on, regardless
Of any new arrival, trains like prayers
Radiating from stations haughty as cathedrals,
Tableaux of spring in milliners' windows, great affairs

Being endorsed on a vulcanite table, lines of washing
Feebly garish among grimy brick and dour
Iron fire-escapes; barrows of cement are rumbling
Up airy planks; a florist adds a flower

To a bouquet that is bound for somebody's beloved
Or for someone ill; in a sombre board-room great
Problems wait to be solved or shelved. The city
Goes on but you, you will probably find, must wait

Till something or other turns up. Something-or-Other
Becomes an expected angel from the sky
But do not trust the sky, the blue that looks so candid
Is non-committal, frigid as a harlot's eye.

Gangways—the handclasp of the land. The resurrected,
The brisk or resigned Lazaruses, who want
Another chance, go trooping ashore. But chances
Are dubious. Fate is stingy, recalcitrant

And officialdom greets them blankly as they fumble
Their foreign-looking baggage; they still feel
The movement of the ship while through their imagination
Seen and unheard-of constellations wheel.

(September, 1940)

JEHU

Peace on New England, on the shingled white houses, on golden
Rod and the red Turkey carpet spikes of sumach. The little
• American flags are flapping in the graveyard. Continuous
Chorus of grasshoppers. Fleece

Of quiet around the mind. Honeysuckle, phlox and smoke-bush,
Hollyhocks and nasturtium and corn on the cob. And the pine wood
Smelling of outmoded peace.

A king sat over the gate looking to the desert. A spiral
Of dust came towards him, a special messenger asking
Anxiously, "Is it peace?" The heavy eyebrows lowered,
He answered, "What have I
To do with peace?" and the messenger mopped the sweat and
obedient
Took his place behind the king who still sat scanning
Miles of desert and sky.

Negative prospect; sand in the lungs; blood in the sand; deceiving
Mirage of what were once ideals or even motives
And in this desert even a ghost can hardly
Live—but in the long run what
Have I to do with life? He got up blandly, harnessed his horses
And furiously drove, his eyeballs burning and the chariot's
Axles burning hot.

Someone sat in a window with a new coiffure, her raddled
Face, a Muse's possibly once but now a harlot's,
Smirked at the charioteer who, looking past her, signalled
To the maids to throw her down
And they threw her down and the wheels went over her ribs and the
carcase,
The one-time inspiration of artists, the toast of kings, was abandoned
To the scavenger dogs of the town.

And now the sand blows over Kent and Wales where we may shortly
Learn the secret of the desert's purge, of the mad driving,
The cautery of the gangrened soul, though we are not certain
Whether we shall stand beside
The charioteer, the surgeon, or shall be one with the pampered
Queen who tittered in the face of death, unable to imagine
The meaning of the flood-tide.

(August, 1940)

Marianne Moore

IN DISTRUST OF MERITS

Strengthened to live, strengthened to die for
medals and positioned victories?
They're fighting, fighting, fighting the blind
man who thinks he sees,—
who cannot see that the enslaver is
enslaved; the hater, harmed. O shining O
firm star, O tumultuous
ocean lashed till small things go
as they will, the mountainous
wave makes us who look, know
depth. Lost at sea before they fought! O
star of David, star of Bethlehem,
O black imperial lion
of the Lord—emblem
of a risen world—be joined at last, be
joined. There is hate's crown beneath which all is
death; there's love's without which none
is king; the blessed deeds bless
the halo. As contagion
of sickness makes sickness,
contagion of trust can make trust. They're
fighting in deserts and caves, one by
one, in battalions and squadrons;
they're fighting that I
may yet recover from the disease, *my*
self; some have it lightly, some will die. "Man's
wolf to man?" And we devour
ourselves? The enemy could not
have made a greater breach in our
defenses. One pilot-
ing a blind man can escape him, but
Job disheartened by false comfort knew,
that nothing is so defeating
as a blind man who

can see. O alive who are dead, who are
proud not to see, O small dust of the earth
that walks so arrogantly,
trust begets power and faith is
an affectionate thing. We
vow, we make this promise

to the fighting—it's a promise—"We'll
never hate black, white, red, yellow, Jew,
Gentile, Untouchable." We are
not competent to
make our vows. With set jaw they are fighting,
fighting, fighting,—some we love whom we know,
some we love but know not—that
hearts may feel and not be numb.
It cures me; or am I what
I can't believe in? Some

in snow, some on crags, some in quicksands,
little by little, much by much, they
are fighting fighting fighting that where
there was death there may
be life. "When a man is prey to anger,
he is moved by outside things; when he holds
his ground in patience patience
patience, that is action or
beauty," the soldier's defense
and hardest armor for

the fight. The world's an orphans' home. Shall
we never have peace without sorrow?
without pleas of the dying for
help that won't come? O
quiet form upon the dust, I cannot
look and yet I must. If these great patient
dyings—all these agonies
and woundbearings and blood shed—
can teach us how to live, these
dyings were not wasted.

Hate-hardened heart, O heart of iron,
iron is iron till it is rust.

There never was a war that was
not inward; I must
fight till I have conquered in myself what
causes war, but I would not believe it.
I inwardly did nothing.
O Iscariotlike crime!
Beauty is everlasting
and dust is for a time.

KEEPING THEIR WORLD LARGE

*All too literally, their flesh
and their spirit are our shield.*
NEW YORK TIMES, June 7, 1944

I should like to see that country's tiled bedrooms,
stone patios

and ancient wells: Rinaldo
Caramonica's the cobbler's, Frank Sblendorio's
and Dominick Angelastro's country—
the grocer's, the iceman's, the dancer's—the
beautiful Miss Damiano's; wisdom's

and all angels' Italy, this Christmas Day
this Christmas year.

A noiseless piano, an
innocent war, the heart that acts against itself. Here,
each unlike and all alike, could
so many—stumbling, falling, multiplied
till bodies lay as ground to walk on—say

“If Christ and the apostles died in vain, I'll
die in vain with them”?

When the very heart was a prayer
against this way of victory. Stem after stem
of what we call the tree—set, row
on row; that forest of white crosses; the
vision makes us faint. My eyes won't close to it. While

* The phrase is quoted from The Reverend James Gordon Gilkey

the knife was lifted, Isaac the offering
lay mute.

These, laid like animals for sacrifice,
like Isaac on the mount, were their own substitute.

And must they all be harmed by those
whom they have saved? Tears that don't fall are what
they wanted. Belief in belief marching

marching marching—all alone, all similar,
spurning pathos,

clothed in fear—marching to death
marching to life; it was like the cross, is like the cross.

Keeping their world large, that silent
marching marching marching and this silence
for which there is no description are

the voices of fighters with no rests between,
who would not yield;

whose spirits and whose bodies
all too literally were our shield, are still our shield.

They fought the enemy, we fight
fat living and self-pity. Shine, O shine
unfalsifying sun, on this sick scene.

Nicholas Moore

WHY THE BRITISH GIRLS GIVE IN SO EASILY

It is not the foreignness *per se* of heroes,
The able, bronzed American or fabulous
Pole. Nor is it a lack of courage, for
The courageous love even Italian prisoners.
There are penalties attached. There are
Dubious blessings to be had, difficulties
To meet. It is the love of colour.

Our scrupulous, yet shady politicians,
Corrupt yet easily-smiling business men,
Our gentle suave police—they are too dull.
Even the evil and corrupt are staid
And do corruption cunningly by guile
Rather than with a flash. What wonder then
That colour is attractive to a girl!

And it is not the colour of vice or desperation,
The exotic. It is, rather, a simple
Colourfulness of voice, of speech and manner;
It is the need for something different, warmer
Than the proverbial weather. O the sinner
Is not such a counterfeit traitor, or known fool,
Nor the girl therefore so obviously a beginner.

It may be true—yet why should it be true—
That none of these, these foreign countries,
Has any liveliness above our own;
Yet they are different: that is enough for us.
There is so little new that one small stone
Casting its ripple on the familiar pool
Is enough to make the body feel less worn.

Time and the Piccadilly pigeons wait
In the roaring of circling traffic, and the dark
Persuades its lovers of its secrets, while

The rulers hold their revels differently,
Plan round their tables blood or tears or toil
To separate each from their disparate heavens,
Girl from strange boy, that strange boy from his girl.

Edwin Muir

READING IN WAR TIME

Boswell by my bed,
Tolstoy on my table:
Though the world has bled
For four and a half years,
And wives' and mothers' tears,
Collected would be able
To water a little field
Untouched by anger and blood,
A penitential yield
Somewhere in the world;
Though in each latitude
Armies like forests fall,
The iniquitous and the good
Head over heels hurled,
And confusion over all:
Boswell's turbulent friend
And his deafening verbal strife,
Ivan Ilych's death
Tell me more about life,
Both being personal,
Than all the carnage can,
Retrieve the shape of man,
Lost and anonymous,
Tell me wherever I look
That not one soul can die
Of this or any clan
Who is not one of us
And has a personal tie
Perhaps to someone now
Searching an ancient book,
Folk-tale or country song
In many and many a tongue,
To find the original face,
The individual soul,

The eye, the lip, the brow
For ever gone from their place,
And gather an image whole.

THE ESCAPE

Escaping from the enemy's hand
Into the enemy's vast domain,
I strove by many a devious path,
Having got in, to get out again.

The endless trap lay everywhere
And all the roads ran in a maze
Hither and thither, like a web
To catch the careless days.

The great farmhouses sunk in time
Rose up out of another land;
Here only the empty harvest-home
Where Caliban waved his wand.

There was no promise in the bud,
No comfort in the blossoming tree,
The yellow waving harvests were
Worse than sterility.

Yet all seemed true. The family group
Still gathered round the vacant hearth,
The old men droned the ancient saws,
And the young mother still gave birth.

But this I saw there: in the church
In rows the stabled horses stood,
And the cottar's threshold stone
Was mired with earth and blood.

And when I reached the line between
The Occupied and Unoccupied,
It was as hard as death to cross,
Yet no change on the other side.

All false, all one: the enemy
These days was scarcely visible;
Only his work was everywhere,
Ill work contrived so well

That he could smile and turn his back,
Let brute indifference overawe
The longing flesh and leaping heart
And grind to dust the ancient law.

A land of bright delusion where
Shape scarce disturbed the emptiness,
Yet troubled the sight which strove to make
Of every shape a shape the less.

There the perpetual question ran,
What is escape? and What is flight?
Liked dialogue in a dismal dream
Where right is wrong and wrong is right.

But at the very frontier line,
Beyond the region of desire,
There runs a wall of towering flame;
The battle is there of blood and fire.

I must pass through that fiery wall,
Emerge into the battle-place,
And there at last lifting my eyes
I'll see the enemy's face.

THE RIDER VICTORY

The rider victory reins his horse
Midway across the empty bridge
As if head-tall he had met a wall.
Yet there was nothing there at all,
No bodiless barrier, ghostly ridge
To check the charger in his course
So suddenly, you'd think he'd fall.

Suspended, steed and rider stare,
Leaping on air and legendary.
In front the waiting kingdom lies,
The bridge and all the roads are free.
But halted in implacable air
Rider and horse with stony eyes
Uprear their motionless statuary.

Frederic Prokosch

FABLE

O the vines were golden, the birds were loud,
The orchard showered, the honey flowed,
The Venice glasses were full of wine,
The women were geese and the men were swine.

And the lamp then flickered over the door,
And the gulls went screaming along the shore,
And the wolf crept down from the milkwhite hill
And the stars lay bright in the frozen well:

O my world, O what have you done to me?
For my love has turned to a laurel tree,
The axe hangs trembling over the Isles,
The Lyre has loosened her flaming miles,

And the door is locked and the key is lost
And the gulls lie stiffening in the frost
And the rippled snow is tracked with blood
And my love lies cold in the burning wood.

THE FESTIVAL

The cello sobs, the symphony begins,
The fever flutters in the violins,
A hundred earrings tremble in the dark,
Sleek in their velvet squat the seven sins:

And sauntering down the river you and I
Discern the baffling planets in the sky,
Through the tall branches watch the tell-tale feet
And hear the voices of the summer sigh.

The castle fades, the distant mountains fade,
The silence falters on the misty glade,

The ducal lantern hovers on the hill,
The cathedral moves into the evening shade.

Softly upon you falls the casual light.
Your hair grows golden and your eyes are bright
And through the warm and lucid Austrian air
In love our arms go wandering tonight.

Far to the east extend the ancient seas,
The dear Danubian banks, the archaic trees
Among whose pillars still the restless dead
Dispel their homesick odors on the breeze;

Crete blows the night across her wicked floors
And Sicily now locks her little doors,
And up the Adriatic leap the clouds
And hurl a shadow on her sucking shores,

And northward through the benches of the park
Stealthily moves the thin conspiring dark;
The thieves and fairies huddle by the bridge
And hear the sickly hounds of Brussels bark.

Each hungry orphan climbs into his bed
Afraid to face the usual midnight dread;
Across the cobbles past the pock-marked church
The hags go hustling with their crusts of bread,

The cripples stumble slowly up the stairs
And toss their curses on the stuffy airs,
The cellar-eyed, the sleepers in the ditches,
Mutter their simple paranoiac prayers.

Listen, the rhythms of the night begin:
The little lamps are flickering in the inn.
Out through the door into the garden glides
The fretful elegance of the mandolin.

The night flies on, the coming tempest flies,
And all our lovely neighbors close their eyes.
Silent the paths of longing and regret
Which all our learning taught us to despise,

And you and I look out upon the stream
And by the lantern's mild and mirrored gleam
The inverted figures on the shore perform
The silly baroque postures of a dream.

O who is there to answer you and me?
The sky, the summer, the prolific sea?
The ground is shaking and we must not wait
Who one more moment feel alone and free

And hear the angels with their wingèd fears
Like serpents hiss their carols in our ears
And rediscover on this festive night
The hatreds of a hundred thousand years.

THE CONSPIRATORS

And if the dead, and the dead
Of spirit now join, and in their horrifying ritual
Proceed till at last with oriental grace
End their concluding dance with the candles guttering,
The cymbals sobbing, the wind harassing the curtains,
The chill from the flood embracing the golden stairway,
The scent devoured and the bowls blown clean of incense:
Ah then, farewell, sweet northern music;
No longer the flight of the mind across the continents,
The dazzling flight of our words across the tempestuous
Black, or the firelit recital of a distant battle.

No. All that we loved is lost, if the intricate
Languor of recollected centuries
Descends in its terrible sweetness on our limbs.
No shot will echo; no fire; no agonizing
Cry will resound in the city's thickets: only,
The ivy falling gently across the bridges,
The larches piercing the roofs, the reclining steeples,
The cellars rich with the agony of the reptiles,
The contemplative worms, the victorious rodents,
And at last, the climax entrancingly serene,

The inconclusive note drowned on the ascendant:
Our lovely shapes in marble still shine through the greenery,
Our exquisite silver bones still glide with the glaciers
That split our familiar hills, still fall with the avalanche,
And weaving their vast wing's thunder over the Indies
The birds, the birds, sob for the time of man.

Herbert Read

TO A CONSCRIPT OF 1940

*Qui n'a pas une fois désespéré de l'honneur,
Ne sera jamais un héros.*

—George Bernanos.

A soldier passed me in the freshly-fallen snow,
His footsteps muffled, his face unearthly grey;
And my heart gave a sudden leap
As I gazed on a ghost of five-and-twenty years ago.

I shouted Halt! and my voice had the old accustomed ring
And he obeyed it as it was obeyed
In the shrouded days when I too was one
Of an army of young men marching

Into the unknown. He turned towards me and I said:
‘I am one of those who went before you
Five-and-twenty years ago: one of the many who never returned,
Of the many who returned and yet were dead.

We went where you are going, into the rain and the mud;
We fought as you will fight
With death and darkness and despair;
We gave what you will give—our brains and our blood.

We think we gave in vain. The world was not renewed.
There was hope in the homestead and anger in the streets
But the old world was restored and we returned
To the dreary field and workshop, and the immemorial feud

Of rich and poor. Our victory was our defeat.
Power was retained where power had been misused
And youth was left to sweep away
The ashes that the fire had strewn beneath our feet.

But one thing we learned: there is no glory in the deed
Until the soldier wears a badge of tarnished braid;
There are heroes who have heard the rally and have seen
The glitter of a garland round their head.

Theirs is the hollow victory. They are deceived.

But you, my brother and my ghost, if you can go
Knowing that there is no reward, no certain use
In all your sacrifice, then honour is reprieved.

To fight without hope is to fight with grace,

The self reconstructed, the false heart repaired.'

Then I turned with a smile, and he answered my salute

As he stood against the fretted hedge, which was like white lace.

