

Making Peace

BY DENISE LEVERTOV

A voice from the dark called out,
 'The poets must give us
imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only
the absence of war.'

 But peace, like a poem,
is not there ahead of itself,
can't be imagined before it is made,
can't be known except
in the words of its making,
grammar of justice,
syntax of mutual aid.

 A feeling towards it,
dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have
until we begin to utter its metaphors,
learning them as we speak.

 A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
questioned our needs, allowed
long pauses . . .

 A cadence of peace might balance its weight
on that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,
an energy field more intense than war,
might pulse then,
stanza by stanza into the world,
each act of living
one of its words, each word
a vibration of light—facets
of the forming crystal.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>

Night and the Madman

BY KAHLIL GIBRAN

“I am like thee, O, Night, dark and naked; I walk on the flaming path which is above my day-dreams, and whenever my foot touches earth a giant oak tree comes forth.”

“Nay, thou art not like me, O, Madman, for thou still lookest backward to see how large a foot-print thou leavest on the sand.”

“I am like thee, O, Night, silent and deep; and in the heart of my loneliness lies a Goddess in child-bed; and in him who is being born Heaven touches Hell.”

“Nay, thou art not like me, O, Madman, for thou shudderest yet before pain, and the song of the abyss terrifies thee.”

“I am like thee, O, Night, wild and terrible; for my ears are crowded with cries of conquered nations and sighs for forgotten lands.”

“Nay, thou art not like me, O, Madman, for thou still takest thy little-self for a comrade, and with thy monster-self thou canst not be friend.”

“I am like thee, O, Night, cruel and awful; for my bosom is lit by burning ships at sea, and my lips are wet with blood of slain warriors.”

“Nay, thou art not like me, O, Madman; for the desire for a sister-spirit is yet upon thee, and thou has not become alone unto thyself.”

“I am like thee, O, Night, joyous and glad; for he who dwells in my shadow is now drunk with virgin wine, and she who follows me is sinning mirthfully.”

“Nay, thou art not like me, O, Madman, for thy soul is wrapped in the veil of seven folds and thou holdest not thy heart in thine

hand.”

“I am like thee, O, Night, patient and passionate; for in my breast
a thousand dead lovers are buried in shrouds of withered kisses.”

“Yea, Madman, art thou like me? Art thou like me? And canst thou
ride the tempest as a steed, and grasp the lightning as a sword?”

“Like thee, O, Night, like thee, mighty and high, and my throne is
built upon heaps of fallen Gods; and before me too pass the days
to kiss the hem of my garment but never to gaze at my face.”

“Art thou like me, child of my darkest heart? And dost thou think
my untamed thoughts and speak my vast language?”

“Yea, we are twin brothers, O, Night; for thou revealest space and
I reveal my soul.”

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>

Trail of Tears: Our Removal

BY LINDA HOGAN

With lines unseen the land was broken.
When surveyors came, we knew
what the prophet had said was true,
this land with unseen lines would be taken.

So, you who live there now,
don't forget to love it, thank it
the place that was once our forest,
our ponds, our mosses,
the swamplands with birds and more lowly creatures.

As for us, we walked into the military strength of hunger
and war for that land we still dream.
As the ferry crossed the distance,
or as the walkers left behind their loved ones,
think how we took with us our cats and kittens,
the puppies we loved. We were innocent of what we faced,
along the trail. We took clothing, dishes,
thinking there would be something to start a new life,
believing justice lived in the world,
and the horses, so many,
one by one stolen, taken by the many thieves

So have compassion for that land at least.

Every step we took was one away from the songs,
old dances, memories, some of us dark and not speaking English,
some of us white, or married to the dark, or children of translators
the half-white, all of us watched by America, all of us
longing for trees for shade, homing, rooting,
even more for food along the hunger way.

You would think those of us born later
would fight for justice, for peace,
for the new land, its trees being taken.

You would think
the struggle would be over
between the two worlds in this place
that is now our knowledge,
our new belonging, our being,
and we'd never again care for the notion of maps
or American wars, or the god of their sky,
thinking of those things we were forced to leave behind,
living country, stolen home,
the world measured inch by inch, mile by mile,
hectares, all measurements, even the trail of our tears.

With all the new fierce light, heat, drought
the missing water, you'd think
in another red century, the old wisdom
might exist if we considered enough
that even before the new beliefs
we were once whole,
but now our bodies and minds remain
the measured geography.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>

The End and the Beginning

BY WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA

TRANSLATED BY JOANNA TRZECIAK

After every war
someone has to clean up.
Things won't
straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble
to the side of the road,
so the corpse-filled wagons
can pass.

Someone has to get mired
in scum and ashes,
sofa springs,
splintered glass,
and bloody rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder
to prop up a wall.
Someone has to glaze a window,
rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,
and takes years.
All the cameras have left
for another war.

We'll need the bridges back,
and new railway stations.
Sleeves will go ragged
from rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand,
still recalls the way it was.

Someone else listens
and nods with unsevered head.
But already there are those nearby
starting to mill about
who will find it dull.

From out of the bushes
sometimes someone still unearths
rusted-out arguments
and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew
what was going on here
must make way for
those who know little.
And less than little.
And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown
causes and effects,
someone must be stretched out
blade of grass in his mouth
gazing at the clouds.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>

Dulce et Decorum Est

BY WILFRED OWEN

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 writhing 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,
Obscene as cancer, bitter 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.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>

“After Experience Taught Me ...”

BY W. D. SNODGRASS

After experience taught me that all the ordinary
Surroundings of social life are futile and vain;

I'm going to show you something very
Ugly: someday, it might save your life.

Seeing that none of the things I feared contain
In themselves anything either good or bad

What if you get caught without a knife;
Nothing—even a loop of piano wire;

Excepting only in the effect they had
Upon my mind, I resolved to inquire

Take the first two fingers of this hand;
Fork them out—kind of a “V for Victory”—

Whether there might be something whose discovery
Would grant me supreme, unending happiness.

And jam them into the eyes of your enemy.
You have to do this hard. Very hard. Then press

No virtue can be thought to have priority
Over this endeavor to preserve one's being.

Both fingers down around the cheekbone
And setting your foot high into the chest

No man can desire to act rightly, to be blessed,
To live rightly, without simultaneously

You must call up every strength you own
And you can rip off the whole facial mask.

Wishing to be, to act, to live. He must ask
First, in other words, to actually exist.

And you, whiner, who wastes your time
Dawdling over the remorseless earth,
What evil, what unspeakable crime
Have you made your life worth?

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>