little-known documents

War Poems from 1914

INTRODUCTION BY DAVID BEN-MERRE AND ROBERT SCHOLES

Introduction

IN OCTOBER 1912 THE FIRST ISSUE OF HARRIET MONROE'S NEW JOURNAL, *POETRY: A MAGAZINE OF VERSE*, APPEARED. THE LAST HAS YET TO come. In an era when little magazines came and went like mayflies, *Poetry* came and has refused to go. The journal had it all—in its early years it was at the forefront of debates about imagism, vers libre, and other issues concerning the "proper" form and content for poetry. Monroe, its editor, is still insufficiently appreciated as a major figure in literary modernism. We hope to change that. Supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Modernist Journals Project (MJP) has completed a digital edition of the first eleven years of this distinguished journal, using original copies provided by the University of Chicago Library, supplemented in some instances by copies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the University of Tulsa's McFarlin Library. Those of us working on this edition have discovered many interesting things, including the first publication of Joyce Kilmer's "Trees," which Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren later used as the primary example of bad poetry in their New Critical textbook, *Understanding Poetry* (274–78).

Poetry did not survive and flourish on "bad poems." The issues of its first decade are full of works by poets now regarded as major and of good poems by other poets as well, along with reviews and critical discussions that remain fascinating. Even the advertising in those issues is interesting now—and there was quite a bit of it, ranging from ads for other magazines, like *Blast*, to ads for antiques and even dogs for poets, though these are missing from most bound copies of *Poetry* in our libraries. In September 1914, one month after World War I had started, in the advertising section at the back of the magazine there appeared the following announcement of a prize for the best war poem:

> POETRY announces a prize of $100 for the best poem based on the present European situation. While all poems national and patriotic in spirit will be considered, the editors of POETRY believe that a poem in the interest of peace will express the aim of the highest civilization.

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Poems must be received not later than October 15th, and the prize-winning poem will be published in the November number. Other poems of a high grade of excellence entered in the contest will be purchased and published by POETRY.
>
> All mss. submitted must be type-written, signed with a pseudonym and accompanied by a sealed envelope enclosing the name and address of the poet and the pseudonym used, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return postage. The judges of the contest will consist of the editorial and advisory committees of POETRY.

The dollar amount of the award may not look large, but we can multiply it by at least twenty to allow for over ninety years of inflation. And the submissions came rolling in. The assistant editor, Alice Corbin Henderson, reported in the November 1914 issue that 738 poems had been entered in this contest (84). That issue's fourteen "poems of war" start with the prizewinner, "The Metal Checks," by Louise Driscoll, a short verse drama about what we now call dog tags. The whole set is of historical interest and is available in the MJP edition of *Poetry* (www.modjourn.org). We wish to bring to your attention here the poems from that set that seem to us to have retained the greatest literary interest. In the order of their inclusion, the authors of these poems are

- Amy Lowell, a founder of imagism, who experimented with prose poetry and free verse and whose work appeared frequently in *Poetry*
- Carl Sandburg, a Chicago modernist whose poems were also published frequently in *Poetry*
- Maxwell Bodenheim, a promising and prolific young writer of poetry and fiction, whose career went downhill after he moved from Chicago to Greenwich Village, where he was murdered in 1954
- Florence Kiper Frank, a young Chicago writer whose work appeared often in *Poetry* and who is worthy of serious attention, especially from those interested in matters of ethnicity and gender
- Joseph Campbell, not the well-known American mythologist but an Irish poet and playwright who wrote as Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil
- Wallace Stevens, a major modernist whose work appeared regularly in *Poetry*
- Richard Aldington, a British imagist, friend of Ezra Pound, and husband of H. D.

We think these poems are still worthy of attention for a number of reasons. The selections give us fascinating glimpses of writers at the beginning of their careers, showing us just what they think the role of poetry should be for a world in crisis. We get different perspectives of poets who were neither at the battlefront—as Wilfred Owen, John McCrae, and Isaac Rosenberg were—nor part of a nationalistic program. Each poem "Winding / Through our heavy dreams," to borrow a phrase from Wallace Stevens, gives us a war of the imagination, and each in its own way is written in the interest of peace. The poems come from America, England, and Ireland, and they vary as much in tone and content as they do in form. Many common motifs run through them, however. Religion is everywhere—in thoughts, buildings, allegories. It is received, questioned, and misunderstood. And even as it is rejected, it can never in the end be refused. The poems are also heavily influenced by modernist art. Their color (in Sandburg, Campbell, and Aldington) is red; even the gold of Lowell's fire is "powdered with scarlet beads." And the sounds . . . they are like nothing else.