*

Anne Ridler

NOW AS THEN

When under Edward or Henry the English armies,
Whose battles are brocade to us and stiff in tapestries,
On a green and curling sea set out for France,
The Holy Ghost moved the sails, the lance
Was hung with glory, and in all sincerity
Poets cried "God will grant to us the victory."
For us, who by proxy inflicted gross oppression,
Among whom the humblest have some sins of omission,
War is not simple; in more or less degree
All are guilty, though some will suffer unjustly.
Can we say Mass to dedicate our bombs?
Yet those earlier English, for all their psalms,
Were marauders, had less provocation than we,
While the causes of war were as mixed and hard to see.
And since of two evils our victory would be the less,
And coming soon leave some strength for peace,
Like Minot and the rest, groping we pray
"Lord turn us again, confer on us victory."

Pour over our floors and frontiers and leave
Pavement and field clean and ceiling clear,
And man, like Noah afloat in his ark
On a single sea, looking for landmark,
His heart's scope not yet shrunken into
Private and poisonous pools of feeling.

Alas! Aeolus will not listen to
Our lot. No upright God angry and stiff
Will suddenly come turning somersaults
Of mercy and cartwheels of leniency
Toward us Noahs. Nor will words rock or wring,
Or invocation sting. At our appeal
No pulse will leap up like a bell-clapper
Proclaiming peace. To us no Nereus will
Rise from the ring of the sea like a rod,
His hair set and salty as dulse, bringing
Succour and promise. So spare your prayers:
There are no interlopers in our fate.
Be sure of this, that in peace or war, we
Are where we are because of what we are:
No censor can excerpt, or scissor-snip
Excise this salient sentence from our lives.
O easy peaceful were those days when
Our hopes bowled on before us like hoops,
And our biddable purposes pedalled
Slowly on rolling gradients of reason
And reform. Fools! in our stinking ditches
War was born, and grew gigantic legs that
Suddenly kicked the ground away like a frog
From under us all. For that is how
The world moves, not with meant and maintained pace
Toward some hill-horizon or held mood,
But in great jags and jerks, probed and prodded
From point on point of anger, exploded
By each new and opposed touch. So War came,
The late and urgent agent of Change, not
Of Chance. So will it always come to wake
The deep sleepers. See how its sudden hands
Now garter and grow round us like quicksands
Here in these islands. O awake! awake!

And let us like the trapped intrepid man
Who on prairie hears the holocaust roar
And sees his horizons running to meet him
In mutinous flames, while the still grasses fill
With rills of refugees, let us calmly
Stand now to windward, and here at our feet
Stooping, light fires of foresight that will clean
And clear the careless ground before us
Of all the dry and tindery increment
Of privilege. So will that other Fate
Arriving find no hold within our state,
And we on our ringed ground its roar will wait
Freely. Awake! before it is too late.

THE AIRMAN

Afterward he may take thought
And praise, who now may not
Move farther than the moment's jot.
Afterward who lives may dare
To stop and spit and backward stare
Up at the proved and friendly air.
But not now, no, not now: who knows
Which moment falls the forward rose?
What hole may open at the feet
Of him who boasts himself complete?
Or whose the mercy, whose the might
Sustains the tight-rope of his flight?
His armour's to be unespied,
Therefore he strips off all his pride,
Assumes the cerements of air
That has no here, and owns no there.
Then should death meet him it will see
Nothing but clear neutrality,
And, gazing still, its eyes will pass
Purely through him as if through glass.
And yet, compulsive and complete,
His fate caves darkly at his feet;

Far in the bottoms of the world
 His path is smoothed, his pit is curled.
 O long the flight but short the spill
 That lands the cock on his dunghill.
 Balanced on searchlight-tip his plane
 May glint like tinsel, fall like rain:
 Wadded in fluffy salvos he
 May see the silent blood flow free:
 And look! out of the blue unrolls
 His vapory bandage, scrolls on scrolls
 Of lightest linen following fast
 As if to fold and overcast.
 Then praise not now his skill or nerve
 Who knows how errors made him swerve
 From his dead reckonings that must
 Have milled and ground him into dust.
 He knows the smooth handrail of flight
 Has stuttering verticals of fright;
 Lives by Death's negligence and not
 By any guards the gods allot.
 To meet with all but go with none
 That is his fate whose single fun
 And only ease is to be found
 Upon the bosom of the round
 And randy air; to it he'll give
 Up everything that he may live.
 Then keep your praise, nor ask him why
 He pierces you with pinsight-eye;
 Nor smile compliantly when he
 Fobs-off applause, for yours may be
 The grin that may precipitate
 The gravelly avalanche of fate.
 Gravely each night he raises hell,
 And he has seen great Gabriel
 Jog God's elbow, bid him look
 Up from His absorbing Book
 To—absentmindedly—admire
 The rhododendron banks of fire
 Flowering from roofs that upward point
 Their pleading hands, all out-of-joint,
 Till God, replete with sacrifice,

Rubs planes like motes out of His eyes.
Afterward he may take thought
And praise, who now may not
Move farther than the moment's jot.
Meanwhile within the mindless deep
Of his humility he'll keep
A waking seed of self that will
One day dance on every hill.
These are dead men; like seed they fly
Silky on every wind, and die
Into their pride that there may grow
More humility below:
Not till that tuberous trumpet breaks the clay
Will they rise up, their resurrection day.

Muriel Rukeyser

LETTER TO THE FRONT

I

Women and poets see the truth arrive.
Then it is acted out,
The lives are lost, and all the newsboys shout.

Horror of cities follows, and the maze
Of compromise and grief.
The feeble cry Defeat be my belief.

Now the strong agonized men
Wear the hard clothes of war,
Try to remember what they are fighting for.

But in dark weeping helpless moments of peace
Women and poets believe and resist forever:
The blind inventor finds the underground river.

II

Even during war, moments of delicate peace
Arrive; ceaseless the water ripples, love
Speaks through the river in its human voices.
Through every power to affirm and heal
The unknown world suggests the air and golden
Familiar flowers, and the brief glitter of waves,
And dreams, and leads me always to the real.
Even among these calendars of fire.

Sings: There is much to fear, but not our power.
The stars turn over us; let us not fear the many.
All mortal intricacies tremble upon this flower.
Let us not fear the hidden. Or each other.
We are alive in an hour whose burning face
Looks into our death, death of our dear wish.
And time that will be eating away our flesh
Gives us this moment when blue settles on rose
And evening suddenly seems limitless silver.
The cold wind streaming over the cold hill-grasses

Remembers and remembers. Mountains lift into night.
And I am remembering the face of peace.

I have seen a ship lying upon the water
Rise like a great bird, like a lifted promise.

III

They called us to a change of heart
But it was not enough.
Not half enough, not half enough
For all their bargaining and their art.

After the change of heart there comes
The savage waste of battlefield;
The flame of that wild battlefield
Rushes in fire through our rooms.

The heart that comes to know its war
When gambling powers try for place
Must live to wrestle for a place
For every burning human care:

To know a war begins the day
Ideas of peace are bargained for.
Surrender and death are bargained for—
Peace and belief must fight their way.

Begin the day we change and so
Open the spirit to the world.
Wars of the spirit in the world
Make us continually know
We fight continually to grow.

IV

Coming to Spain on the first day of the fighting,
Flame in the mountains, and the exotic soldiers,
I gave up ideas of strangeness, but now, keeping
All I profoundly hoped for, I saw fearing
Travellers and the unprepared and the fast-changing
Foothills. The train stopped in a silver country.

Coast-water lit the valleys of this country—
All mysteries stood human in the fighting.

We came from far. We wondered, Were they changing,
Our mild companions, turning into soldiers?
But the cowards were persistent in their fearing,
Each of us narrowed to one wish he was keeping.

There was no change of heart here; we were keeping
Our deepest wish, meeting with hope this country.
The enemies among us went on fearing
The frontier was too far behind. This fighting
Was clear to us all at last. The belted soldiers
Vanished into white hills that dark was changing.

The train stood naked in flowery midnight changing
All complex marvellous hope to war, and keeping
Among us only the main wish, and the soldiers.
We loved each other, believed in the war; this country
Meant to us the arrival of the fighting
At home; we began to know what we were fearing.

As continents broke apart, we saw our fearing
Reflect our nations' fears; we acted as changing
Cities at home would act, with one wish, fighting
This threat or falling under it; we were keeping
The knowledge of fiery promises; this country
Struck at our lives, struck deeper than its soldiers.

Those who among us were sure became our soldiers.
The dreams of peace resolved our subtle fearing.
This was the first day of war in a strange country.
Free Catalonia offered that day our changing
Age's hope and resistance, held in its keeping
The war this age must win in love and fighting.

This first day of fighting showed us all men as soldiers.
It offered one wish for keeping. Hope. Deep fearing.
Our changing spirits awake in the soul's country.

v

Much later, I lie in a white seaport night
Of gongs and mystery and bewildered mist
Giving me a strange harbor in these white
Scenes, white rivers, my white dreams of peace.
And a ship lifted up on a sign of freedom.

Peace sharp and immediate as our winter stars.
A blue sailor with a cargo of guitars.

I saw a white ship rise as peace was made
In Spain, the first peace the world would not keep.
The ship pulled away from the harbor where Columbus
Standing on his black pillar sees new worlds;
And suddenly all the people at all the rails
Lifted their hands in a gesture of belief
That climbs among my dreams like a bird flying.
Until the world is lifted by one bird flying
An instant drawing to itself the world.

VI

Home thoughts from home: we read you every day,
Soldiers of distances. You wish most to be here.
In the strange lands of war, I woke and thought of home.
Remembering how war came, I wake and think of you,
In the city of water and stone where I was born,
My home of complex light. What we were fighting for,
In the beginning, in Spain, was not to be defined.
More human than abstract, more direction than end.
Terror arrived intact, lit with the tragic fire
Of hope before its time, tore us from lover and friend.
We came to the violent act with all that we had learned.

But now we are that home you dream across a war.
You fight; and we must go in poetry and hope
Moving into the future that no one can escape.
Peace will in time arrive, but war defined our years.
We are like that young saint at the spring who bent
Her face over dry earth the vision told her flowed,
Miring herself. She knew it was water. But for
Herself, it was filth. Later, for all to come
Following her faith, miraculous crystal ran.

O saint, O poet, O wounded of these wars
To find life flowing from the heart of man.
We hold belief. You fight and are maimed and mad.
We believe, though all you want to be bed with one
Whose mouth is bread and wine, whose flesh is home.

VII

To be a Jew in the twentieth century
Is to be offered a gift. If you refuse,
Wishing to be invisible, you choose
Death of the spirit, the stone insanity.
Accepting, take full life. Full agonies:
Your evening deep in labyrinthine blood
Of those who resist, fail, and resist; and God
Reduced to a hostage among hostages.

The gift is torment. Not alone the still
Torture, isolation; or torture of the flesh.
That may come also. But the accepting wish,
The whole and fertile spirit as guarantee
For every human freedom, suffering to be free,
Daring to live for the impossible.

VIII

Evening, bringing me out of the government building,
Spills her blue air, her great Atlantic clouds
Over my hair, reminds me of my land.
My back to high stone and that man's golden bands
Who said of our time which has only its freedom,
'I will not ever say 'for a free world',
'A better world' or whatever it is;
A man fights to win a war,
To hang on to what is his—"
Consider this man in the clothes of a commander.
Remember that his field is bottled fizz.

O the blue air and the nightsound of heartbeats—
Planes or poems or dreams direct as prayer.
The belief in the world, and we can stand with them,
Whoever clearly fights the order of despair.
In spite of the fascist, Malicioso King,
Contractor, business man and publisher,
Who will hire a man to hire another man
To hire someone to murder the man of strong belief.
Look at him at the Radio City bar;
Remember that he functions best as thief.

O the clouds and the towers are not enough to hide
The little sneer at freedom, the whisper that art died.
Here is the man who changed his name, the man who dyed his hair;
One praises only his own birth; one only his own whore.
Unable to create or fight or commit suicide,
Will make a job of weakness, be the impotent editor,
The sad and pathetic bull always wishing he were
The bullfighter. But we remember the changes that he made,
Screaming "Betrayed!" He forever betrays. He alone is betrayed.

They are all here in this divided time:

* * * * *

I hold their dead skulls in my hand; this death
Worked against labor, women, Jews,
Reds, Negroes. But our freedom lives
To fight the war the world must win.
The fevers of confusion's touch
Leap to confusion in the land.
We shall grow and fight again.
The sickness of our divided state
Calls to the anger and the great
Imaginative gifts of man.
The enemy does his rigid work.
We live fighting in that dark.
Let all the living fight in proof
They start the world this war must win.

IX

Among all the waste there are the intense stories
And tellers of stories. One saw a peasant die.
One guarded a soldier through disease. And one
Saw all the women look at each other in hope.
And came back, saying, "All things must be known."

They come home to the rat-faced investigator
Who sneers and asks, "Who is your favorite poet?"
Voices of scissors and grinders asking their questions:
"How did you ever happen to be against fascism?"
And they remember the general's white hair,
The food-administrator, alone and full of tears.

They come home to the powder-plant at twilight,
The girls emerging like discolored shadows.
But this is a land where there is time, and time;
This is the country where there is time for thinking.
“Is he a ‘fellow-traveler’?— No. —Are you sure? —No.”
The fear. Voices of clawhammers and spikes clinking.

If they bomb the cities, they must offer the choice.
Taking away the sons, they must create a reason.
The cities and women cry in a frightful voice,
“I care not who makes the laws, let me make the sons.”
But look at their eyes, like drinking animals’
Full of assurance and flowing with reward.
The seeds of answering are in their voice.
The spirit lives, against the time’s disease.
You little children, come down out of your mothers
And tell us about peace.

I hear the singing of the lives of women,
The clear mystery, the offering and pride.
But here also the orange lights of a bar, and an
Old biddy singing inside:

Rain and tomorrow more
They say there will be rain
They lean together and tell
The sorrow of the loin.

Telling each other, saying
“But can you understand?”
They recount separate sorrows.
Throat. Forehead. Hand.

On the bars and walls of buildings
They passed when they were young
They vomit out their pain,
The sorrow of the lung.

Who would suspect it of women?
They have not any rest.
Sad dreams of the belly, of the lip,
Of the deep warm breast.

All sorrows have their place in flesh,
All flesh will with its sorrow die—
All but the patch of sunlight over,
Over the sorrowful sunlit eye.

x

Surely it is time for the true grace of women
Emerging, in their lives' colors, from the rooms, from the harvests,
From the delicate prisons, to speak their promises.
The spirit's dreaming delight and the fluid senses'
Involvement in the world. Surely the day's beginning
In midnight, in time of war, flickers upon the wind.

O on the wasted midnight of our pain
Remember the wasted ones, lost as surely as soldiers
Surrendered to the barbarians, gone down under centuries
Of the starved spirit, in desperate mortal midnight
With the pure throats and cries of blessing, the clearest
Fountains of mercy and continual love.

These years know separation. O the future shining
In far countries or suddenly at home in a look, in a season,
In music freeing a new myth among the male
Steep landscapes, the familiar cliffs, trees, towers
That stand and assert the earth, saying: "Come here, come to me.
Here are your children." Not as traditional man
But love's great insight—"your children and your song."

Coming close to the source of belief, these have created
Resistance, the flowering fire of memory,
Given the bread and the dance and the breathing midnight.
Nothing has been begun. No peace, no word of marvellous
Possible hillsides, the warm lips of the living
Who fought for the spirit's grace among despair,
Beginning with signs of belief, offered in time of war,
As I now send you, for a beginning, praise.

Delmore Schwartz

FOR THE ONE WHO WOULD TAKE MAN'S LIFE IN HIS HANDS

Tiger Christ unsheathed his sword,
Threw it down, became a lamb.
Swift spat upon the species, but
Took two women to his heart.
Samson who was strong as death
Paid his strength to kiss a slut.
Othello that stiff warrior
Was broken by a woman's heart.
Troy burned for a sea-tax, also for
Possession of a charming whore.
What do all examples show?
What must the finished murderer know?

You cannot sit on bayonets,
Nor can you eat among the dead.
When all are killed, you are alone,
A vacuum comes where hate has fed.
Murder's fruit is silent stone,
The gun increases poverty.
With what do these examples shine?
The soldier turned to girls and wine.
Love is the tact of every good,
The only warmth, the only peace.

"What have I said?" asked Socrates,
"Affirmed extremes, cried yes and no,
Taken all parts, denied myself,
Praised the caress, extolled the blow,
Soldier and lover quite deranged
Until their motions are exchanged.
—What do all examples show?
What can any actor know?
The contradiction in every act,
The infinite task of the human heart."

Winfield Townley Scott

ANNUAL LEGEND

A million butterflies rose up from South America,
All together, and flew in a gold storm toward Spain:
Eastward, the annual legend, a shining amber cloud
Driven homeward as it had been and would be again
Since the conquerors searching the harder shining
Brought for the bargain a handful of wings of flame.

