

Poems for Haskell Small's *Lullaby of War*

**War is Kind**

Stephen Crane

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.  
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky  
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,  
Little souls who thirst for fight,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
The unexplained glory flies above them,  
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom --  
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.  
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,  
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,  
Eagle with crest of red and gold,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,  
Make plain to them the excellence of killing  
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button  
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

**NO**

Joy Harjo

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The version used here is that which was published in the anthology, *Poets Against the War*, edited by Sam Hamill (2003, Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, New York, NY).

Yes that was me you saw shaking with bravery, with a government issued rifle on my back. I'm sorry I could not greet you as you deserved, my relative.

No. They were not my tears. I have a reservoir inside. They will be cried by my sons, my daughters if I can't learn how to turn tears to stone.

Yes, that was me standing in the back door of the house in the alley, with a bowl of beans in my hands for the neighbors, a baby on my hip.

No. I did not foresee the flood of blood. How they would forget our friendship, would return to kill me and the baby.

Yes, that was me whirling on the dance floor. We made such a racket with all that joy. I loved the whole world in that silly music.

No. I did not realize the terrible dance in the staccato of bullets.

Yes. I smelled the burning grease of corpses after they were lit by the pages of our poems. And like a fool I expected our words might rise up and jam the artillery in the hands of dictators.

No. We had to keep going. Our songs of grief cleaned the air of enemy spirits.

Yes, I did see the terrible black clouds over the suburb as I cooked dinner. And the messages of the dying spelled there in the ashy sunset. Every one addressed: "mother".

No, there was nothing about it in the news. Everything was the same. Unemployment was up. Another queen crowned with flowers. Then there were the sports scores.

Yes, the distance was great between your country and mine. Yet our children played in the path between our houses.

We had no quarrel with each other.

**Recitative (VIII)** (excerpts)

from *Requiem for the Dead of Europe*  
Yvan Goll (tr. Patrick Bridgwater).  
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Like a grey wall around Europe  
The long battle ran.  
Oh, the monotony of trench-warfare! Oh, trench-grave! Oh, sleep of starvation!  
The bridges built of corpses!  
The roads built of corpses!  
The walls cemented with corpses!

For months on end the horizon stared mysteriously and glassily like a dead man's eye.

For months on end the distance rang like the same old passing-bell,  
The days alike as a pair of graves.

Oh, you Greek dancers, dwarfed in lousy caverns!

Popping up like Indians when the drums sounded the attack;  
Before sticking your bayonet into his groin, did not one of you see the Christ-like look of

his opponent, did not one of you notice that the man over there had a kingly heart full of love?

Did not one of you still believe in his own and mankind's conscience?  
You brothers, fellow-men! Oh, you heroes!

**Naming Souls**

Uri Zvi Greenberg (tr. Jon Silkin and Ezra Spicehandler). Copyright owned by the family of Uri Zvi Greenberg. Used by permission. Permission to use translation granted by Dr. Ezra Spicehandler and by the Executors of the Literary Estate of Jon Silkin.

An hour is held deep, in the underneath of time.  
In the religion of purification  
men's innerness  
stands stripped of garments in the dusk  
and prays to see God's image. Ah, if only I could bear up  
the cup of bitterness,  
my eyes turned inwards, I would drink to the terror  
in the eyes  
of soldiers, brothers whom I fought with  
and reached the Sawa's waters.

They fell, tangled on the wire,  
their feet raised high,  
and that wail, essence of their dying, lasted only  
a moment; they died, then,  
very dark.

I stood on my own, the last  
of the species that fight,  
seeing these brothers, with feet turned upwards, growing  
until they reached the sky, in death,  
to kick it. I saw  
the moon like an animal  
rub a silver face on the worn nails in the boots  
of upturned soldiers.

This fearful glowing on the nails in the boots of the dead  
who kick at God, electrified  
my being with a terror  
that shone as if I were dying. With the flesh's  
eyes, I saw the divine  
in fear's mystery, in men falling. I cried  
then, as if I were the last to cry  
who never again in life  
will cry what I wept  
on the Sawa's water.

**Look Down, Fair Moon**

*From Leaves of Grass*  
Walt Whitman

Look down, fair moon, and bathe this scene;  
Pour down night's nimbus floods on faces ghastly, swollen, purple;  
On the dead on their backs, with their arms toss'd wide,  
Pour down your unstinted nimbus, sacred moon.

**Guernica Pantoum**

*Paula Tatarunis*  
*From Poets Against the War, edited by Sam Hamill*  
*(2003, Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, New York, NY).*  
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Of the eighteen eyes in Guernica, sixteen are open.  
Of its nine mouths, eight gape and cry.  
There is a bull, a bird, a horse, one child broken,  
one mother grieving; elsewhere, others fall, flee, watch, die.

Not nine mouths, but eight gape and cry  
with impeccable lips, palates, tongues, teeth.  
One woman grieves; others fall, flee, watch, or die  
while lance and flame menace their raw breath.

With impeccable lips, palates, tongues and teeth  
eight mouths siren terrible laments  
until lance and flame, transfixing their raw breath,  
become the pivot of a deathward dance.

Eight mouths will siren terrible laments  
for a child's face folded like a sleeping rose.  
Around the pivot of a deathward dance  
sixteen eyes glare like embers, cannot close.

I sing for a child's face, a sleeping rose,  
beside a bull, a bird's throat, a pierced mare,  
under sixteen eyes like embers that refuse to close  
amidst fanged flames and cascades of hair;

I sing for a bull, a bird, a pierced mare  
as darkness and dust refract gray arcs-en-ciel  
collapsing between fanged flames and falling hair,  
between candlewicks and the ghosts of petals.

As darkness and dust refract gray arcs-en-ciel  
savagery inspects, approves what it has fractured.  
Between candlewicks and the ghosts of petals,  
it celebrates what it has tainted and ruptured.

Savagery extracts the joy from what it's fractured  
then spills and wastes it on the hungry dust.  
It celebrates taint amidst the strew and rupture  
beneath an icy sun and incendiary frost.

Spilled and wasted on the hungry dust,  
joy will take root and rise as rage,  
and thrive on icy sun or incendiary frost,  
then march like soldiers off the burning page.

Spilled joy will take root and rise as rage,  
will speak for the lips that have fallen together  
will charge like armies off the bitter page  
will riot like paint beyond the frame's tether.

They call us from the ruins- four weeping women,  
a bull, a bird, a horse, one woman and one child broken.  
Of what they have seen let us sing and sing again!  
(Of the eighteen eyes in Guernica, sixteen are open.)