The one prose poem of the collection, Amy Lowell's "The Bombardment," rhymes more subtly than any of the other poems and uses one of the most demanding refrains—the "Boom!" of the bombardment—which is scattered throughout. The refrain shocks even when we know it is coming, and then, suddenly, it doesn't shock anymore. The poem is colored by the silver of the rain and the gold of the fire, the deadly and beautiful "yellow-petaled flower flickering at the window." The bombardment affects all aspects of life: the laboratory, the cathedral, the home. Everything in the poem resonates, from the repeated rhyme "Boom! . . . room" to the other internal rhymes: "Smearing its gold on the sky, the fire dances, lances itself through the doors, and lisps and chuckles along the floors." You have to dig for the rhymes, as though through the rubble of other words.

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Carl Sandburg also uses a refrain in his "Among the Red Guns," but his has been deadened by the excess of war. With each stanza, the hopeful "Dreams go on" seems to lose more and more any weight it once might have carried. What go on instead are the "guns and saddles and muzzles." The poem moves from the hearts to the heads to the hands of the soldiers and, finally, when they have died, to their backs, "[b]roken and [of] no use." In the end, Sandburg asks us to imagine how the morning dawn could carry the same red glow across the ocean.

In Maxwell Bodenheim's "Camp Follower," we are given a momentary glimpse into the life of an army prostitute. "[T]he smell of thousands of men" blends with the odor of gunpowder, stale wine, and wet earth. It's not the scent of death that hovers over the camp but what Shakespeare called "[t]h'expense of spirit in a waste of shame." The smell reminds the camp follower of the malicious grin of an Odessa madam. If the soldiers, following orders, are like prostitutes, as the poem asks us to see them, then the prostitutes are like soldiers, caught up in the machinery of someone else's war. The poem closes with the speaker—presumably a soldier who just took his turn with the camp follower—wondering . . . wondering about the prostitute's words, about his own scent, about who will be grinning if he should come back dead.

Between the September announcement of the *Poetry* prize and the November publication of the war poems, Florence Kiper Frank was busily at work producing her play *Jael*, which premiered at the Chicago Little Theatre in October 1914. It is interesting to consider the play, which dramatizes the liberation of the biblical nation of Israel, in the context of Frank's submission to *Poetry*, a short ballad entitled "The Jewish Conscript." Contrary to Jael, the ballad's speaker details the hypocrisy of having to fight for a nation that not only won't have him but that also killed his child. The poem moves between two failing images of fatherhood: the national "fatherland" and the religious "God of our fathers." The poem begins with a metaphoric image of real parentage—the national father "dressing up" his young—and it ends with a real image of the metaphoric son, who "died in vain" because he could not redeem humanity from two millennia of war.

A metaphor describing war as a harvest runs through Joseph Campbell's submission, "Whence Comes the Stranger." Now that the farms are useless, "The sheaves scattered, / And the rooted trees uptorn," what was once arable land can be used only to "dig unseen graves." The stranger measures death in swaths. He is hidden as if by a tent of two hides—the darkness of night and of mystery. The stranger is Death; he is war, riding "[o]n a pale horse." We hear a preecho of Death's mount in the opening of the poem—the stranger "with hoarse, lifted throat / Threatens the fields"—but cannot yet see it. The poem exploits the disjunction between *horse* and *hoarse*, one a tool not only of the farm but also of the messenger, the other a figure of incommunicability. The tension between the two, for Campbell, shapes the modern relation between human beings and God. Once, God gave them "the Gift of Heaven," making them in his image; once, he spoke to John at Patmos. After the stranger flattens God's altar, God (or the modern individual) turns away: "For my thoughts / Are not your thoughts, / Neither are your ways / My ways, / Saith the Lord."