Balboa lies dead somewhere and Pizarro's helmet
Is a spider's kingdom; yet here was the arrogant breath
And the dangerous plume burning across the foreign air
That danced like an ancient Andalusian noon:
A blaze, it rose leaving the jungle dark and the leaves
Heavy with silence, and the wheeltracks folding to doom
Where majesty wandered:

A million butterflies,
Wheeling eastward from the soil where the nugget lies lost,
Turned homeward in vast diurnal fire that marched one day
Burning toward Spain; and after that, for a while,
Spread like a field of death, gold on the sea.

THE U.S. SAILOR WITH THE JAPANESE SKULL

Bald-bare, bone-bare, and ivory yellow: skull
Carried by a thus two-headed U.S. sailor
Who got it from a Japanese soldier killed
At Guadalcanal in the ever-present war: our

Bluejacket, I mean, aged 20, in August strolled
Among the little bodies on the sand and hunted
Souvenirs; teeth, tags, diaries, boots; but bolder still
Hacked off this head and under a leopard tree skinned it:

Peeled with a lifting knife the jaw and cheeks, bared
The nose, ripped off the black-haired scalp and gutted
The dead eyes to these thoughtful hollows: a scarred
But bloodless job, unless it be said brains bleed.

Then, his ship underway, dragged this aft in a net
Many days and nights—the cold bone tumbling
Beneath the foaming wake, weed-worn and salt-cut
Rolling safe among fish and washed with Pacific;

Till on a warm and level-keeled day hauled in
Held to the sun and the sailor, back to a gun-rest,
Scrubbed the cured skull with lye, perfecting this;
Not foreign as he saw it first; death's familiar cast.

Bodiless, fleshless, nameless, it and the sun
Offend each other in strange fascination
As though one of the two were mocked; but nothing is in
This head, or it fills with what another imagines

As: here were love and hate and the will to deal
Death or to kneel before it, death emperor,
Recorded orders without reasons, bomb-blast, still
A child's morning, remembered moonlight on Fujiyama:

All scoured out now by the keeper of this skull
Made elemental, historic, parentless by our
Sailor boy who thinks of home, voyages laden, will
Not say, 'Alas! I did not know him at all.'

John Singer

STEPNEY GREEN

Where I was born, near Stepney Green,
They toil all day on a sewing-machine.
Marry on twopence and live on less,
Bring up a family on watercress.
They're mostly ill-starred,
But they die hard.

Where I was born, near Stepney Green,
They make fighting Cockneys out of margarine.
Some get old, and some T.B.
Some get jail and live rent-free.
They're mostly ill-starred,
But they die hard.

Where I was born, near Stepney Green,
Some read Lenin, but none, Racine.
Their learning is little, their culture less,
But Oxford's finding is Mile End's guess.
They're mostly ill-starred,
But they die hard.

Edith Sitwell

LULLABY

Though the world has slipped and gone.
Sounds my loud discordant cry
Like the steel birds' song on high:
"Still one thing is left—the Bone!"
Then out danced the Babioun.

She sat in the hollow of the sea—
A socket whence the eye's put out—
She sang to the child a lullaby
(The steel birds' nest was thereabout).

"Do, do, do, do—
They mother's hied to the vaster race:
The Pterodactyl made its nest
And laid a steel egg in her breast—
Under the Judas-coloured sun.
She'll work no more, no dance, nor moan,
And I am come to take her place
Do, do.

There's nothing left but earth's low bed—
(The Pterodactyl fouls its nest):
But steel wings fan thee to thy rest,
And wingless truth and larvae lie
And eyeless hope and handless fear—
All these for thee as toys are spread,
Do—do—

Red is the bed of Poland, Spain,
And thy mother's breast, who has grown wise
In that fouled nest. If she could rise,
Give birth again,

In wolfish pelt she'd hide thy bones
To shield thee from the world's long cold,
And down on all fours shouldst thou crawl
For thus from no height canst thou fall—
Do, do.

She'd give no hands: there's naught to hold,
And naught to make: there's dust to sift,
But no food for the hands to lift.
Do, do.

Heed my ragged lullaby,
Fear not living, fear not chance;
All is equal—blindness, sight,
There is no depth, there is no height:
Do, do,

The Judas-coloured sun is gone,
And with the Ape thou art alone—
Do,
Do.”

(Note—The phrase “out-dance the Babioun” occurs in an Epigram by Ben Jonson.)

Bernard Spencer

A COLD NIGHT

Thick wool is muslin to-night, and the wire
Wind scorches stone-cold colder. Boys
Tremble at counters of shops. The world
Gets lopped at the radius of my fire.

Only for a moment I think of those
Whom the weather leans on under the sky;
Newsmen with placards by the river's skirt,
Stamping, or with their crouching pose,

The whores; the soldiery who lie
Round wounded Madrid; those of less hurt
Who cross that bridge I crossed to-day
Where the waves snap white as broken plates

And the criss-cross girders hammer a grill
Through which instead of flames, wind hates.

I turn back to my fire. Which I must.
I am not God or a crazed woman.
And one needs time too to sit in peace
Opposite one's girl, with food, fire, light,

And do the work one's own blood heats,
Or talk, and forget about the winter
—This season, this century—and not be always
Opening one's doors on the pitiful streets

Of Europe, not always think of winter, winter, like a hammering
rhyme

For then everything is drowned by the rising wind, everything is
done against Time.

LETTERS

Letters, like blood along a weakening body,
move fainter round our map. On dangerous wings,
on darkness-loving keels they go, so longed for;
but say no memorable things.

The “dear” and “darling” and the “yours for ever”
are relics of a style. But most appear
mere rambling notes: passion and tenderness
fall like a blot or a burst of tears.

Now public truths are scarce as sovereigns,
what measure for the personal truth? How can
this ink and paper coursing continents
utter the clothed or the naked man?

Theodore Spencer

THE INFLATABLE GLOBE

When the allegorical man came calling,
He told us all he would show us a trick,
And he showed us a flat but inflatable ball.
“Look at this ball,” he told us all;
“Look at the lines marked out on this ball.”
We looked at the ball and the lines on the ball:
England was red, and France was blue;
Germany orange and Russia brown:
“Look at this ball,” he told us all,
“With a blow of my breath I inflate this ball.”
He blew, and it bounced, and bouncing, falling,
He bounced it against the wall with a kick.
“But without my breath it will flatten and fall,”
Said the allegorical man; and down
Flat came his hand and squashed the ball,
And it fell on the floor with no life at all
Once his breath had gone out of the ball . . .
It seemed to us all a stupid trick.

Stephen Spender

NOT PALACES

Not palaces, an era's crown
Where the mind dreams, intrigues, rests;
The architectural gold-leaved flower
From people ordered like a single mind,
I build. This only what I tell:
It is too late for rare accumulation,
For family pride, for beauty's filtered dusts;
I say, stamping the words with emphasis,
Drink from here energy and only energy,
As from the electric charge of a battery,
To will this time's change.
Eye, gazelle, delicate wanderer,
Drinker of horizon's fluid line;
Ear that suspends on a chord
The spirit drinking timelessness;
Touch, love—all senses—
Leave your gardens, your singing feasts,
Your dreams of suns circling before our sun,
Of heaven after our world.
Instead, watch images of flashing brass
That strike the outward sense, the polished will,
Flag of our purpose which the wind engraves.
No spirit seek here rest. But this: No man
Shall hunger; Man shall spend equally.
Our goal which we compel: Man shall be man.

The program of the antique Satan
Bristling with guns on the indented page,
With battleship towering from hilly waves:
For what? Drive of a ruining purpose,
Destroying all but its age-long exploiters.
Our program like this, yet opposite:
Death to the killers, bringing light to life.

I THINK CONTINUALLY OF THOSE WHO WERE TRULY GREAT

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious is never to forget
The delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth;
Never to deny its pleasure in the simple morning light,
Nor its grave evening demand for love;
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields
See how these names are fêted by the wavering grass,
And by the streamers of white cloud,
And whispers of wind in the listening sky;
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.
Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

ULTIMA RATIO REGUM

The guns spell money's ultimate reason
In letters of lead on the spring hillside.
But the boy lying dead under the olive trees
Was too young and too silly
To have been notable to their important eye.
He was a better target for a kiss.

When he lived, tall factory hooters never summoned him.
Nor did restaurant plate-glass doors revolve to wave him in.
His name never appeared in the papers.
The world maintained its traditional wall
Round the dead with their gold sunk deep as a well,
Whilst his life, intangible as a Stock Exchange rumour,
drifted outside.

O too lightly he threw down his cap
One day when the breeze threw petals from the trees.
The unflowering wall sprouted with guns,
Machine-gun anger quickly scythed the grasses;
Flags and leaves fell from hands and branches;
The tweed cap rotted in the nettles.

Consider his life which was valueless
In terms of employment, hotel ledgers, news files.
Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man.
Ask. Was so much expenditure justified
On the death of one so young and so silly
Lying under the olive trees, O world, O death?

TO POETS AND AIRMEN

*(Dedicated to Michael Jones in his life,
and now in his memory)*

Thinkers and airmen—all such
Friends and pilots upon the edge
Of the skies of the future—much
You require a bullet's eye of courage
To fly through this age.

The paper brows are winged and helmeted,
The blind ankles bound to a white road,
Which streams into a night of lead
Where cities explode.
Fates unload

Hatred burning, in small parcels,
 Outrage against social lies,
Hearts breaking against stone refusals
 Of men to show small mercies
 To men. Now death replies
Releasing new, familiar devils.

And yet, before you throw away your childhood
 With the lambs pasturing in flaxen hair,
 To plunge into this iron war,
Remember for a flash the wild good
 Drunkenness where
 You abandoned future care.

And then forget. Become what
 Things require. The expletive word.
 The all-night-long screeching metal bird.
And all of time shut down in one shot
 Of night by a gun uttered.

For the joy that was is hidden under grass
 Shadows of hawks flicker over.
Buried in cellars is laughter that once was
 Which the pick and shovel endeavour
 Vainly to uncover;
Like a child buried when the raiders pass.

With axe and shovel men hunt among the bricks,
 With lamps and water, for their soul
Of lilac in the city square; they hack with picks
 Amongst the ruins for their love's goal,
 As though a smile frozen at the North Pole
Might take pity on their tricks.

TWO ARMIES

Deep in the winter plain, two armies
Dig their machinery, to destroy each other.
Men freeze and hunger. No one is given leave
No either side, except the dead, and wounded.

These have their leave; while new battalions wait
On time at last to bring them violent peace.

All have become so nervous and so cold
That each man hates the cause and distant words
Which brought him here, more terribly than bullets.
Once a boy hummed a popular marching song,
Once a novice hand flapped the salute;
The voice was choked, the lifted hand fell,
Shot through the wrist by those of his own side.

From their numb harvest all would flee, except
For discipline drilled once in an iron school
Which holds them at the point of a revolver.
Yet when they sleep, the images of home
Ride wishing horses of escape
Which herd the plain in a mass unspoken poem.

Finally they cease to hate: for although hate
Bursts from the air and whips the earth like hail
Or pours it up in fountains to marvel at,
And although hundreds fall, who can connect
The inexhaustible anger of the guns
With the dumb patience of these tormented animals?

Clean silence drops at night when a little walk
Divides the sleeping armies, each
Huddled in linen woven by remote hands.
When the machines are stilled, a common suffering
Whitens the air with breath and makes both one
As though these enemies slept in each other's arms.

Only the lucid friend to aerial raiders,
The brilliant pilot moon, stares down
Upon the plain she makes a shining bone
Cut by the shadow of many thousand bones.
Where amber clouds scatter on no-man's-land
She regards death and time throw up
The furious words and minerals which kill life.

Wallace Stevens

HOW RED THE ROSE THAT IS THE SOLDIER'S WOUND

(from *Esthétique Du Mal*)

How red the rose that is the soldier's wound,
The wounds of many soldiers, the wounds of all
The soldiers that have fallen, red in blood,
The soldier of time grown deathless in great size.

A mountain in which no ease is ever found,
Unless indifference to deeper death
Is ease, stands in the dark, a shadows' hill,
And there the soldier of time has deathless rest.

Concentric circles of shadows, motionless
Of their own part, yet moving on the wind,
Form mystical convolutions in the sleep
Of time's red soldier deathless on his bed.

The shadows of his fellows ring him round
In the high night, the summer breathes for them
Its fragrance, a heavy somnolence, and for him,
For the soldier of time, it breathes a summer sleep,

In which his wound is good because life was.
No part of him was ever part of death.
A woman smooths her forehead with her hand
And the soldier of time lies calm beneath that stroke.

REPETITIONS OF A YOUNG CAPTAIN

I

A tempest cracked on the theatre. Quickly,
The wind beat in the roof and half the walls.
The ruin stood still in an external world.

It had been real. It was something overseas
That I remembered, something that I remembered
Overseas, that stood in an external world.

It had been real. It was not now. The rip
Of the wind and the glittering were real now,
In the spectacle of a new reality.

II

The people sat in the theatre, in the ruin,
As if nothing had happened. The dim actor spoke.
His hands became his feelings. His thick shape

Issued thin seconds glibly gaping.
Then faintly encrusted, a tissue of the moon
Walked toward him on the stage and they embraced.

They polished the embracings of a pair
Born old, familiar with the depths of the heart,
Like a machine left running, and running down.

It was a blue scene washing white in the rain,
Like something I remembered overseas.
It was something overseas that I remembered.

III

Millions of major men against their like
Make more than thunder's rural rumbling. They make
The giants that each one of them becomes

In a calculated chaos: he that takes form
From the others, being larger than he was,
Accoutred in a little of the strength

That sweats the sun up on its morning way
To giant red, sweats up a giant sense
To the make-matter, matter-nothing mind,

Until this matter-makes in years of war,
This being in a reality beyond
The finikin spectres in the memory,

This elevation, in which he seems to be tall,
Makes him rise above the houses, looking down.
His route lies through an image in his mind:

My route lies through an image in my mind,
It is the route that milky millions find,
An image that leaves nothing much behind.

IV

If these were only words that I am speaking
Indifferent sounds and not the heraldic-ho
Of the clear sovereign that is reality,

Of the clearest reality that is sovereign,
How should I repeat them, keep repeating them,
As if they were desperate with a know-and-know,

Central responses to a central fear,
The abode of the angels? Constantly,
At the railway station, a soldier steps away,

Sees a familiar building drenched in cloud
And goes to an external world, having
Nothing of place. There is no change of place

Nor of time. The departing soldier is as he is,
Yet in that form will not return. But does
He find another? The giant of sense remains

A giant without a body. If, as giant,
He shares a gigantic life, it is because
The gigantic has a reality of its own.

V

On a few words of what is real in the world
I nourish myself. I defend myself against
Whatever remains. Of what is real I say,

Is it the old, the roseate parent or
The bride come jingling, kissed and cupped, or else
The spirit and all ensigns of the self?

A few words, a memorandum voluble
Of the giant sense, the enormous harnesses
And writhing wheels of this world's business,

The drivers in the wind-blows cracking whips,
The pulling into the sky and the setting there
Of the expanses that are mountainous rock and sea;

And beyond the days, beyond the slow-foot litters
Of the nights, the actual, universal strength,
Without a word of rhetoric-there it is.

A memorandum of the people sprung
From that strength, whose armies set their own expanses.
A few words of what is real or may be

Or of glistening reference to what is real,
The universe that supplements the manqué,
The soldier seeking his point between the two,

The organic consolation, the complete
Society of the spirit when it is
Alone, the half-arc hanging in mid-air

Composed, appropriate to the incomplete,
Supported by a half-arc in mid-earth.
Millions of instances of which I am one.

VI

And if it be theatre for theatre,
The powdered personals against the giants' rage,
Blue and its deep inversions in the moon

Against gold whipped reddened in big-shadowed black,
Her vague "Secrete me from reality",
His "That reality secrete itself",

The choice is made. Green is the orator
Of our passionate height. He wears a tufted green,
And tosses green for those for whom green speaks.

Secrete us in reality. It is there
My orator. Let this giantness fall down
And come to nothing. Let the rainy arcs

And pathetic magnificences dry in the sky.
Secrete us in reality. Discover
A civil nakedness in which to be,

In which to bear with the exactest force
The precisions of fate, nothing fobbed off, nor changed
In a beau language without a drop of blood.

Allen Tate

ODE

To Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air

Once more the country calls
From sleep, as from his doom,
 Each citizen to take
 His modest stake
Where the sky falls
With a Pacific boom.

Warm winds in even climes
Push southward angry bees
 As we, with tank and plane,
 Wrest land and main
From yellow mimes,
The puny Japanese.

Boys hide in lunging cubes
Crouching to explode,
 Beyond Atlantic skies,
 With cheerful cries
Their barking tubes
Upon the German toad.

Marvelling day by day
Upon the human kind,
 What might I have done
 (A poet alone)
To balk or slay
These enemies of mind?

I sought by night to foal
Chimeras into men—
 Decadence of power
 That, at late hour,
Untimed the soul
To live the past again:

Toy sword, three-cornered hat
At York and Lexington—
 While *Bon-Homme* whipped at sea
 This enemy
Whose roar went flat
After George made him run;

Toy rifle, leather hat
Above the boyish beard—
 And in that Blue renown
 The Gray went down,
Down like a rat,
And even the rats cheered.