In the notes on contributors, Monroe mentioned that Wallace Stevens was "unknown as yet to the editor" ("Notes" 97), but such anonymity would not last. A year after *Poetry* published "Phases," it featured part of Stevens's masterpiece "Sunday Morning." Earlier, in the September 1915 issue, Monroe had praised his "Peter Quince at the Clavier" in a discussion of the little magazine *Others*, in which it had appeared, mentioning Stevens as one of six "of POETRY's poets." She wrote, ". . . Mr. Stevens has a sense of words, of rhythm and color, and better still, of things underneath which these reveal" ("Our Contemporaries" 316). "Phases" was Stevens's first major publication. The title gestures toward stages—stages of a moon, or of a war, or of a poem. The phases of "Phases" repeat, echo, transform. But, as the parrot of the first phase makes clear, there is a danger in just repeating words: the parrot "Will see us on parade . . . / And serenade." The words will be hollow, the song insincere. Glory must be taken with a grain of salt,

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as must sacrifice, as must tears. Contrasted with Agamemnon, the modern soldier has no mythology; he is "[o]nly . . . an eyeball in the mud." How then can we read "Fallen Winkle felt the pride / Of Agamemnon / When he died"? Is this epigram a "short, triumphant sting" or merely the parrot in the window repeating someone else's words?

Two years before he enlisted in the army and three years before he was wounded in the war, the literary editor of the *Egoist*, Richard Aldington, sent Monroe his poem "War Yawp." If the title and the paratactic and anaphoric lines hark back to Walt Whitman ("I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" [73]), they do so by introducing an event England and the United States share: Bunker Hill. The speaker's witty parenthetical about the event, that it is "(*[n]ot mentioned in o u r history books*)," betrays a deeper motive—that the poets are here writing the history of the war. "*D'you know what it's all about?*" the speaker asks. For a stanza that has no answers of its own, the only conclusion could be a sarcastic one: "*And we're going to win.*" "[I]t will be more fun afterwards," the speaker wryly asserts, "[m]ore fun for the poets and the painters" to "make their patterns."

Both history and art have patterns—here they are reds and golds, "Booms" and "dreams." These war poems, or, in Harriet Monroe's words, poems "in the interest of peace," show us how the sounds of war can have patterns and yet still be a barbaric yawp. We hope you find these poems and the relationships among these modernist personalities as fascinating as we do and then perhaps consider how their words might be relevant today. As a final thought, we'd like to end with a few lines from Aldington's poem: "The poets still make their music / Which nobody listens to, / Which hardly anyone ever listened to." Listen to it.

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POEMS OF WAR

THE METAL CHECKS

[*The scene is a bare room, with two shaded windows at the back, and a fireplace between them with a fire burning low. The room is furnished scantily with a few plain chairs, and a rough wooden table on which are piled a great many small wooden trays.* The Counter, *who is Death, sits at the table. He wears a loose gray robe, and his face is partly concealed by a gray veil. He does not look at* The Bearer, *but works mechanically and speaks in a monotonous tone.* The Bearer *is the World, that bears the burden of War. He wears a soiled robe of brown and green and he carries on his back a gunny-bag filled with the little metal disks that have been used for the identification of the slain common soldiers.*]

The Bearer

Here is a sack, a gunny sack,
A heavy sack I bring.
Here is toll of many a soul—
But not the soul of a king.

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This is the toll of common men,
Who lived in the common way;
Lived upon bread and wine and love,
In the light of the common day.

This is the toll of working men,
Blood and brawn and brain.
Who shall render us again
The worth of all the slain?

[*As* The Counter *speaks,* The Bearer *pours out the disks on the table.* The Bearer *obeys* The Counter.]

The Counter
Pour them out on the table here.
C l i c k e t y—c l i c k e t y—c l a c k !
For every button a man went out,
And who shall call him back?
C l i c k e t y—c l i c k e t y—c l a c k !

One—two—three—four—
Every disk a soul!
Three score—four score—
So many boys went out to war.
Pick up that one that fell on the floor—
Didn't you see it roll?
That was a man a month ago.
This was a man. Row upon row—
Pile them in tens and count them so.

The Bearer
I have an empty sack.
It is not large. Would you have said
That I could carry on my back
So great an army—and all dead?

[*As* The Counter *speaks* The Bearer *lays the sack over his arm and helps count.*]

The Counter
Put a hundred in each tray—
We can tally them best that way.
Careful—do you understand
You have ten men in your hand?
There's another fallen—there—
Under that chair.

[The Bearer *finds it and restores it.*]

That was a man a month ago;
He could see and feel and know.
Then, into his throat there sped
A bit of lead.
Blood was salt in his mouth; he fell
And lay amid the battle wreck.
Nothing was left but this metal check—
And a wife and child, perhaps.

[The Bearer *finds the bag on his arm troublesome. He holds it up, inspecting it.*]

The Bearer
What can one do with a thing like this?
Neither of life nor death it is!
For the dead serve not, though it served the dead.
The wounds it carried were wide and red,
Yet they stained it not. Can a man put food,
Potatoes or wheat, or even wood
That is kind and burns with a flame to warm
Living men who are comforted—
In a thing that has served so many dead?
There is no thrift in a graveyard dress,
It's been shroud for too many men.
I'll burn it and let the dead bless.

[*He crosses himself and throws it into the fire. He watches it burn.* The Counter *continues to pile up the metal checks, and drop them by hundreds into the trays which he piles one upon another.* The Bearer *turns from the fire and speaks more slowly than he has before. He indicates the metal checks.*]

Would not the blood of these make a great sea
For men to sail their ships on? It may be
No fish would swim in it, and the foul smell
Would make the sailors sick. Perhaps in Hell
There's some such lake for men who rush to war
Prating of glory, and upon the shore
Will stand the wives and children and old men

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bereft, to drive them back again
When they seek haven. Some such thing
I thought the while I bore it on my back
And heard the metal pieces clattering.

The Counter
Four score—five score—
These and as many more.
Forward—march!—into the tray!
No bugles blow today,
No captains lead the way;
But mothers and wives,
Fathers, sisters, little sons,
Count the cost
Of the lost;
And we count the unlived lives,
The forever unborn ones
Who might have been your sons.

The Bearer
Could not the hands of these rebuild
That which has been destroyed?
Oh, the poor hands! that once were
strong and filled
With implements of labor whereby they
Served home and country through the
peaceful day.
When those who made the war stand
face to face
With these slain soldiers in that
unknown place
Whither the dead go, what will be the
word
By dead lips spoken and by dead ears
heard?
Will souls say King or Kaiser? Will souls
prate
Of earthly glory in that new estate?

The Counter
One hundred thousand—
One hundred and fifty thousand—
Two hundred—

The Bearer
Can this check plough?
Can it sow? can it reap?
Can we arouse it?
Is it asleep?

Can it hear when a child cries?—
Comfort a wife?
This little metal disk
Stands for a life.

Can this check build,
Laying stone upon stone?
Once it was warm flesh
Folded on bone.

Sinew and muscle firm,
Look at it—can
This little metal check
Stand for a man?

The Counter
One—two—three—four—

Louise Driscoll

CHANT OF THE SHROUD MAKER

"We shall need also shrouds"

Others work for the living—
Be mine to work for the dead.
Afar there rages the battle loud;
With tender hands I fashion a shroud
For the clay when the soul has fled.

Soldier, stranger, friend,
Man I shall never see,
Loving, I weave a winding sheet
For one who has died for me.

Triply the sheet be folded
For the Blessed Trinity;
And on his bosom his folded hands
Unwanted now for life's demands,
And the scarlet cross shall be.

Soldier, brother, friend,
Face I shall never see,
Loving, I weave a winding sheet
For one who has died for me.

Cover the clay deserted
Now that the life has sped.
Prayers, blessings and grateful tears

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Follow his memory through the years:
Peace to the honored dead.

Soldier, brother, friend,
Man I shall never see;
Loving, I weave a winding sheet
For one who has died for me.

Marian Ramié

IF WAR IS RIGHT

If war is right, then God is might
And every prayer is vain:
Go raze your temples from the hills—
Red death is in the plain.

If war is right, then God is might,
And every prayer is vain:
Look not for Christ upon the hills—
He lies among the slain.

Parke Farley

THE HERO

Bomb and ball and shell
Had done their work so well
That, after many weeks,
The city fell—
(To save the women, so the burghers said.)

Then with red-dripping sword,
We, the enemy, poured
Down through the streets
To know what spoils the city might afford.
(What *are* the spoils of war?)

A corporal, nameless, with a little troop
Of nameless men, has stopped before a stoop
Whose door's ajar.
The corporal laughs. "Ha! Note the family group!"
(A man and wife, three daughters—and a dog.)

Ten of the soldiers enter. "Seize the goat.
No, no, don't shoot him—cut the villain's throat.
That's right, a little blood. Don't splutter so, you fool, before the ladies.
What, not dead yet? You've bled a quart, you bloat!"
(A corporal must have his joke, you know.)

"Well, let him die. There's tastier business now.
Here, you two nearest, strip me that old sow.
Too fat by far—but get those rags off, boys—
That's it. Now tie her up, so she can see the row."
(What *are* the spoils of war?)

"Now for the ninnies. Three to each, and quick!
Hell!—what a form! She'd make a queen look sick!
She's mine. You take the others,

And when you're through, a butt'll do the trick."
(A rifle butt is a handy thing, they say.)

An hour later.—"Stretch them in a row.