In a much later age
(Europe had been in flames)
 Proud Wilson yielded ground
 To franc and pound,
Made pilgrimage
In the wake of Henry James.

Where Lou Quatorze held *fête*
For sixty thousand men,
 France took the German sword
 But later, bored,
Opened the gate
To Hitler—at Compiègne.

In this bad time no part
The poet took, nor chance:
 He studied Swift and Donne,
 Ignored the Hun,
While with faint heart
Proust caused the fall of France.

Sad day at Oahu
When the Jap beetle hit!
 Our Proustian retort
 Was Kimmel and Short,
Old women in blue;
And then the beetle bit.

It was defeat, or near it!
Yet all that feeble time
 Brave Brooks and lithe MacLeish
 Had sworn to thresh
Our flagging spirit
With literature made Prime!

Cow Creek and Bright Bear Wallow,
Nursing the *blague* that dulls
 Spirits grown Eliotic,
 Now patriotic
Are: we follow
The Irresponsibles!

Young men, Americans!
You go to win the world
 With zeal pro-consular
 For our whole star—
You partisans
Of Liberty unfurled!

O animal excellence,
Take pterodactyl flight
 Fire-winged into the air
 And find your lair
With cunning sense
On some Arabian bight

Or sleep your dreamless sleep
(Reptilian bomber!) by
 The Mediterranean
 And like a man
Swear you to keep
Faith with imperial eye:

Take off, O gentle youth,
And coasting India
 Scale crusty Everest
 Whose mythic crest
Resists your truth;
And spying far away

Upon the Tibetan plain
A limping caravan,
Dive, and exterminate
The Lama, late
Survival of old pain.
Go kill the dying swan!

JUBILO

*Hit mus' be now de Kingdom comin'
And de year of Jubilo!*

Tailspinning from the shelves of sky
See how it dips and tacks and tosses
To cast a beam in the mind's eye:
Who will count the gains and losses
On the day of Jubilo

Public accountant with double entry
Enter in red war's final cast
In the black column the pacing sentry,
Old women picking the hogs' mast
For the Day of Jubilo

Lean to the crowded air and hear,
Eavesdropper, how it goes inside
Your own deaf and roaring ear:
Boys caress the machines they ride
On the day of Jubilo

After the dry and sticking tongue
After our incivility:
Who will inflate the poet's lung
Gone flat of this indignity
Till the Day of Jubilo

Scholar, no dog will have your day
For all your capital's run out,
Wry baby in wet disarray—

Scholar, prepare your meagre clout
For the Day of Jubilo

Under the slip and slide of day
Think, at the end you'll never be
Trapped in a fox-hole of decay
Nor snip nor glide of history
After the Day of Jubilo

All our jubilant eyes are raised,
Jubilo. Over the barbican
On the great Day pure and dazed,
Empty of heart the empty man
Of the Day of Jubilo

Then for the Day of Jubilo
The patient bares his arm at dawn
To suck the blood's transfusing glow
And then when all the blood is gone
(For the Day of Jubilo)

Salt serum stays his arteries
Sly tide threading the ribs of sand,
Till his lost being dries, and cries
For that unspeakable salt land
Beyond the Day of Jubilo

MORE SONNETS AT CHRISTMAS

I

Again the native hour lets down the locks
Uncombed and black, but gray the bobbing beard;
Ten years ago His eyes, fierce shuttlecocks,
Pierced the close net of what I failed: I feared
The belly-cold, the grave-clout, that betrayed
Me slithering in the rift of cordial seas;
Ten years is time enough to be dismayed
By mummy Christ, head crammed between his knees.

Suppose I take an arrogant bomber, stroke
By stroke, up to the frazzled sun to hear
Sun-ghostlings whisper: Yes, the capital yoke—
Remove it and there's not a ghost to fear
This crucial day, whose decapitate joke
Languidly winds into the inner ear.

II

The day's at end and there's nowhere to go,
Draw to the fire, even this fire is dying;
Get up and once again politely lying
Invite the ladies toward the mistletoe
With greedy eyes that stare like an old crow.
How pleasantly the holly wreaths did hang
And how stuffed Santa did his reindeer clang
Above the golden oaken mantel, years ago!

Then hang this picture for a calendar,
As sheep for goat, and pray most fixedly
For the cold martial progress of your star,
With thoughts of commerce and society,
Well-milked Chinese, Negroes who cannot sing,
The Huns gelded and feeding in a ring.

III

Give me this day a faith not personal
As follows: The American people fully armed
With assurance policies, righteous and harmed,
Battle the world of which they're not at all.
That lying boy of ten who stood in the hall,
His hat in hand (thus by his father charmed:
"You may be President"), was not alarmed
Nor even left uneasy by his fall.

Nobody said that he could be a plumber,
Carpenter, clerk, bus-driver, bombardier;
Let little boys go into violent slumber,
Aegean squall and squalor where their fear
Is of an enemy in remote oceans
Unstalked by Christ: these are the better notions.

IV

Citizen, myself, or personal friend,
Your ghosts are Plato's Christians in the cave.
Unfix your necks, turn to the door; the nave
Gives back the cheated and light dividend
So long sequestered; now, new-rich, you'll spend
Flesh for reality inside a stone
Whose light obstruction, like a gossamer bone,
Dead or still living, will not break or bend.

Thus light, your flesh made pale and sinister
And put off like a dog that's had his day,
You will be Plato's kept philosopher,
Albino man bleached from the mortal clay,
Mild-mannered, gifted in your masters' ease
While the sun squats upon the waveless seas.

Dylan Thomas

THE HAND THAT SIGNED THE PAPER FELLED A CITY

The hand that signed the paper felled a city;
Five sovereign fingers taxed the breath,
Doubled the globe of dead and halved a country;
These five kings did a king to death.

The mighty hand leads to a sloping shoulder,
The finger joints are cramped with chalk;
A goose's quill has put an end to murder
That put an end to talk.

The hand that signed the treaty bred a fever,
And famine grew, and locusts came;
Great is the hand that holds dominion over
Man by a scribbled name.

The five kings count the dead but do not soften
The crusted wound nor pat the brow;
A hand rules pity as a hand rules heaven;
Hands have no tears to flow.

HOLY SPRING

O
Out of a bed of love
When that immortal hospital made one more move to soothe
The cureless counted body,
And ruin and his causes
Over the barbed and shooting sea assumed an army
And swept into our wounds and houses,
I climb to greet the war in which I have no heart but only
That one dark I owe my light,
Call for confessor and wiser mirror but there are none
To glow after the god stoning night
And I am struck as lonely as a holy maker by the sun.

No

Praise that the spring time is all
Gabriel and radiant shrubbery as the morning grows joyful
Out of the woebegone pyre
And the multitude's sultry tear turns cool on the weeping wall,
My arising prodigal
Sun the father his quiver full of the infants of pure fire,
But blessed be hail and upheaval
That uncalm still it is sure alone to stand and sing
Alone in the husk of man's home
And the mother and toppling house of the holy spring,
If only for a last time.

CEREMONY AFTER A FIRE RAID

- I Myselfes
The grievers
Grieve
Among the street burned to tireless death
A child of a few hours
With its kneading mouth
Charred on the black breast of the grave
The mother dug, and its arms full of fires.

Begin
With singing
Sing
Darkness kindled back into beginning
When the caught tongue nodded blind,
A star was broken
Into the centuries of the child
Myselfes grieve new, and miracles cannot atone.

Forgive
Us forgive
Us your death that myselfes the believers
May hold it in a great flood
Till the blood shall spurt,
And the dust shall sing like a bird
As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart.

Crying
Your dying
Cry,
Child beyond cockcrow, by the fire-dwarfed
Street we chant the flying sea
In the body bereft.
Love is the last light spoken. Oh
Seed of sons in the loin of the black husk left.

- II I know not whether
Adam or Eve, the adorned holy bullock
Or the white ewe lamb
Or the chosen virgin
Laid in her snow
On the altar of London,
Was the first to die
In the cinder of the little skull,
O bride and bride groom
O Adam and Eve together
Lying in the lull
Under the sad breast of the head stone
White as the skeleton
Of the garden of Eden.
I know the legend
Of Adam and Eve is never for a second
Silent in my service
Over the dead infants
Over the one
Child who was priest and servants,
Word, singers, and tongue
In the cinder of the little skull,
Who was the serpent's
Night fall and the fruit like a sun
Man and woman undone,
Beginning crumbled back to darkness
Bare as the nurseries
Of the garden of wilderness.
- III Into the organpipes and steeples
Of the luminous cathedrals,
Into the weathercocks' molten mouths
Rippling in twelve-winded circles,
Into the dead clock burning the hour

Over the urn of sabbaths
Over the whirling ditch of daybreak
Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire
And the golden pavements laid in requiems,
Into the bread in a wheatfield of flames,
Into the wine burning like brandy,
The masses of the sea
The masses of the sea under
The masses of the infant-bearing sea
Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever
Glory glory glory
The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

A REFUSAL TO MOURN THE DEATH, BY FIRE, OF A CHILD IN LONDON

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness
And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn
The majesty and burning of the child's death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth.
Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.

Mark Van Doren

THAT DAY

Even if wars to come sleep warm and small,
Deep seeds in action's body not yet born;
Even if horror then, sometimes the now
Looks fearfuller; is absolute forlorn;
In its own form seems final. Whence we say,
Sometimes, there is no day beyond that day,

That day of bells, of prodigal high sirens
Howling, when the harbor whistles burst
And dancers on the street take off their heads.
For the last idiot singer shall be first
On such a morning, leveller of men
With girls, and with a boy come home again.

Sometimes. And yet the germs, the little ghosts,
Still haunt us in their unmade mothers' blood.
And if we think, they grow; as time itself
Ticks in the dark, and horror in the bud
Stands giant high, a forest doomed to fall
On that day's children, armistice and all.

OUR LADY PEACE

How far is it to peace, the piper sighed,
The solitary, sweating as he paused.
Asphalt the noon; the ravens, terrified,
Fled carrion thunder that percussion caused.

The envelope of earth was powder loud;
The taut wings shivered, driven at the sun.
The piper put his pipe away and bowed.
Not here, he said. I hunt the love-cool one,

The dancer with the clipped hair. Where is she?
We shook our heads, parting for him to pass.
Our lady was of no such trim degree,
And none of us had seen her face, alas.

She was the very ridges we must scale,
Securing the rough top. And how she smiled
Was how our strength would issue. Not to fail
Was having her, gigantic, undefiled,

For homely goddess, big as the world that burned,
Grandmother and taskmistress, field and town.
We let the stranger go; but when we turned
Our lady lived, fierce in each other's frown.

APRIL, 1942

How terrible their trust, the little leaves,
The odorless, uncurling into love,
The warm day round them, careless if they curl.
It is not there for them; the great clock swings
Regardless, and the circle kissing sun
Sucks its own pleasure, ruthless, noons away.

Yet now they thrust their spirals into air
As into lacy morning, into April's
Charity that hath no aftercold,
No cunning to deceive. So thin the gift,
So thoughtless. What caresses is the same
As leads me forth this fiftieth light spring,

This never to be doubted, this wide open
Wanness like a waking out of sleep:
Pure sleep, on nothing solid; for the beams
Are houseless, and the heaven I arise in
Had no hands to build it; not an angle
Shows, or mark of pressure; nothing nailed.

The leaves and I put forth a fiftieth life,
Blinking with infant pleasure at old winds

That weaken to our play; at piles of sun
That topple on us, downy; at no danger
Anywhere, except that bliss can die
From innocence too absolute for fear.

So ours will end; the tips that reach and trust,
My half shut eyes in lazy April, May,
Face a far cold; the other side of time
Wrinkles, and black edges form like frost
On the known circle, turning; soon and sure
Some month will shape its mockery; then fall.

Yet that's not it. That is not why my spring
Is nipped already, even as I smile.
For them the natural death, set slow in change;
Mine murdered in the morning: a heart stopped
Even before it capers. I remember
No such May as this that men prepare.

It is the month of powder. Rage's blueprint
Mocks the soft green and scaffolds the free sky.
The dome is ribbed with rumors: a tall skeleton
Rears, insulting vacancy. Offensives
Rafters our thought, that misses one more childhood.
The pastures are all closed, and noon comes down.

To wish a May December, and war done,
With victory, and buds another year,
Is nevertheless to batten hungry Death,
Who more than flesh devours. He feeds on thinnest
Things: on freedom's fragrance over a wall;
And takes this bitterest bite out of our time.

Arthur Waley

CENSORSHIP

A poem in the Chinese style

To Hsiao Ch'ien

I have been a censor for fifteen months;
The building where I work has four times been bombed.
Glass, boards and paper, each in turn,
Have been blasted from the windows—where windows are left at all.
It is not easy to wash, keep warm and eat;
At times we lack gas, water or light.
The rules for censors are difficult to keep;
In six months there were over a thousand 'stops'.
The Air Raid Bible alters from day to day;
Official orders are not clearly expressed.
One may mention Harrods, but not Derry and Toms;
One may write of mist, but may not write of rain.
Japanese, scribbled on thin paper
In faint scrawl tires the eyes to read.
In a small room with ten telephones
And a tape-machine concentration is hard.
Yet the Blue Pencil is a mere toy to wield,
There are worse knots than the tangles of Red Tape.
It is not difficult to censor foreign news,
What is hard to-day is to censor one's own thoughts,—
To sit by and see the blind man
On the sightless horse, riding into the bottomless abyss.

Robert Penn Warren

TERROR

"I Volontari Americani Presso Eserciti Stranieri Non Perdono La Cittadinanza."—Il Messaggero, Roma, Sabato, 27 Gennaio, 1940.

Not picnics or pageants or the improbable
Powers of air whose tongues exclaim dominion
And gull the great man to follow his terrible
Star, suffice; not the window-box, or the bird on
The ledge, which mean so much to the invalid,
Nor the joy you leaned after, as by the tracks the grass
In the emptiness after the lighted Pullmans fled,
Suffices; nor faces, which, like distraction, pass
Under the street-lamps, teasing to faith or pleasure,
Suffice you, born to no adequate definition of terror.

For yours, like a puppy, is darling and inept,
Though his cold nose brush your hand while you laugh at his
clowning;
Or the kitten you sleep with, though once or twice while you slept
It tried to suck your breath, and you dreamed of drowning,
Perjured like Clarence, sluiced from the perilous hatches,
But never of lunar wolf-waste or the arboreal
Malignancy, with the privy breath, which watches
And humps in the dark; but only a dream, after all.
At the worst, you think, with a little twinge of distress,
That contagion may nook in the comforting fur you love to caress.

Though some, unsatisfied and sick, have sought
That immitigable face, whose smile is ice,
And fired their hearts like pitch-pine, for they thought
Rather flame than the damp worm-tooth of compromise:
So Harry L. I knew, whose whores and gin
Had dwindled to a sick smile in the drug store
But for the absurd contraption of a plane,
Which flung on air the unformulable endeavor
While heart bled speed to lave the applauded name.
The crash was in an old cornfield; not even flame.

So some, whose passionate emptiness and tidal
Lust swayed toward the debris of Madrid,
And left New York to loll in their fierce idyll
Among the olives, where the snipers hid;
And now the North, to seek that visioned face
And polarize their iron of despair,
Who praise no beauty like the boreal grace
Which greens the dead eye under the rocket's flare.
They fight old friends, for their obsession knows
Only the immaculate itch, not human friends or foes.

They sought a secret which fat Franco's Moor,
Hieratic, white-robed, pitiless, might teach,
Who duped and dying but for pride, therefore
Hugged truth which cause or conscience scarcely reach.
As Jacob all night with the angelic foe,
They wrestled him who did not speak, but died,
And wrestle now, by frozen fen and floe,
New Courier, in fury sanctified;
And seek that face which, greasy, frost-breathed, in furs,
Bends to the bomb-sight over bitter Helsingfors.

Blood splashed on the terrorless intellect creates
Corrosive fizzle like the spattered lime,
And its enseamed stew but satiates
Itself, in that lewd and faceless pantomime.
You know, by radio, how hotly the world repeats,
When the brute crowd roars or the blunt boot-heels resound
In the Piazza or the Wilhelmsplatz,
The crime of Onan, spilled upon the ground;
You know, whose dear hope Alexis Carrel kept
Alive in a test tube, where it monstrously grew, and slept.

But it is dead, and you now, guiltless, sink
To rest in lobbies, or pace gardens where
The slow god crumbles and the fountains prink,
Nor heed the criminal king, who paints the air
With discoursed madness and protruding eye,
Nor give the alarm, nor ask tonight where sleeps
That head which hooped the jewel Fidelity,
But like an old melon now, in the dank ditch, seeps;
But you crack nuts, while the conscience-stricken stare
Kisses the terror; for you see an empty chair.