The old sow's fainted. Didn't like the show,
Perhaps. Fat—ugh! Better unburden her belly—
That's it—a twist of the sword. Well, bring the dog, and off we go."
(A mascot's good to keep the spirits up.)

. . . . . .

Again the howl of war;
Again the roar
Of cannon, and the rain
Of bombs from ships that soar.
(And we must win, for God is on our side!)

The devilish enemy
Force onward, sullenly.
We are turned, driven, routed—
Drop everything, and flee.
(Why does not God uphold the right?)

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But see! The flag is raised
And waved aloft! Amazed,
But ready to be led, we turn about.
'Tis the work of the very God we praised.
(Men can do worse than follow a flag.)

And there in the mighty din
We win,
And turn to see who bore the colors back.
We gather round and hem the hero in—
(A nameless corporal, now to be named
forever.)

. . . . . .

Mark where the hero stands,
A banner in his hands;
Banner of bronze in hands of bronze!
Bronze on granite forever he stands.
(Was he not chosen of God?)

John Russell McCarthy

THE BOMBARDMENT

Slowly, without force, the rain drops into the city. It stops a moment on the carved head of Saint John, then slides on again, slipping and trickling over his stone cloak. It splashes from the lead conduit of a gargoyle, and falls from it in turmoil on the stones in the Cathedral square. Where are the people, and why does the fretted steeple sweep about in the sky? Boom! The sound swings against the rain. Boom, again! After it, only water rushing in the gutters, and the turmoil from the spout of the gargoyle. Silence. Ripples and mutters. Boom!

The room is damp, but warm. Little flashes swarm about from the firelight. The lustres of the chandelier are bright, and clusters of rubies leap in the Bohemian glasses on the étagère. Her hands are restless, but the white masses of her hair are quite still. Boom! Will it never cease to torture, this iteration! Boom! The vibration shatters a glass on the étagère. It lies there formless and glowing, with all its crimson gleams shot out of pattern, spilled, flowing red, blood-red. A thin bell-note pricks through the silence. A door creaks. The old lady speaks: "Victor, clear away that broken glass." "Alas! Madame, the Bohemian glass!" "Yes, Victor, one hundred years ago my father brought it—" Boom! The room shakes, the servitor quakes. Another goblet shivers and breaks. Boom!

It rustles at the window-pane,—the smooth, streaming rain, and he is shut within its clash and murmur. Inside is his candle, his table, his ink, his pen, and his dreams. He is thinking, and the walls are pierced with beams of sunshine, slipping through young green. A fountain tosses itself up at the blue sky, and through the spattered water in the basin he can see copper carp, lazily floating among cold leaves. A wind-harp in a cedar-tree grieves and whispers, and words blow into his brain, bubbled, iridescent, shooting up like flowers of fire, higher and higher. Boom! The flame-flowers snap on their slender stems. The fountain rears up in long broken spears of disheveled water and flattens into the earth. Boom! And there is only the room, the table, the candle, and the sliding rain. Again, Boom!—Boom!—Boom!—He stuffs his fingers into his ears. He sees corpses, and cries out in fright. Boom! It is night, and they are shelling the city! Boom! Boom!

A child wakes and is afraid, and weeps in the darkness. What has made the bed shake? "Mother, where are you? I am awake." "Hush, my Darling, I am here." "But, Mother, something so queer happened, the room shook." Boom! "Oh! What is it? What is the matter?" Boom! "Where is father? I am so afraid." Boom! The child sobs and shrieks. The house trembles and creaks. Boom!

Retorts, globes, tubes, and phials lie shattered. All his trials oozing across the floor. The life that was his choosing, lonely, urgent, goaded by a hope, all gone. A weary man in a ruined laboratory, that was his story. Boom! Gloom and ignorance, and the jig of drunken

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

brutes. Diseases like snakes crawling over the earth, leaving trails of slime. Wails from people burying their dead. Through the window he can see the rocking steeple. A ball of fire falls on the lead of the roof, and the sky tears apart on a spike of flame. Up the spire, behind the lacings of stone, zig-zagging in and out of the carved tracings, squirms the fire. It spouts like yellow wheat from the gargoyles, coils round the head of Saint John, and aureoles him in light. It leaps into the night and hisses against the rain. The Cathedral is a burning stain on the white, wet night.

Boom! The Cathedral is a torch, and the houses next to it begin to scorch. Boom! The Bohemian glass on the étagère is no longer there. Boom! A stalk of flame sways against the red damask curtains. The old lady cannot walk. She watches the creeping stalk and counts. Boom!—Boom!—Boom!

The poet rushes into the street, and the rain wraps him in a sheet of silver. But it is threaded with gold and powdered with scarlet beads. The city burns. Quivering, spearing, thrusting, lapping, streaming, run the flames. Over roofs, and walls, and shops, and stalls. Smearing its gold on the sky, the fire dances, lances itself through the doors, and lisps and chuckles along the floors.

The child wakes again and screams at the yellow-petaled flower flickering at the window. The little red lips of flame creep along the ceiling beams.

The old man sits among his broken experiments and looks at the burning Cathedral. Now the streets are swarming with people. They seek shelter, and crowd into the cellars. They shout and call, and over all, slowly and without force, the rain drops into the city. Boom! And the steeple crashes down among the people. Boom! Boom, again! The water rushes along the gutters. The fire roars and mutters. Boom!

Amy Lowell.

AMONG THE RED GUNS

After waking at dawn one morning when the wind sang low among dry leaves in an elm

Among the red guns,
In the hearts of soldiers
Running free blood
In the long, long campaign:
  Dreams go on.

Among the leather saddles,
In the heads of soldiers
Heavy in the wracks and kills
Of all straight fighting:
  Dreams go on.

Among the hot muzzles,
In the hands of soldiers
Brought from flesh-folds of women—
Soft amid the blood and crying—
In all your hearts and heads
Among the guns and saddles and muzzles:

  Dreams,
Dreams go on,
Out of the dead on their backs,
Broken and no use any more:
Dreams of the way and the end go on.

Carl Sandburg

THE CAMP FOLLOWER

We spoke, the camp-follower and I.
About us was a cold, pungent odor—
Gun-powder, stale wine, wet earth, and
    the smell of thousands of men.
She said it reminded her of the scent
In the house of prostitutes she had lived in.
About us were soldiers—hordes of scarlet
    women, stupidly, smilingly giving up
    their bodies
To a putrid-lipped, chuckling lover—
    Death;
While their mistresses in tinsel whipped
    them on. . . .
She spoke of a woman she had known in
    Odessa,
Owner of a huge band of girls,

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Who had pocketed their earnings for years,
Only to be used, swindled and killed by
some nobleman. . . .
She said she thought of this grinning
woman
Whenever she saw an officer brought back
from battle, dead. . . .
And I sat beside her and wondered.

Maxwell Bodenheim

THE JEWISH CONSCRIPT

There are nearly a quarter of a million Jews in the Czar's army alone.

Newspaper clipping

They have dressed me up in a soldier's
dress,
With a rifle in my hand,
And have sent me bravely forth to shoot
My own in a foreign land.

Oh, many shall die for their fields and
homes,
And many in conquest wild,
But I shall die for the fatherland
That murdered my little child.

How many hundreds of years ago—
The nations wax and cease!—
Did the God of our fathers doom us to bear
The flaming message of peace!

We are the mock and the sport of time!
Yet why should I complain!—
For a Jew that they hung on the bloody
cross,
He also died in vain.

Florence Kiper Frank.

WHENCE COMES THE STRANGER

Whence comes this stranger
That with hoarse, lifted throat
Threatens the fields?

Night's darkness
And the darkness of mystery
Cover him as in a tent
Of two hides.

At twilight
I looked through the windows of my body,
And, lo!
The sheaves scattered,
And the rooted trees uptorn.

His feet are flails of iron:
What he has threshed
Only the birds of the air will gather.
Bedstraw and branch
Will lie, and rot,
And dig unseen graves.

The wind blows where it wills:
(The Gift of Heaven wrote it in Patmos).
I hear the sound thereof,
But cannot tell whence it comes,
Or whither it will go.

War rides, without thought,
On a pale horse
Through quiet places.
His banners are smoking torches;
His trumpets blow horribly.

He reaps a red harvest,
But not with the crooks of sickles.
The swaths fall slowly,
And the wings of vultures shadow them.

Love is a lamb, for weakness;
Kin a dove, for sorrow;
Peace the silence of a song.

He thunders,
And the suckling's cry
Is not heard:
He casts his lightning,
And flame breaks from the roofbeam:
He shakes the earth,
And the stones of the altar
Are dust.

At dawn
I looked through the windows of my spirit,
And, lo!

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A sower had passed,
Sowing.

For my thoughts
Are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways
My ways,
Saith the Lord.

Joseph Campbell

PHASES

I.