Yvor Winters

TO A MILITARY RIFLE, 1942

The times come round again;
The private life is small;
And individual men
Are counted not at all.
Now life is general,
And the bewildered Muse,
Thinking what she has done,
Confronts the daily news.

Blunt emblem, you have won:
With carven stock unbroke,
With core of steel, with crash
Of mass, and fading smoke;
Your fire leaves little ash;
Your balance on the arm
Points whither you intend;
Your bolt is smooth with charm.
When other concepts end,
This concept, hard and pure,
Shapes every mind therefor.
The time is yours, be sure,
Old Hammerheel of War.

I cannot write your praise
When young men go to die;
Nor yet regret the ways
That ended with this hour.
The hour has come. And I,
Who alter nothing, pray
That men, surviving you,
May learn to do and say
The difficult and true,
True shape of death and power.

Oscar Williams

THE MAN IN THAT AIRPLANE

The man in that airplane once lay in the womb
He flies like a lark in a place full of room
In the clouds to get a good look at his tomb

The man in that airplane once clung to the dark
But his shadow is strewn over meadow and park
Where God airs the light the man seeks his mark

The man in that airplane once curled in his mother
Where he couldn't move to get at his brother
Now he flies straight in the face of his Father

IN POSTURES THAT CALL

The soldiers suddenly struck by love
Embrace the earth unwieldy woman
All their blood is not enough
They must give up being human

The man within a bed of flowers
Suddenly puts his face to the earth
The ardor of the kiss of horrors
Drains him all the way to his birth

The toy lovers have become dolls
Mud bodies in muddied rag clothes
A soldier doll in real grass falls
And stretches his legs in repose

Why does the man idle in the midst
Of the fiery battle as the guns roar
Postwar problems like tornadoes twist
The man gives up in the middle of a war

The signal given by a gun that quakes
He surrenders his blood on the spot
He has lost all sense of value and takes
His body's weight in mud

I saw a soldier in a public print
He was leaning against a wooden gate
His blond hair an untimely grey tint
He was resting from working for the state

How human they are after death
The children of compassion's age
Born before their time for breath
They cannot live in the rarefied carnage

They get so tired they sit or lie
In postures that call for the heart's deep love
They are so alive when they die
They do not give up their will to live

A poet soldier has elsewhere said
They die in pain but not in vain
In vain and forever are the dead dead
Alas death always is in vain

Perhaps there are others fitter
Than I am to speak of pain
But that world can only be better
That knows they have died in vain.

ON THE COUCH

In a shack in the summer woods, 1942

To see my coat hanging there limp as a scarecrow's
On the back of the chair in the corner of the room,
Its agonized inertness eloquent of past motion,
Its very shapelessness a fugitive of the body's form—

To see me stretched out like a road from my chin
In the exhausting lifetime journey from here to there,

To see the trees looking in at the windows as I measure
The distance from the thought to the step in the air,

No one would know that events like a storm are raging,
A cloudburst of jungles, and snarl up the inner eye,
That man is a hunted animal caught in his own barrage,
In the plague of grasshopper gadgets out of the blue sky.

For the trees race backward fast on my right and left,
As my profile lunges forward, my fate is out gunning,
The black branches of leaves rush over my shoulders
Crashing, as I lie here, stretched out, running running.

ONE MORNING THE WORLD WOKE UP

One morning the world woke up and there was no news;
No gun was shelling the great ear drum of the air,
No Christian flesh spurted beneath the subtle screws,
No moaning came from the many agony-faced Jews,
Only the trees in a gauze of wind trembled and were fair.

No trucks climbed into the groove of an endless road,
No tanks were swaying drunken with death at the hilltop,
No bombs were planting their bushes of blood and mud,
And the aimless tides of unfortunates no longer flowed:
A break in the action at last . . . all had come to a stop.

Those trees danced, in their delicate selves half furled
And a new time on the glittering atmosphere was seen;
The lightning stuttering on the closed eyelid of the world
Was gone, and an age of horizons had dawned, soft, pearled,
The world woke up to a scene like spring's first green.

Birds chirped in waterfalls of little sounds for hours,
Rainbows, in miniature nuggets, were stored in the dews,
The sky was one vast moonstone of the tenderest blues,
And the meadows lay carpeted in three heights of flowers:
One morning the world woke up and there was no news.

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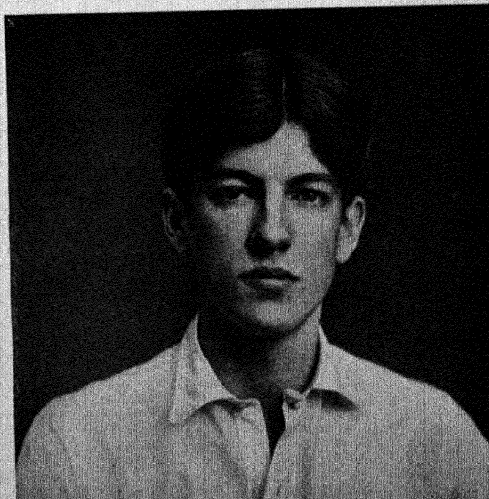
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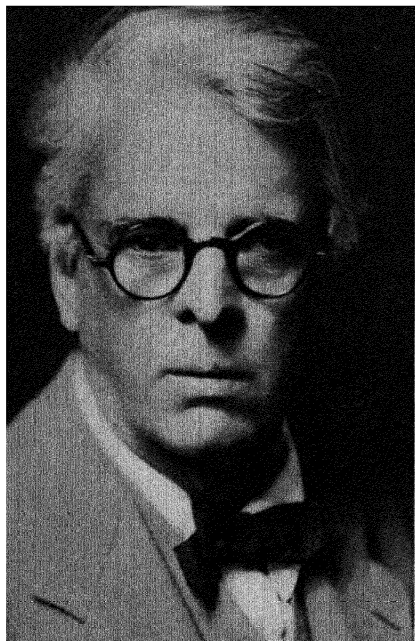
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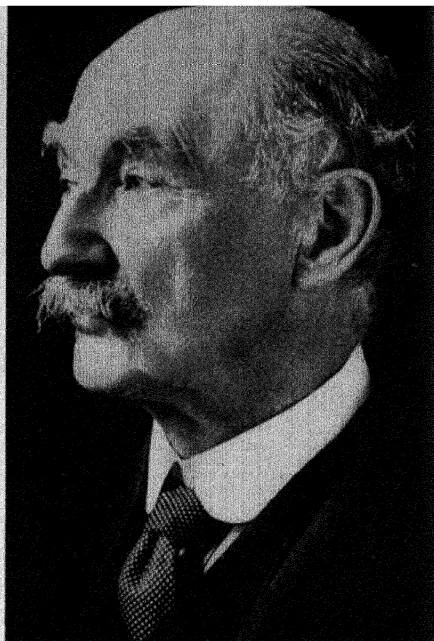
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ALAN SEEGER

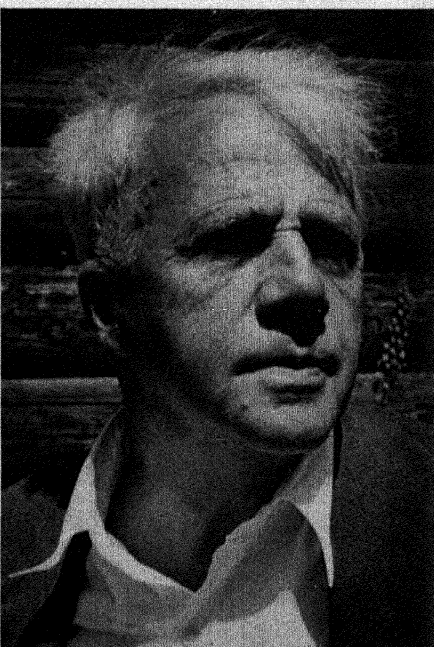
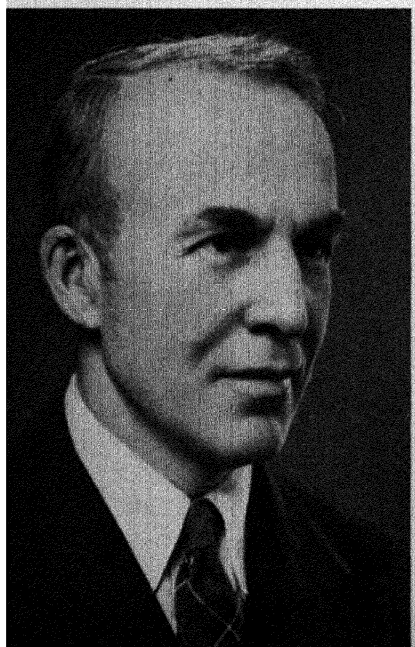




W. B. YEATS
ARCHIBALD MacLEISH



THOMAS HARDY
ROBERT FROST

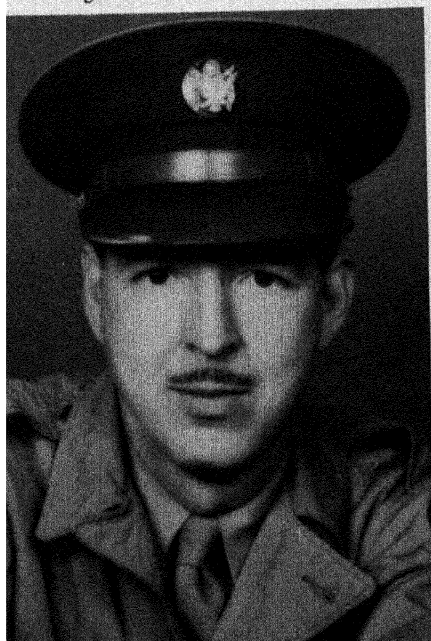


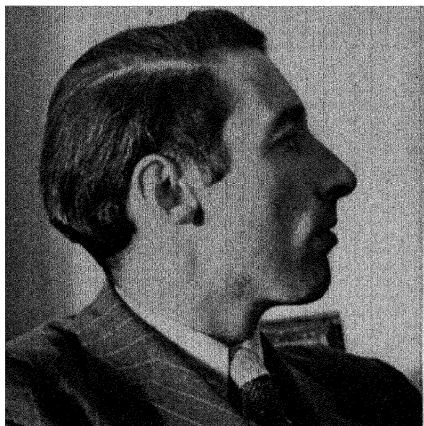


Cpl. DUNSTAN THOMPSON
Sergeant RANDALL JARRELL



Capt. H. B. MALLALIEU
Major PAUL DEHN



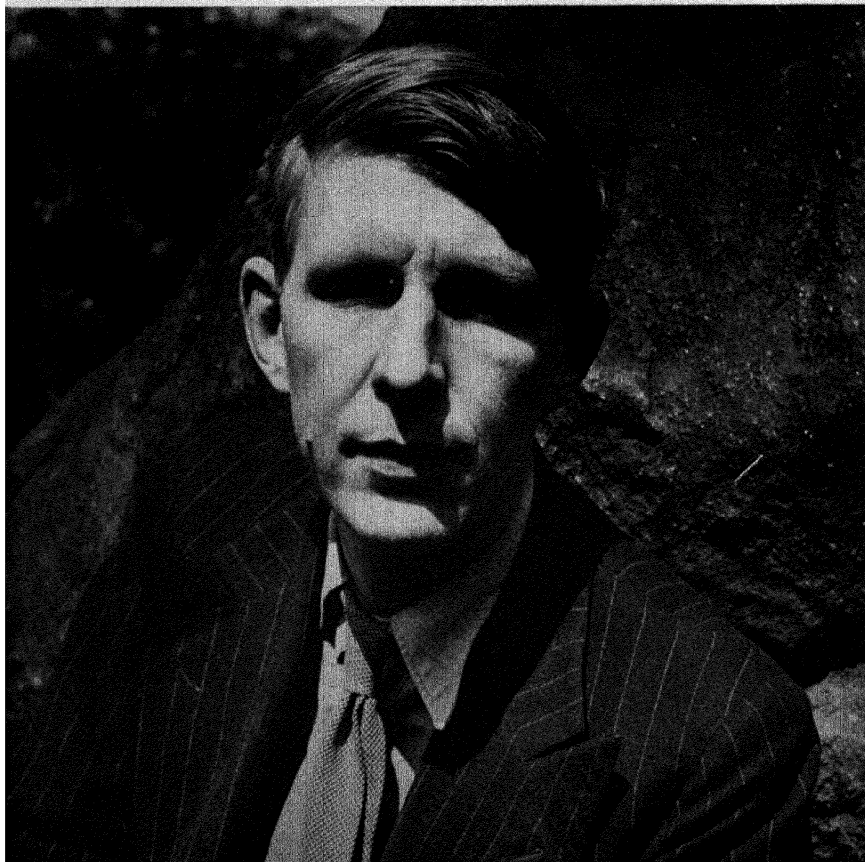


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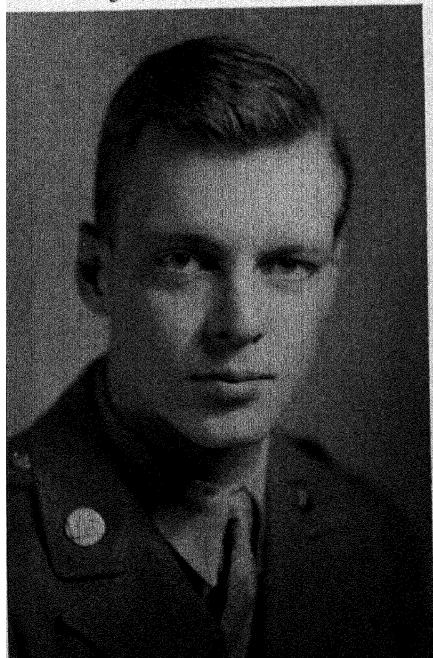


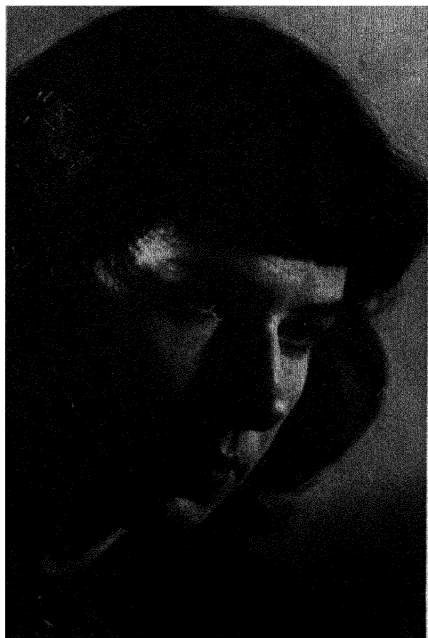


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S/Sgt. JOHN THOMPSON



Capt. JOHN MANIFOLD
Lieut. SIDNEY KEYES

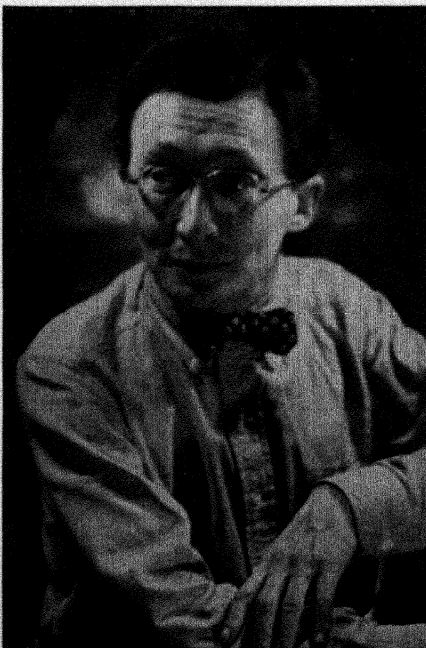
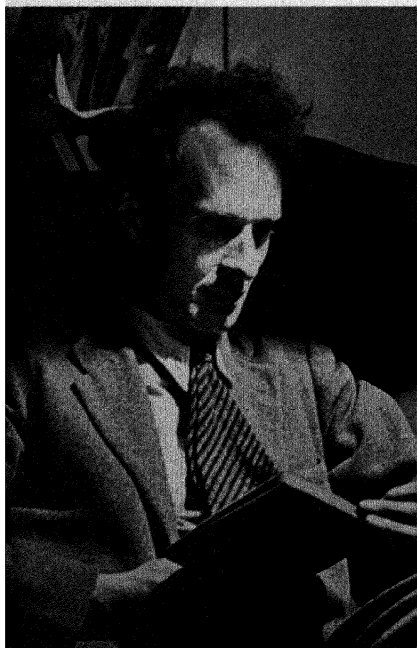