There's a little square in Paris,
Waiting until we pass.
They sit idly there,
They sip the glass.

There's a cab-horse at the corner,
There's rain. The season grieves.
It was silver once,
And green with leaves.

There's a parrot in a window,
Will see us on parade,
Hear the loud drums roll—
And serenade.

II.

This was the salty taste of glory,
That it was not
Like Agamemnon's story.
Only, an eyeball in the mud,
And Hopkins,
Flat and pale and gory!

III.

But the bugles, in the night,
Were wings that bore
To where our comfort was;
Arabesques of candle beams,
Winding
Through our heavy dreams;

Winds that blew
Where the bending iris grew;

Birds of intermitted bliss,
Singing in the night's abyss;

Vines with yellow fruit,
That fell
Along the walls
That bordered Hell.

IV.

Death's nobility again
Beautified the simplest men.
Fallen Winkle felt the pride
Of Agamemnon
When he died.

What could London's
Work and waste
Give him—
To that salty, sacrificial taste?

What could London's
Sorrow bring—
To that short, triumphant sting?

Wallace Stevens

FALLEN

He was wounded and he fell in the midst
of hoarse shouting.
The tide passed, and the waves came and
whispered about his ankles.
Far off he heard a cock crow—children
laughing,
Rising at dawn to greet the storm of petals
Shaken from apple-boughs; he heard them
cry,
And turned again to find the breast of her,
And sank confused with a little sigh. . . .
Thereafter water running, and a voice
That seemed to stir and flutter through
the trenches
And set dead lips to talking. . . .

Wreckage was mingled with the storm of
petals. . . .

He felt her near him, and the weight
dropped off—
Suddenly. . . .

Alice Corbin

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.5.1747 Published online by Cambridge University Press

THE WAKENED GOD

The War-god wakened drowsily;
There were gold chains about his hands.
He said: "And who shall reap my lands
And bear the tithes to Death for me?

"The nations stilled my thunderings;
They wearied of my steel despair,
The flames from out my burning hair:
Is there an ending of such things?"

Low laughed the Earth, and answered: "When
Was any changeless law I gave
Changed by my sons intent to save,
By puny pitying hands of men?

"I feel no ruth for some I bear. . . .
The swarming, hungering overflow
Of crowded millions, doomed to go,
They must destroy who chained you there.

"For some bright stone or shining praise
They stint a million bodies' breath,
And sell the women, shamed, to death,
And send the men brief length of days.

"They kill the bodies swift for me,
And kill the souls you gave to peace. . . .
You were more merciful than these,
Old master of my cruelty.

"Lo, souls are scarred and virtues dim:
Take back thy scourge of ministry,
Rise from thy silence suddenly,
Lest these still take Death's toll to him!"

The War-God snapped his golden chain:
His mercies thundered down the world,
And lashing battle-lines uncurled
And scourged the crouching lands again.

Margaret Widdemer

UNSER GOTT

They held a great prayer-service in Berlin,
And augured German triumph from some words
Said to be spoken by the Jewish God
To Gideon, which signified that He
Was staunchly partial to the Israelites.
The aisles were thronged; and in the royal box
(I had it from a tourist who was there,
Clutching her passport, anxious, like the rest,)
There sat the Kaiser, looking "very sad."
And then they sang; she said it shook the heart.
The women sobbed; tears salted bearded lips
Unheeded; and my friend looked back and saw
A young girl crumple in her mother's arms.
They carried out a score of them, she said,
While German hearts, through bursting German throats
Poured out, *Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott!*

(Yea, "Unser Gott! Our strength is *Unser* Gott!
Not that light-minded Bon Dieu of France!")

I think we all have made our God too small.
There was a young man, a good while ago
Who taught that doctrine. . . . but they murdered him
Because he wished to share the Jewish God
With other folk.
They are long-lived, these fierce
Old hating Gods of nations; but at last
There surely will be spilled enough of blood
To drown them all! The deeps of sea and air,
Of old the seat of gods, no more are safe,
For mines and monoplanes. The Germans, now,
Can surely find and rout the God of France
With Zeppelins, or some slim mother's son
Of Paris, or of Tours, or Brittany,

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Can drop a bomb into the *Feste Burg*,
And, having crushed the source of German
strength,
Die happy in his blazing monoplane.

Sad jesting! If there be no God at all,
Save in the heart of man, why, even so—
Yea, all the more,—since we must make
our God,
Oh, let us make Him large enough for all,
Or cease to prate of Him! If kings must
fight,
Let them fight for their glory, openly,
And plain men for their lands and for their
homes,
And heady youths, who go to see the fun,
Blaspheme not God. True, maybe we might
leave
The God of Germany to some poor frau
Who cannot go, who can but wait and
mourn,
Except that she will teach Him to her
sons—
A God quite scornful of the Slavic soul,
And much concerned to keep Alsace-
Lorraine.
They should go godless, too—the poor,
benumbed,
Crushed, anguished women, till their
hearts can hold
A greater Comforter!
(Yet it is hard
To make Him big enough! For me, I like
The English and the Germans and the
French,
The Russians, too; and Servians, I should
think,
Might well be very interesting to God.
But, do the best I may, my God is white,
And hardly takes a nigger seriously
This side of Africa. Not those, at least
Who steal my wood, and of a summer night
Keep me awake with shouting, where they
sit
With monkey-like fidelity and glee
Grinding through their well-oiled sausage-
mill—
The dead machinery of the white man's
church—
Raw jungle-fervor, mixed with scraps
sucked dry
Of Israel's old sublimities: not those.
And when they threaten us, the Higher
Race,
Think you, which side is God's? Oh, let us
pray
Lest blood yet spurt to wash that black skin
white,
As now it flows because a German hates
A Cossack, and an Austrian a Serb!)

What was it that he said so long ago,
The young man who outgrew the Jewish
God—
"Not a sparrow falleth—?" Ah, God, God,
And there shall fall a million murdered
men!

Karle Wilson Baker

WAR YAWP

America!
England's cheeky kid brother,
Who bloodily assaulted your august elder
At Bunker Hill and similar places
(Not mentioned in o u r history books),
What can I tell you of war or of peace?
Say, have you forgotten 1861?
Bull Run, Gettysburg, Fredericksburg?
Your million dead?
Tell me,
Was that the greatest time of your lives
Or the most disastrous?
Who knows? Not you; not I.
Who can tell the end of this war?
And say, brother Jonathan,
D'you know what it's all about?
Let me whisper you a secret—we don't!
We were all too fat with peace,
Or perhaps we didn't quite know how good
peace was,
And so here we are,
And we're going to win. . . .

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It's fine to be a soldier,
To get accepted by the recruiting sergeant,
Be trained, fitted with a uniform and a gun,
Say good-bye to your girl,
And go off to the front
Whistling, "It's a long way to Tipperary."
It's good to march forty miles a day,
Carrying ninety-one pounds on your back,
To eat good coarse food, get blistered, tired out, wounded,
Thirst, starve, fight like a devil
(*i. e.*, like you an' me, Jonathan),
With the Maxims zip-zipping
And the shrapnel squealing,
And the howitzers rumbling like the traffic in Piccadilly.

Civilization?—
Jonathan, if you could hear them
Whistling the *Marseillaise* or *Marching Through Georgia*,
You'd want to go too.
Twenty thousand a day, Jonathan!
Perhaps you're more civilized just now than we are,
Perhaps we've only forgotten civilization for a moment,
Perhaps we're really fighting for peace.
And after all it will be more fun afterwards—
More fun for the poets and the painters—
When the cheering's all over
And the dead men buried
And the rest gone back to their jobs.
It'll be more fun for them to make their patterns,
Their word-patterns and color-patterns.
And after all, there is always war and always peace,
Always the war of the crowds,
Always the great peace of the arts.

Even now,
With the war beating in great waves overhead,
Beating and roaring like great winds and mighty waters,
The sea-gods still pattern the red seaweed fronds,
Still chip the amber into neck-chains
For Leucothea and Thetis.
Even now,
When the *Marseillaise* screams like a hurt woman,
And Paris—grisette among cities—trembles with fear,
The poets still make their music
Which nobody listens to,
Which hardly anyone ever listened to.

The great crowds go by,
Fighting over each other's bodies in peace-time,
Fighting over each other's bodies in war-time.
Something of the strife comes to them
In their little, high rock-citadel of art,
Where they hammer their dreams in gold and copper,
Where they cut them in pine-wood, in Parian stone, in wax,
Where they sing them in sweet bizarre words
To the sound of antiquated shrill instruments;
And they are happy.
The little rock-citadel of the artists
Is always besieged;
There, though they have beauty and silence,
They have always tears and hunger and despair.
But that little citadel has held out
Against all the wars of the world—
Like England, brother Jonathan.
It will not fall during the great war.

There is always war and always peace;
Always the war of the crowds,
Always the great peace of the arts.

Richard Aldington

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