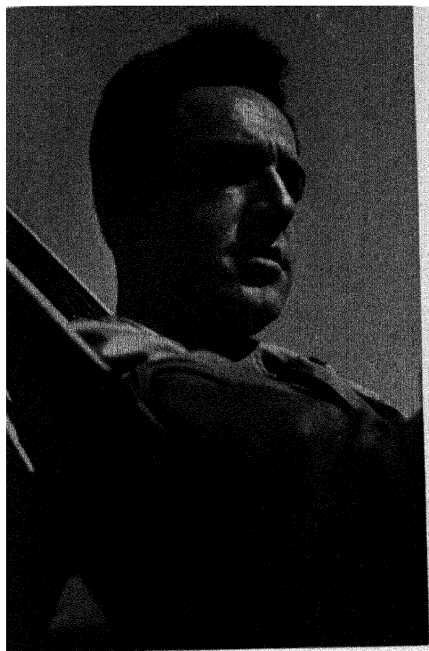


GENE DERWOOD
STEPHEN SPENDER



GEORGE BARKER
OSCAR WILLIAMS





Cpl. KARL SHAPIRO

Ft. Lt. HENRY TREECE



M/Sgt. SELDEN RODMAN

S./L. JOHN PUDNEY

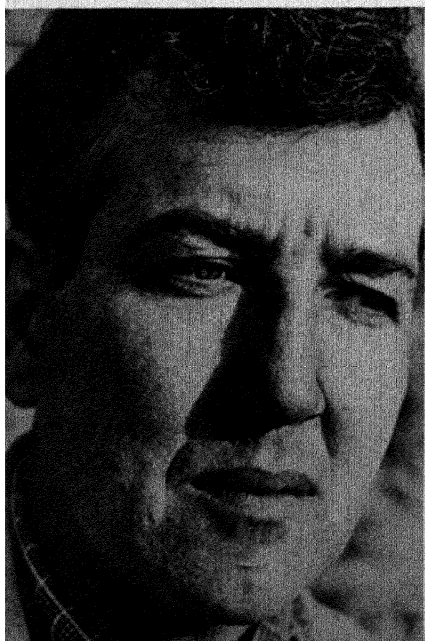


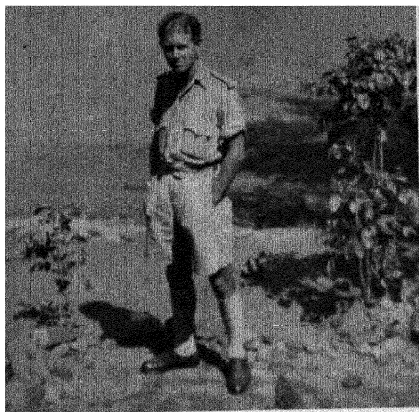


E. E. CUMMINGS
ROBERT GRAVES



JOHN PEALE BISHOP
MARK VAN DOREN

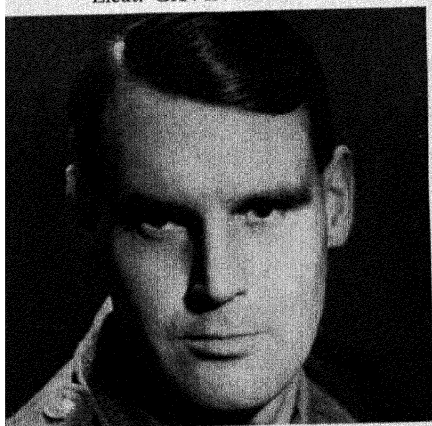




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Lieut. GAVIN EWART



Lt. Comdr. RICHARD EBERHART
Capt. DONALD STAUFFER



Lieut. WALTER BENTON



Cpl. DICK ROBERTS





DELMORE SCHWARTZ



DYLAN THOMAS

MARIANNE MOORE

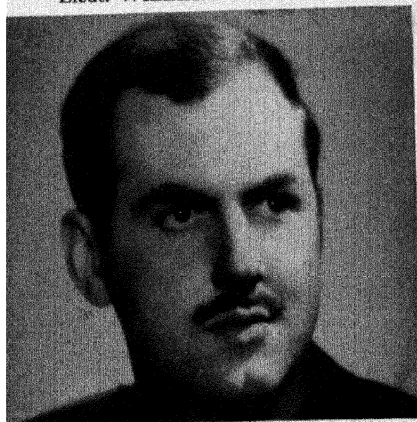




Lieut. HUBERT CREEKMORE
Lieut. WILLIAM MEREDITH



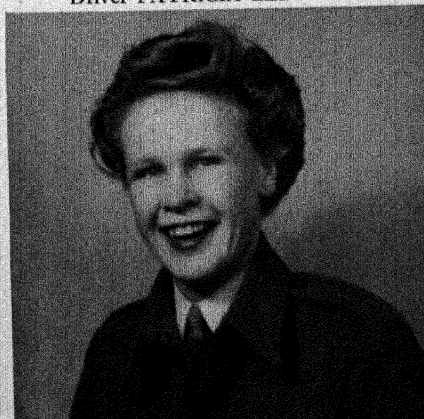
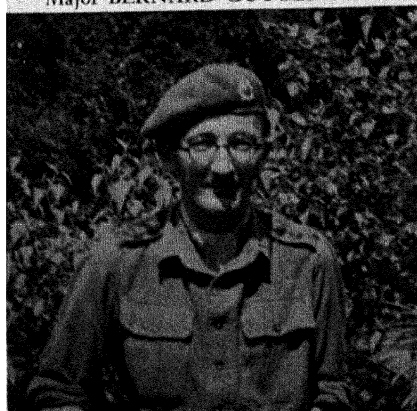
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Lieut. STEPHEN STEPANCHEV



Major BERNARD GUTTERIDGE



Driver PATRICIA LEDWARD





ALLEN TATE



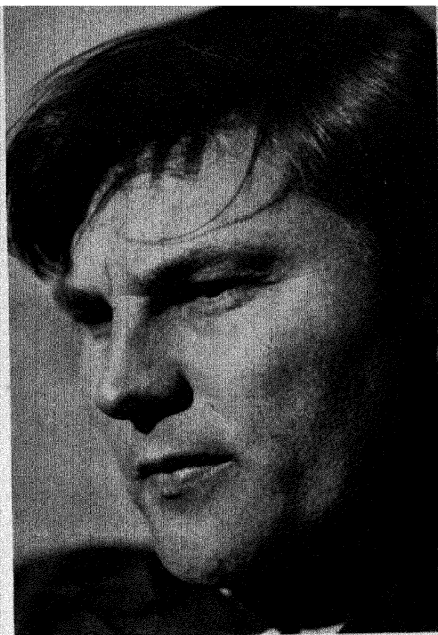
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MURIEL RUKEYSER





Sgt. STANLEY KUNITZ

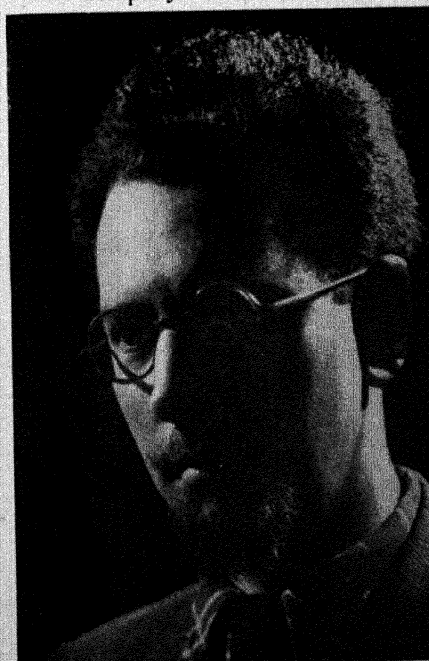


Pvt. WILLARD MAAS



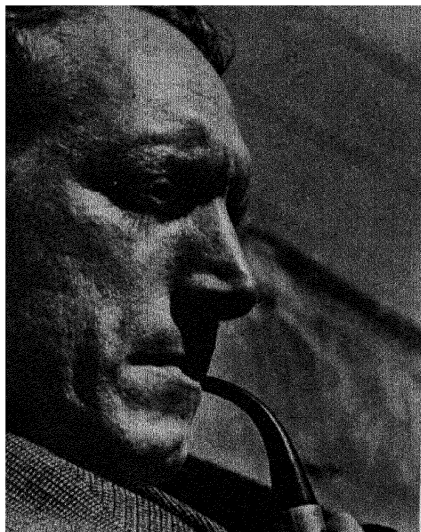
Capt. JAMES FORSYTH

Gunner KEIDRYCH RHYS



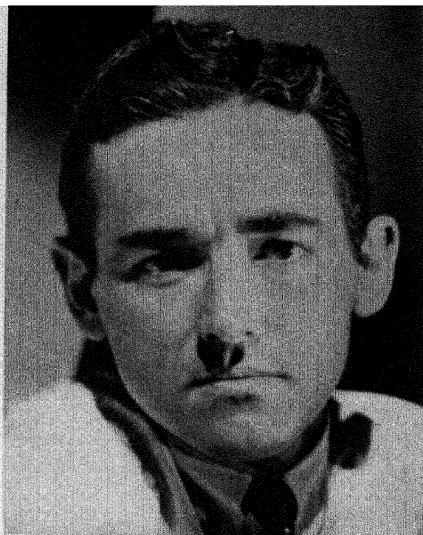
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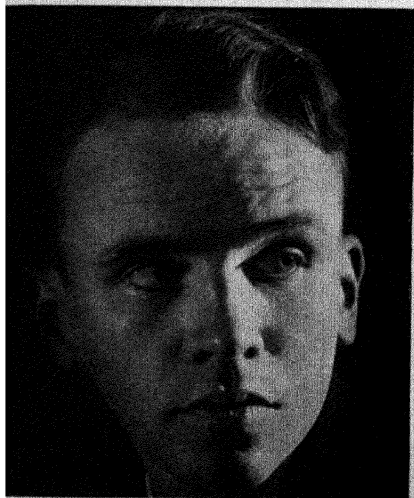
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WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT



JAMES LAUGHLIN

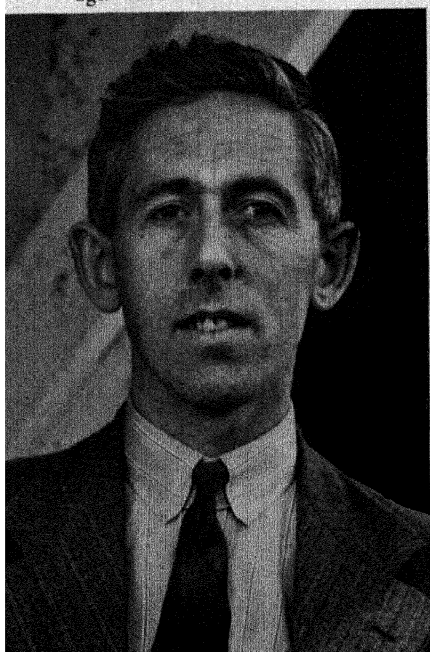


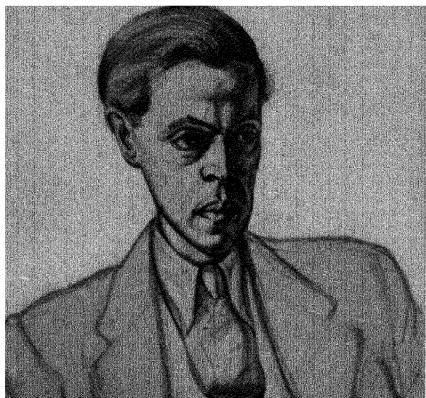


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Sgt. VERNON WATKINS

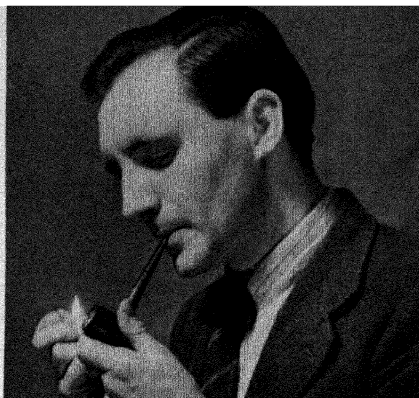


Lt. WILLIAM JAY SMITH
Sgt. WILLIAM ABRAHAMS





W. R. RODGERS



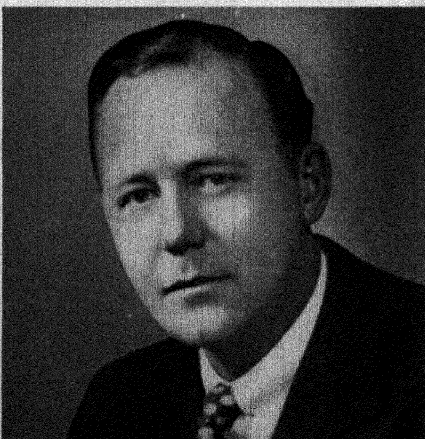
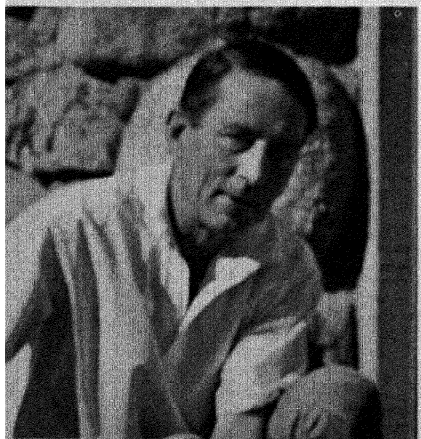
SEÁN JENNETT



NICHOLAS MOORE
ROBINSON JEFFERS



Cpl. RANDALL SWINGLER
THEODORE SPENCER



Biographical Notes

Part One

THE POETRY OF WORLD WAR I

WILFRED OWEN (1893-1918) managed to think and write while meeting the overwhelming demands made upon an officer serving in the front line in the trenches of World War I. What he wrote, in the poetry, in his preface, in much of his prose contained in letters, is a major contribution to English poetry. He joined the Artist's Rifles in 1915 and served in France from 1916 to June, 1917, at which time he was invalided home for fourteen months. He returned to the front where his gallantry in saving his men brought him the Military Cross. He was killed in action while directing the construction of a bridge across the Sambre Canal. Exactly one week after his death the Armistice was signed.

RUPERT BROOKE (1887-1915) is the poet of World War I who has chiefly occupied the popular favour. He enlisted at the outbreak of that war and saw service in Belgium. He was placed in a training camp in Dorsetshire for some months and then, in February, 1915, sailed for the Dardanelles with the British Expeditionary Force. He contracted blood-poisoning en route and died at Skyros on April 23, 1915.

E. E. CUMMINGS was born in 1894 in Cambridge, Mass. and educated at Harvard. In World War I he served in the Ambulance Corps and, through an error of the censor's, in a detention camp. Cummings' battle against the causes of war, the stupidities of society and dishonesty have continued up to the present moment, even when he has had to fight alone. His contribution to American literature is of major quality.

ROBERT GRAVES was born in 1895 and was educated at Charterhouse and Oxford. He served three times in France in the same regiment as Siegfried Sassoon. His early work was well received and the war poems established his reputation as a war poet. But as his talent and understanding deepened he repudiated much of that early work. The poems included in this anthology are the only war poems of which he now approves. His prose works include criticism and novels; his *Collected Poems* were published in 1938 by Random House.

THOMAS HARDY (1840-1928) began writing verse at the age of fifty-eight, after a long career as a novelist. He is one of the most important of English war poets, whose work has not been sufficiently read, especially in the United States. Difficulty in obtaining permissions has prevented this editor from using as many of Hardy's poems as he would have desired. It is recommended to the reader that he look up three poems in especial: *The Man He Killed*, *In Time of "The Breaking of Nations,"* and the Armistice poem, *And There Was A Great Calm*.

HERBERT READ was born in 1893, in Yorkshire, and educated at Crossley's School, Halifax, and at the University of Leeds. He was commissioned to the Yorkshire Regiment in 1915 and served in France and Belgium, reaching the rank of Captain. His first volume appeared in 1915. He has continued to gain in distinction and influence with the years, publishing successive volumes of verse and criticism.

ISAAC ROSENBERG (1890-1918) in spite of the impediments of adverse circumstances, imperfect education and life in the trenches, was able to produce sufficient poetry to make him an important World War I poet. He was apprenticed in trade at fourteen but friends helped him to escape the depressing job, and his abilities as a painter brought him a two and a half year period at the Slade School. But his true talent was for poetry in which he struggled persistently for exact expression. He joined the army in 1915 and in spite of the torments of regimented life and trench warfare managed to produce a slim volume of work which was later gathered together and edited by Gordon Bottomley and published in 1922. He was killed in action on April 1, 1918.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON was born in 1886 and educated at Cambridge. During the First World War he served in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers

with the rank of Captain and received the Military Cross. The appearance of his book *Counter-Attack* in 1918 established him as one of the few important poets of World War I. He has continued to publish volumes of both poetry and prose throughout the "armistice" years and is now living in Wiltshire.

ALAN SEEGER (1888-1916) was born in New York and educated at Harvard. He went to Paris in 1913 and was there when war came. He quickly enlisted in the Foreign Legion in which he served for two years, almost always in action at the front. He was killed on the Fourth of July.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939) is not thought of as a war poet and saw no war service in 1914-1918. But his reading of the social dilemma gave due warning of our chaos, hence his inclusion here. His work has greatly influenced most of the poets of this generation. In this case, too, publisher's permissions were difficult to obtain, hence *Easter, 1916* and *Lapis Lazuli* which the editor wished to include are unfortunately not in this anthology.

Part Two

POEMS BY THE MEN IN THE ARMED FORCES OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA

WILLIAM ABRAHAMS (Sergeant, U.S. Army) was born in Boston, 1919; Harvard; inducted in the army, 1942; prior to induction an associate editor of *Vice Versa*; presently writing a novel for Simon & Schuster.

BRIAN ALLWOOD (Pilot, R.A.F.) born 1920 was killed in Italy on June 30th, 1944; worked for some time in Mass Observation, joined the R.A.F. in 1941, married September 1942 and went abroad to North Africa in November of the same year; mentioned in dispatches June 1943; is buried at Caserta.

JACK BEECHING (Petty Officer Radio Mechanic, Royal Navy) writes: "Before the war I worked as mechanic, clerk, labourer, salesman, etc., the usual run of employment for a semiskilled uneducated young man. I've published a good deal of verse in anthologies and magazines; a book of verse, *Dance Without Music* and a novel are

forthcoming; my poems aren't about the fighting war because I'm not in it—all we see are crashes, casualties and survivors, and we experience only discomforts, not danger like the infantry. A good deal of my poetry nowadays is unprintable—mostly ballads for my mess-mates.”

WALTER BENTON (Lieutenant, U.S. Army) is 36 years old; a graduate of Ohio University; in the army since 1942; has appeared in many magazines; a book of poems *This Is My Beloved* is now in its sixth printing.

EARLE BIRNEY (Major, Canadian Army) was born in 1904 in Calgary, Alberta; University of British Columbia, and took his M.A. and Ph.D. in Toronto; in 1943 was awarded a Fellowship by The Royal Society of Canada; literary editor of *The Canadian Forum* 1936-1940; one book, *David and Other Poems*.

DAVID BOURNE (Pilot Officer, R.A.F.) was born in 1921 and was killed in action in 1941; educated at Cranbrook, Kent; volunteered for the R.A.F. in 1939, commissioned as Pilot Officer January 1941; in company (each in their own Hurricane) with his Squadron Leader he shot down an enemy bomber which was pursuing a convoy in the North Sea; the Squadron Leader was forced into the sea, but was saved by Pilot Bourne's promptness; David Bourne was killed when intercepting another enemy bomber.

NORMAN BRICK (Flight Sergeant, R.A.F.); little is known of this poet; he has appeared in Henry Treece's collection, *Air Force Poetry* and in Keidrych Rhys's *Poems from the Forces*.

JOHN CIARDI (Sergeant, U.S. Air Force) was born in Boston, 1916; Bates, Tufts and University of Michigan; one book of poems *Home-ward To America*, 1940; Instructor in English, Kansas City University 1940-1942; signed on as Aviation Cadet May 1942, washed out September 1943; assigned as Central Fire Control Gunner, B-29, 1944.

TIMOTHY CORSELLIS (Pilot Officer, R.A.F.) was born in 1921; educated at Winchester; before volunteering for the R.A.F. at the age of 18 he worked in A.R.P. (Air Raid Precaution) during the blitz in London; killed in action in 1941; contributed to all the important anthologies of war poetry published in England.

LOUIS O. COXE (Lieutenant, U.S. Navy) was born in 1918 in Manchester, N.H.; St. Paul's school; Princeton; taught English at Brooks

School, North Andover, Mass. until he joined the Navy in 1942; at present a senior lieutenant in command of a small escort vessel in the Pacific, where he has been serving since May 1943.

HUBERT CREEKMORE (Lieutenant, United States Naval Reserve) was educated at Columbia University; has appeared with stories, poems and reviews in many magazines; two books of verse. *Personal Sun* and *The Stone Ants*; on editorial staff of "Gismo"—a literary magazine of writing by men in the service—while in the South Pacific; enlisted in Navy in Spring 1942, commissioned in 1943.

PAUL DEHN (Major, Intelligence Corps, R.A.) was born in 1912; Shrewsbury School; Brasenose College, Oxford; between 1934 and 1939 was a film critic, dramatic critic, columnist and crime-reporter; 1939-1944, from Private in 3rd Battalion London Scottish, via Commando, to Major in Intelligence Corps.

RICHARD EBERHART (Lieutenant Commander, U.S.N.R.) was born at Austin, Minn., 1904; four books of verse of which the latest is *Poems, New and Selected* (new Directions); stationed at present at Wildwood, N. J.

FREDERICK EBRIGHT (Sergeant, U.S. Army) was born in Penn., 1912; attended art school in Philadelphia; enlisted in the 13th Coast Artillery in 1939; has published verse in many magazines.

GAVIN EWART (Lieutenant, Royal Artillery) was born in London, 1916; educated at Wellington College & Christ's College, Cambridge; worked as commercial traveller, publisher's reader, literary and advertising odd job man until 1939; Overseas (North Africa and Italy) as a subaltern in the Royal Artillery since January 1943.

JAMES FORSYTH (Captain, British Liberation Army) was trained as a Painter and Sculptor and held exhibitions in native Scotland; in 1937 came to London and wrote; in 1941 was commissioned to a Welsh Regiment in Ireland; in June 1944 landed in France and has been fighting ever since as Captain and Signal Officer in an Infantry Battalion.

G. S. FRASER (Sergeant, British Army) was born in Scotland 25 years ago; at St. Andrews' University became editor of *The College Echoes*; was a journalist in Aberdeen, his home town; joined the army at the beginning of the war; was on the staff of PARADE, the army magazine in Cairo, and has lately been in Eritrea; a book of poems *Home Town Elegy*, 1944.

ROY FULLER (S/Lieutenant, R.N.V.R.) was born at Oldham, Lancashire, 1912; conscripted to the British Navy in April 1941, transferred to the Fleet Air Arm six months later; three books of poems, the latest of which is *A Lost Season*, published by Hogarth Press, 1944.

BERNARD H. GUTTERIDGE (Major, South East Asia Command, British Army) was born in 1916; educated at Cranleigh; now fighting in Burma with the 36th Division (Infantry); has been away from England for more than three years; the first poem of his group in this anthology was written about the hills in which Alun Lewis is buried.

JOHN HAY (Sergeant, U.S. Army) is 29 years old; Harvard; in 1939 and 1940 lived in Washington, D.C., as correspondent for the *Charleston, S.C. News and Courier*; drafted in April 1941 and in the infantry for a year before coming to the staff of *Yank*, the army weekly; has just come back to the states after eight months in Panama.

ALFRED HAYES (Private, U.S. Army) was born in London 1911; has appeared in many magazines and anthologies with his poems. One book of verse *The Big Time*; at the present in Italy.

RAYNER HEPPESTALL (Private, British Army) was born in Yorkshire in 1911; has served four years in the British army; three books of verse; has written feature programmes for the B.B.C. and published two novels and a critical history of the ballet called "Apology for Dancing."

RANDALL JARRELL (Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Force) was born in 1914; Vanderbilt; one book of poems, *Blood for a Stranger*; in 1942 enlisted in the Air Corps as a pilot, washed out after about 30 hours flying; now a C. N. T. operator at Tucson, Arizona; *Little Friend, Little Friend*, a new book of war poetry is scheduled for 1945.

SIDNEY KEYES (2nd Lieutenant, R.A. British) was born in 1922 and killed in action in the last days of the Tunisian campaign in 1943; his second book of poems has just been published by Routledge.

STANLEY KUNITZ (S/Sergeant, U.S. Army) was born in Worcester, Mass. in 1905; Harvard; two books of verse, *Intellectual Things* and *Passport to the War*; *Poetry* awarded him the Oscar Blumenthal Prize for Lyric Poetry in 1941; before entering the army in 1943 was editor of the *Wilson Library Bulletin*; now serving with the Air Transport Command.

PATRICIA LEDWARD (Driver, A.T.S. British) was born in 1920; is joining Army Education Corps as Sergeant; has appeared in a number of anthologies and has just finished a novel of service life.

ALUN LEWIS (Lieutenant, British Army) was born in 1915; taught in a Welsh secondary school; two books of poems of which the latest *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets* has just been published in England by George Allen & Unwin; was killed in an accident May 1944, while on active service in India.

EMANUEL LITVINOFF (Lieutenant, British Army) was born in London in 1915; wrote two novels which were destroyed in the London blitz; has served in the army for 5 years; three books of poems.

WILLARD MAAS (Private, U.S. Army) was born in Lindsay, California in 1911 and spent the early part of his life on an orange ranch in San Joaquin Valley; was educated at San Jose State College and University of California; author of two books of verse.

BEN MADDOW (S/Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Force) was born in Passaic, N.J.; at college he shifted from chemistry to biophysics to post-graduate work in mathematics; was unemployed for a number of years; worked in a die factory, then as assistant at Bellevue; then as relief investigator; many years in the field of documentary films; has been to South America on the film job; has not yet published his first book; now with the Army Air Force Motion Picture Unit.

H. B. MALLALIEU (Captain, Royal Artillery) was born in New Jersey, U.S.A. in 1914; before the war was a journalist in London; has contributed to many magazines and anthologies; now on active service in Italy.

JOHN MANIFOLD (Captain, Intelligence Corps, Middle East Forces, Australian) was born in Melbourne, 1915; educated at Geelong Grammar School and Jesus College, Cambridge; worked as schoolmaster and as journalist in England, later as translator with a publishing firm in Germany; escaped from Germany in 1939 and joined the British Army; married in 1940; served in West Africa, and at the present time is in France; two books of verse, and a new one, *Sonnets, Chiefly Satirical* in preparation.

MICHAEL C. MARTIN (Signaller, Royal Durban Light Infantry, South African) has contributed to Keidrych Rhys's anthology; no other facts known about this poet.

WILLIAM MEREDITH (Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.) was born in New York City in 1919; worked on *The New York Times* as copy boy and later as a reporter; in 1941 was inducted into the Army, serving for eight months as a noncommissioned officer in Army Air Forces Public Relations before being discharged to enter Naval Aviation; received Navy wings and commission in October 1942; has served since as a pilot in the Pacific area; one book of poems, *Love Letter From an Impossible Land*.

HOWARD NEMEROV (Lieutenant, U.S. Air Force) was born in New York City in 1920; Harvard; with the Royal Canadian Air Force, but transferred to the U.S. Air Force in 1943; now stationed in England.

J. ELGAR OWEN (L/Bdr. Australian) appeared with his poem "Maturity" in *SALT*, the Australian Army Education Service magazine; due to difficulties of wartime communication, there is no further biographical data on Bdr. Owen.

FRANK TEMPLETON PRINCE (Captain, British Army) was born in 1912 at Kimberley, Cape Province, South Africa; went to school at Christian Brothers College, Kimberley; Balliol College, Oxford, 1931-1934; spent a year at the Graduate College, Princeton, N. J.; married; one book *Poems*, Faber & Faber, 1938; spent six months in the Middle East, but is at present stationed in England.

JOHN PUDNEY (Squadron Leader, R.A.F.) was born in England, and before the war he worked for the *News Chronicle* and the B. B. C.; has written ten books, including poetry, short stories, a novel and a travel book; as Squadron Leader he has been in Malta, Italy, the Western Desert, Canada, the U.S. and Persia; latest book of poems *Flight Above Clouds*; has edited, with Henry Treece, an anthology *Air Force Poetry* published in England.

HENRY REED (Private, British Army) has contributed to Keidrych Rhys's second war anthology; no other facts known at the present.

KEIDRYCH RHYS (Gunner, R.A., British) is the editor of *Wales*, a well-known literary magazine; one book of poems, *The Van Pool*; editor of a number of anthologies including the ably edited war collections, *Poems from the Forces* and *More Poems from the Forces*.

DICK ROBERTS (Corporal, U.S. Army) was given an honorable discharge on the 25th of November 1944 after two years of service;

born 1919 in Miles City, Montana; has lived in Billings, Mont., for 15 years; one book of verse *Spring Comes in Many Ways*, just published.

SELDEN RODMAN (M/Sergeant, U.S. Army) was born in 1909; Yale 1931; in 1932 founded, with Alfred M. Bingham, the political monthly "Common Sense" which they jointly edited until 1943; three narrative book-length poems; edited the well known collections *A New Anthology of Modern Poetry* (Modern Library) and *The Poetry of Flight*; *The Revolutionists*, a play published in 1942, was produced by the Haitian Government in Port au Prince; at present, with Lieutenant Commander Richard Eberhart, Sergeant Rodman is at work on a new anthology of war poetry.

EDWIN ROLFE (Private, U.S. Army) was born 1909 in Philadelphia, Pa.; spent two years in Spain as member of International Brigades, part of the time in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (Canadian) and the rest in the Lincoln Battalion (American); took part in Aragon-Catalan retreat (March-April 1938) and in Ebre Offensive (July-September 1938); entered U.S. Army in February 1943, but was medically discharged late autumn of the same year; books: *The Lincoln Battalion* and *To My Contemporaries*, poems.

ALAN ROSS (S/Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., British) was born in India in 1922; lived in France and England; Oxford; joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1942, subsequently served in destroyers on the Russian convoy route; now a staff officer attached to a destroyer flotilla; has just completed an impressionist book of prose and poetry about the war.

KARL SHAPIRO (Corporal, U.S. Army, Pacific Area) was born in Baltimore, Md., in 1913; drafted into the army in 1941, and in 1942 left for Australia; his last two books *Person, Place and Thing* and *V-Letter* have been widely acclaimed; at the present stationed in the Dutch Indies; expected back in the U.S. by the time this book appears.

WILLIAM JAY SMITH (Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.) was born at "Winnfield, La. in 1918, next door to Huey Long on Shakespeare's birthday"; Washington University (St. Louis, Mo.) on a Swope Memorial Scholarship; enlisted in U.S.N.R. in 1941; has served on both the Pacific and European theatres; joined the French Sloop *La Grandière* in 1944 as U.S. Naval Liaison Officer.

DONALD A. STAUFFER (Captain, Aircraft Unit, U.S. Marine Corps) was born in Colorado, 1902; Princeton; from 1927 on, taught English at Princeton; editor of *The Intent of the Critic*; a new book of poetic criticism *The Nature of Poetry* to be published after the war; Capt. Stauffer writes: "I've served in aviation in the Marine Corps as an Air Combat Intelligence Officer since September 1942. I've been over a year out here in the South and West Pacific. Saw the Bougainville and Rabaul campaigns when they were at their height from Nov. 1943 to March 1944, and am now seeing about all one should in the Western Carolines. This is captured Jap stationery—more plentiful than our own—and I am using red ribbon to save the sole black record for official reports. Poetry, and even business talk about poetry, does not require formality of precisely that kind."

STEPHEN STEPANCHEV (Lieutenant, A.E.F. Mission to France) was born in Jugoslavia in 1915; attended the University of Chicago, and until his induction taught at Purdue; his comment on Poetry and War and his biographical note (which he wrote he was sending in October 1944 from France) have never arrived.

GERVASE STEWART (Lieutenant, R.A.F., British) was born in 1920; educated at Cambridge, where he was Chairman of Debates and Editor of *Granta*; joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1940, was commissioned a Sub Lieutenant and became a pilot; killed in action 1941; one book of poems *No Weed Death* and another forthcoming from John Lane, The Bodley Head.

RANDALL SWINGLER (Corporal, Royal Signals, British Army) was born in 1909; novels, poems, critical essays; has been editor of *Left Review* and *Our Time*; called up into the army in 1941, and since has seen active service in North Africa and Italy.

JULIAN SYMONS (Trooper, Royal Armoured Corps, British) was born in 1912; largely self-educated; edited 1937-1939 *Twentieth Century Verse*, a "little" magazine of verse and criticism; two books of verse, *Confusions about X* (1939), *The Second Man* (1943); one anthology, *An Anthology of War Poetry* (1942); one detective story; many oddments; in preparation *The Ideal Critic*, critical essays, another detective book, a book of stories of army life; conscripted as Trooper into Royal Armoured Corps, April 1942, discharged Jan. 1944 with injured arm, still a Trooper.

DONALD THOMPSON (Gunner, British Army) has just celebrated his 25th birthday in the Middle East where he has been serving since 1939 with the British army; some of his verse was broadcast in London last year, some is to appear in a Forces Number of *Poetry London*, and John Lane, The Bodley Head, will shortly bring out his first volume of poetry.

DUNSTAN THOMPSON (Corporal, U.S. Army) was born in New London, Conn., in 1918; Harvard; one of the founders of *Vice Versa* the verse publication of the late thirties; a first book *Poems* has been widely acclaimed; now with a Films Division of Office of War Information, stationed in London.

JOHN THOMPSON, JR. (Sergeant, U.S. Air Force) was born in 1918; has lived in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Kenyon College; at present an instructor in an Air Force ground school at San Antonio.

HENRY TREECE (Flight Lieutenant, Royal Air Force, British) was born in 1912; author of four books of verse the latest of which is *The Black Seasons* (Faber, 1944); co-editor of *The New Apocalypse*, *The White Horseman*, *Wartime Harvest*, *Transformation*, *Air Force Poetry*, *The Crown and the Sickle*; editor of a symposium on *Herbert Read* (Faber); generally known as the leader of the Apocalypse school of poetry.

BERTRAM WARR (Sergeant, Royal Canadian Air Force) was born in 1917 and killed in action in 1943; one of the two Canadian poets represented in this anthology; his poems have appeared in Henry Treece's *Air Force Poetry*, and in Keidrych Rhys's collections; no other biographical data available.

VERNON WATKINS (Sergeant, Royal Air Force) 38 years old, is Welsh poet; in peacetime lives near Swansea; contributes widely to the literary magazines; one book of poems *Ballad of the Mari Lwy* (Faber & Faber).

EDWARD WEISMILLER (2nd Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve) was born in Monticello, Wis. in 1915; spent a year at Swarthmore College; Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Ia.; Rhodes Scholarship 1938-1939; taught English at Harvard 1939 to 1943; commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant 1943; one book of poems *The Deer Come Down* at the present stationed somewhere in France.

Part Three

WAR POEMS BY THE CIVILIAN POETS

CONRAD AIKEN, one of America's distinguished poets, was born in Georgia in 1889; was class poet at Harvard and removed to England in 1921 and alternated his residence between England and the U.S. for years, finally settling in Brewster, Mass.; his first book was published in 1914, his last has been published (*The Soldier*, New Directions) at the end of 1944; has written much prose ranging from criticism to fiction and has just finished revising his two anthologies of modern poetry for *The Modern Library*.

W. H. AUDEN was born in 1907; Gresham's, Holt, and Oxford; named after St. Wystan (patron saint of Wistanstow), who planted a stick in the ground which grew into a tree; the best known of the English poets and the acknowledged leader of the younger (and the older) poets during the thirties and half of the forties; author of many volumes of verse both here and in England; his *Collected Poems* (which should be a literary event of first magnitude) has been promised by Random House for early 1945.

GEORGE BARKER was born in 1913; self- and travel-educated; was teaching in Tokyo University in Japan when the war broke out; was in America 1940 to 1942; two books of prose and four of verse, all published in England; one book *Selected Poems* published in the U.S., and a New Directions pamphlet; now in England.

JOHN BERRYMAN was born in 1914; Columbia and Cambridge; a group of his poems was published in *Five Young American Poets* (First Series); a pamphlet *Poems* (New Directions, 1942); now living in Princeton.

JOHN PEALE BISHOP was born in Charles Town, W. Va., 1892; Mercersburg Academy, and Princeton; managing editor *Vanity Fair* 1921; in 1942 Director of the Publications Program in the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs; four books of verse, one with Edmund Wilson, Jr.; *Selected Poems* was published in 1941; in 1943, appointed Fellow to the Library of Congress in Comparative Literature, but was obliged to resign before the end of the year because of ill health. John Peale Bishop died of a heart attack April 1944.

GENE DERWOOD lives on Upper New York Bay.

WILLIAM EMPSON was born in 1906, educated at Cambridge; has occupied chairs in English Literature at Universities in Japan and China; author the well known *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, a book of criticism; one book of verse, *The Gathering Storm*; was lecturing on English Literature in the Peiping National University while it was refugeeing in 1937-1939, is still on the books and hopes to go back; at present doing B.B.C. work on broadcasts in Chinese; married in 1941, two children.

KENNETH FEARING was born in Chicago, 1902; University of Wisconsin; has written a number of novels but is best known for his poetry; five volumes of verse, including his *Collected Poems* published by Random House in 1940.

ROBERT FROST was born in San Francisco in 1875; he spent some time in Dartmouth, in Harvard, in teaching and in farming until 1912 when he went to England; there he found friends in the literary world with the result that his first book of verse, *A Boy's Will* was published in London in 1913; since then he has published many volumes of poetry the latest of which is *A Witness Tree*.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON writes: "I was born in 1905, the youngest of seven sons of a Church of England clergyman, and was brought up in a Cornish village, in a family in many ways governed still by a mid-nineteenth century and pre-industrial ethos. My ancestors were country lawyers, doctors, and more clergymen. Five of my brothers have been killed in the two wars. I took an English degree at Oxford, and then slid into journalism, and slid out again, after discovering that elderly journalists believed their own lies, and that journalism was as corrupt and contemptible as writing advertisements. Editing *New Verse* was an attempt to get my own mind straight, and to establish some balance between order and the fantastic, and to clip the exuberance of English sentiment and stupidity. Most of my poems are rooted in Cornwall. My admirations, as far as they are fixed, are the incorruptibility of Wyndham Lewis, the poems of Dryden, Auden, and John Clare, the drawings of Samuel Palmer and Henry Moore, the example of Blake, the limestone districts of England and Europe, the orderly excitement of the paintings of Stubbs, Poussin, and Uccello. My aversions—two of them—are the social corruptibility of English authors and the muddle-headedness of Stephen Spender. I am married and have three children, and my politics—my religion, too—are implicit in the statements I have just made. I would add money to my aversions."

ROBINSON JEFFERS was born in 1887; was educated by private tutors and by his father, and had many years in private schools in Switzerland and Leipzig; studied at University of Pittsburgh and Occidental College, Los Angeles (A.B. 1905. D. Litt. 1937); University of So. California (Doctor of Humane Letters 1939); attended medical school at U.S.C. for three years; did postgraduate work in literature at University of Zurich; married Una Call Kuster of Los Angeles in 1913; has lived on a cliff in Carmel, California, since September 1914; two long sojourns with his wife and sons in the British Isles 1929 and 1937; member National Institute of Arts and Letters; many volumes of poetry; *Selected Poetry* published in 1938; *Be Angry At the Sun*, 1941.

SEÁN JENNETT is a young poet whose first book *Always Adam* was published last year by Faber & Faber; has contributed to many anthologies and literary publications in England.

JAMES LAUGHLIN was born in 1914, Pittsburgh; started *New Directions* in 1936 while an undergraduate at Harvard.

ARCHIBALD MAC LEISH was born in Glencoe, Illinois, 1892; educated at public schools in Illinois and at Hotchkiss School; graduated from Yale and from the Harvard Law School; served in the Field Artillery of the A.E.F.; practiced law briefly in Boston and taught at Harvard; lived in France from 1923 to 1928; worked as an editor of *Fortune* from the beginning of that magazine until 1938; was an officer of Harvard University in 1938-39 and was appointed the Librarian of Congress in 1939; has published some 15 volumes of verse, including *The Hamlet of A. MacLeish*, *New Found Land*, *Conquistador*, (Pulitzer Prize 1932) and *Public Speech*, as well as two verse plays for radio, *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid*; has just been appointed Assistant Secretary of State, in charge of cultural relations.

LOUIS MACNEICE was born in 1907; Marlborough and Oxford; (Greek: London University); several books of verse, a play, translations, a novel, poetic criticism; his collected *Poems 1925-1940* published early in 1941; was in the United States during 1940 but went back to England in the fall of that year.

MARIANNE MOORE was born in 1887; Bryn Mawr, 1909; assistant, New York Public Library, 1921-1925; acting editor, *The Dial*, 1925-1929; *Observations*, 1924; *Selected Poems*, 1935; contributor of verse

and criticism to magazines; won the Shelley Memorial Award for 1940; *Harriet Monroe Award for 1944*; *What Are Years*, 1941; *Nevertheless*, 1944.

NICHOLAS MOORE is one of the better known of the younger English poets; has contributed widely to literary magazines in both England and America; author of several volumes of verse, all published in London; was the editor of *Seven*, one of the little verse magazines of the late thirties.

EDWIN MUIR was born in Orkney in 1887, lived for a long time in Glasgow, then in London, then in various Continental cities, Prague, Dresden, Vienna, Forte dei Marmi, St. Tropez, Menton, then in London again; now in Edinburgh; a good deal of literary criticism and several volumes of poetry, including *The Narrow Place*, *Journeys and Places*, *Variations on a Time Theme*; an autobiography, *The Story and the Fable*.

FREDERIC PROKOSCH was born in 1908 in Madison, Wis.; Haverford College; Yale University, King's College, Cambridge (fellow in Chaucerian research); five novels, four books of verse, the latest of which is *Chosen Poems* published in England; has just come back from spending two years in Sweden at a "listening post" for the OWI.

ANNE RIDLER was born at Rugby, 1912; worked for some years with Faber & Faber; several volumes of verse; editor of *A Little Book of Modern Verse*.

MICHAEL ROBERTS was born in 1902; King's College; Trinity College, Cambridge; has published a great many books of criticism, and two anthologies, one of which *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* is considered the best collection of modern poetry published in the last decade; one book of poems, *Orion Marches*, 1939.

W. R. RODGERS, an Ulsterman of 33, was first discovered by the English magazine *Horizon*; his first and only book, *Awake! and Other War Poems* has been widely acclaimed; has contributed to all four of the *New Poems* series of annual anthologies edited by the present editor.

MURIEL RUKEYSER was born in New York in December 1913; Vassar; four books of verse of which the latest is *Beast In View* from which the selections in this anthology were taken; one biography,

Willard Gibbs; worked in the Graphics Division of the OWI in 1943; now working on a play, *The Middle of the Air*.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ was born December 1913 in Brooklyn, N. Y.; University of Wisconsin, New York University and Harvard; Briggs-Copeland Instructor in English Composition at Harvard; now the poetry editor of *Partisan Review*; *In Dreams Begin Responsibility*, 1938; *Shenandoah*, 1941; *Genesis*, 1943.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT was born in Haverhill, Mass. in 1910; Brown University; Shelley Memorial Award, 1939; five books of verse, the latest of which has been promised for 1945 by Thomas Y. Crowell.

JOHN SINGER is a young English poet now working in Glasgow; one book of verse *The Fury of the Living*, published by William Maclelan, 1942; founder and editor of *Million—New Left Writing*.

EDITH SITWELL was born in Yorkshire in 1887 and has lived in London since 1914; published her first book of verse in 1915 and has since had a succession of volumes, including criticism, history, biography and fiction; anthologies, too; her latest book of poems, published in 1944, rounds out thirty years of noteworthy work.

BERNARD SPENCER was born in 1909; Marlborough and Oxford; has been a schoolmaster, tutor and advertising writer; once editor of *Oxford Poetry*; at present teaching at the University in Cairo.

THEODORE SPENCER was born in Villa Nova, Pa. 1902; Princeton, Cambridge and Harvard; Associate Professor of English at Harvard University; author of two books of verse, *The Paradox in the Circle* (1941) and *An Act of Life* published by Harvard University Press in 1944; *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, originally a series of Lowell Lectures, was published in 1942.

STEPHEN SPENDER was born in 1909 in London; University College School and Oxford; poems, plays, criticism, translations, short stories, generally a literary life; latest book of poems, *Ruins and Visions*.

WALLACE STEVENS was born in 1879 in Reading, Pa.; Harvard; practiced law in New York; lives in Hartford, Conn. and is vice-president of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, engaged in handling claims; two books of verse in 1942, *Parts of a World* and

Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction, the latter published by the fine Cummington Press.

ALLEN TATE was born in Kentucky in 1899, and graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1922; free lance in New York 1924 to 1928; was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, 1928, and spent two years in France; in charge of creative writing under the Creative Arts Program, Princeton University, 1939 to 1942; author of two biographies; six volumes of verse, of which the latest is *The Winter Sea*, beautifully hand-printed by The Cummington Press; also, a novel, *The Fathers*; two volumes of criticism, *Reactionary Essays in Poetry and Ideas* and *Reason in Madness*; Chair of Poetry, Library of Congress 1943-1944; editor of *Sewanee Review*, 1945.

DYLAN THOMAS was born in 1914 in Wales; Swansea Grammar School; his first three books published in England were combined into one volume *The World I Breathe* by James Laughlin in 1939; another selection *New Poems* was published in pamphlet form in 1942 by New Directions; a still later book *Deaths and Entrances* is being published in England in 1945; at the present writing film scripts for a living.

MARK VAN DOREN was born in Illinois, 1894; University of Illinois, Columbia University (now professor of English there); literary editor *The Nation* 1924-1928; three novels, six volumes of criticism (a seventh, *Calliope*, in preparation); ten volumes of verse, of which the latest was *The Seven Sleepers*, 1944; the first, *Spring Thunder and Other Poems*, 1924, was written after World War I; service in that war from September, 1917, to December, 1918, 1st Lt. Infantry; service in this war, civilian.

ARTHUR WALEY was born in 1889; Rugby; King's College, Cambridge; Hon. LL.D., Aberdeen; is known as a leading authority on Chinese literature and translator of Chinese poetry; his *170 Chinese Poems* is a standard work.

ROBERT PENN WARREN was born in Kentucky in 1905; Vanderbilt University, University of California, Yale and Oxford; a founder and an editor of *The Southern Review*; three novels; *Selected Poems*, 1944; Professor of English at the University of Minnesota; at present the Chair of Poetry, Library of Congress.

YVOR WINTERS was born in Chicago in 1900; University of Chicago, and the University of Idaho for two years; associate professor

of English, Stanford; married to Janet Lewis, the novelist; three books of criticism including *The Anatomy of Nonsense*, 1943; a number of volumes of poetry of which the latest is *The Giant Weapon* published by James Laughlin in the New Direction series.

OSCAR WILLIAMS started writing poetry for the second time in 1937 after a sixteen-year silence; *The Golden Darkness*, The Yale Series of Younger Poets; *The Man Coming Toward You* published by Oxford University Press in 1940 contains the work of the years 1937 to 1940; a new book of poems, *That's All That Matters*, has just been published by The Creative Age Press; editor of the *New Poems* series of annual anthologies of modern poetry.

Acknowledgments

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ROY FULLER—for the six poems from *A Lost Season* and *The Middle of a War*, both published by The Hogarth Press;

GEOFFREY GRIGSON—for the six poems from *Several Observations* (Cresset Press) and from *Under the Cliff* (Routledge);

HARCOURT, BRACE & COMPANY—for *Awake!* from *Awake! and Other Wartime Poems* by W. R. Rodgers, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Brace & Co., Inc., for *Terror* from *Selected Poems 1923-1943* by Robert Penn Warren, copyright, 1944, by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.; for the poem from *Afternoon of a Pawnbroker and Other Poems*, copyright, 1943, by Kenneth Fearing, by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.; for the two poems by E. E. Cummings in the first part of this anthology from *Collected Poems* of E. E. Cummings, copyright, 1923, 1925, 1931, 1935, 1938, by E. E. Cummings, published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.;

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN—for *The Too Late Born* by Archibald MacLeish from *Poems 1924-1933*;

MISS EVALYN KATZ—for the six poems and comment by Karl Shapiro from *Person, Place and Thing* and *V-Letter*, copyright for the years 1942 and 1944 respectively, by Karl Shapiro, published by Reynal and Hitchcock;

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY—Two poems by Thomas Hardy from *Collected Poems*; two poems by William Butler Yeats from *Collected Poems*; five poems by George Barker from *Selected Poems*; and *In Distrust of Merits* from *Nevertheless* by Marianne Moore; all by permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers;

NICHOLAS MOORE—for the poems by G. S. Fraser two of which, *Nilotic Elegy* and *Rostov* are from *Home Town Elegy* (published by PL, Nicholson and Watson); also for his own poem;

NEW DIRECTIONS AND JAMES LAUGHLIN—for poems by F. T. Prince, Yvor Winters, Delmore Schwartz, Conrad Aiken; the first of the three poems by Dylan Thomas; the poems by Richard Eberhart (*Poems New and Selected*); and the poem by James Laughlin;

RANDOM HOUSE—for the five poems by Stephen Spender from *Poems*; for *Ballad, August for the People and Spain* from *POEMS, September 1, 1939* from *Another Time, The Jew in the German Cell* from *The Double Man, If On Account of the Political Situation* from *For The Time Being*, these last six poems by W. H. Auden; for three poems from *Be Angry At the Sun* by Robinson Jeffers; for five poems by Louis MacNeice from *Collected Poems 1925-1940* and *Autumn Journal*; for three poems by Robert Graves from *Collected Poems*; all of these reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.;

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS—for the poems by Sidney Keyes, Emanuel Litvinoff, Bertram Warr and Norman Brick (*Poems from the Forces*, edited by Keidrych Rhys);

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W. T. SCOTT—for the two poems from *To Marry Strangers*, published by Thomas Y. Crowell, copyright, 1945, by Winfield Townley Scott;

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WALLACE STEVENS—for his two poems, and his comment from *Parts of a World* (published by Alfred A. Knopf) copyright, 1942, by Wallace Stevens;

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Many of the poems in Part Two of this book have never before been published in book or magazine; the editor is especially grateful to those poets who have taken the trouble to send their manuscripts.

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