

WAR POETRY

by

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*poems about World War I and World War II
available individually or altogether for anyone
wanting to record and produce them*

WAR

for Max Ernst

I watch the Beast as it licks itself
The better to confound itself with all that surrounds it
Its storm-colored eyes
Are unexpectedly the pond dragging to itself
 the filthy linen the rubbish
That one that always stops man
The pond with its little Place de l'Opera in its belly
Because phosphorescence is the key to the eyes of the Beast
That licks itself
And its tongue
Thrust one never knows beforehand in what direction
In a crossroad of braziers
From below I contemplate its palate
Made of lamps in bags
And beneath the royal blue vault
Of ungilded arches set in perspective one within the other
While blows the breath made of the infinite generalization
 of that of one of those bare-chested wretches
 who appear in public squares swallowing gasoline torches
 in an acrid shower of pennies
The pustules of the Beast grow resplendent in those hecatombs
 of young men on which the Number gorges
With its flanks protected by the shimmering scales that are armies
All domed and each of them turning perfectly on its hinge
Although they all depend on one another no less than cocks
 that insult each other from dungheap to dungheap
One touches the flaw of conscience yet some persist
 in arguing that day will break
The door I wanted to say the Beast licks itself beneath its wing
And one sees crooks shaken is it with laughter at the back of a tavern
That mirage that they have made out to be the good is open to discussion
It is a bed of quicksilver
It could be lapped up all at one go
I thought the Beast was turning towards me I saw again
 the filth of the lightning
How white it is in its membranes in the looseness of its white birchwoods
 where they keep watch

In the ropes of its ships at whose prow a woman dives
 who has been adorned with a green harlequin mask
 by the toils of love
False alarm the Beast keeps its claws in an erectile crown around its nipples
I try not to be too unsteady when it stirs its tail
That is at the same time the bevelled carriage and the whiplash
In the suffocating odor of tiger-beetles
From its lair befouled with black blood and gold towards the moon
 it sharpens one of its horns on the enthusiastic tree of grudges
It coils itself with frightening languors
Petted
The Beast licks its sex I said nothing

--ANDRE BRETON

WAR (alternate translation)

for Max Ernst

I watch the Beast as it licks itself
The better to blend into all of its surroundings
Its eyes the color of heavy seas
Unexpectedly are the pond drawing unto itself the dirty linen the garbage
The one that always stops man
The pond with its little Place de l'Opera in its belly
Because phosphorescence is the key to the eyes of the Beast
That licks itself
And its tongue
Darting one never knows in advance in what direction
Is a plexus of furnaces
From underneath I gaze at its palate
Made of lamps in bags
And under the royal blue vault
Of ungilded arches arrayed in perspective one within the other
While the breath runs rampant being made of the infinite generalization
 of one of those bare-chested wretches
 who appear in the public square swallowing kerosene torches
 in an acrid shower of coins
The Beast's pustules are resplendent owing to the immolations of young men
 on which the Number gorges
Its flanks protected by the shimmering scales that armies are
Convex scales each one of which turns perfectly on its pivot
Although they depend on each other no less than roosters
 that jeer at each other at dawn from dungheap to dungheap
The default of consciousness is at hand yet some persistently maintain
 that the day will dawn
The door I meant the Beast licks itself under the wing
And some thieves can be seen convulsed as it with laughter
 in the back of a tavern
The mirage alleged to have been goodness is rationalized
It's a lode of quicksilver
Such as could be lapped up in one gulp
I thought the Beast was turning toward me I saw the filth
 of lightning once again
How white it is in its membranes in the nimbleness of its birch groves
 where a lookout is being posted
In the riggings of its ships at whose prow a woman is plunging
 whom the exertions of lovemaking have adorned with a green mask

False alarm the Beast holds its claws in an erectile crown around the breasts
I try not to falter too much when it wags its tail
Which is at the same time the beveled coach and the whiplash
In the suffocating smell of the tiger-beetle
From its litter fouled with black blood and gold
 it sharpens one of its horns moonward on the enthusiastic tree of wrongs
By coiling itself with fearsome lasciviousness
Flattered
The Beast licks its sex I've said nothing

--ANDRE BRETON

from MR AA THE ANTIPHILOSOPHER

1

Captain!
the thunderbolts,
the full might of the waterfall menaces us,
the knot of serpents,
the cat-o'-nine-tails,
triumphantly march into countries
contaminated with continual strife;

Captain!

all the accusations of ill-treated animals,
yawn, in bites above the bed,
in rose-windows of blood,
the rain of stone teeth
and the excrement stains in the cages
shroud us in endless snowlike cloaks;

Captain!

the brightness of the coal becoming seal,
lightning, insect under your eyes,
the squadrons of moonstruck people,
the monsters on wheels,
the screams of mechanical sleepwalkers,
the liquid stomachs on silver salvers,
the cruelties of carnivorous flowers
will overrun the simple country day
and the cinema of your sleep;

Captain!

beward of blue eyes.

--TRISTAN TZARA

from **GOOD TIME**

2

blighted fruits
jagged walls
dead snow
polluted hours
locked steps
have broken up the streets
the disgrace of living
floods my eyes

furnaces dead
toothless laughter
squares trampled
harassed old-age
outlined in the hearth
all the misery
in order to tread on
the disemboweled horses
in the arena of heads
shutters stolen
open houses
children outside
straw words
as the only truth

empty mattress
no use for sleeping
or laughing or dreaming
cold in your guts
iron in the snow
burning in your throat
what have you done what have you done
hands warm with tenderness
have you lost the heaven
in your head through the world
in stone in the wind
friendship and the smile
like dogs run wild
like dogs

--TRISTAN TZARA

RETREAT

birds childhood ploughs quick
inns
battle at the pyramids
eighteenth brumaire
the cat the cat is saved
entrance
cry
valmy
long live turn red
cry
in the hole trumpet small slow bells
cry
the chapped hands of trees order
cry
to him
post
to the white to the bird
let's cry
you cry
slide

You wear nailed on your scars moon proverbs
tanned moon spread your diaphragm on the horizon
moon eye tanned in a black viscous liquid
vibrations the deafman
heavy animals fleeing in tangent circles
of muscles tar heat
the pipes bend braid
the bowels
blue

--TRISTAN TZARA

DEATH

Greater than the beef steak is death
he walks through the land with those monstrous eyes like two cinnabar-clouds
so that the sun sinks in pale fear the policeman freezes
and the sea screams what a miracle in its sleep
yes processions of hearses jostling waggons with well-fed corpses
also virgins on whose lips and brows the kiss has turned stiff
mother's body convulsed the immeasurable made by god
yes he sings more powerfully than the priests' litanies
sending up steam and trumpets' call
nations burst apart little grumblers children yes hopeless pleading
God God God he flings the cloak round his lions
breathes into the cities where lying weeping and inconsolable on beds
we are forced to comprehend the incomprehensible
he descends on shoulders and necks before we realize
strokes soft cheeks and mouth hound
Almighty killer revolutionary
we are respect and simultaneously disrespect
which we humans form in your likeness

--RICHARD HUELSENBECK

CLAPERSTON DIES OF FISH POISONING

Your bellies are large copper drums
The hearses wheel across your ear with wailing and weeping
O – O behold the noses which hang on the door leaves
We hold our fist in our hand and sing the Watch on the Rhine
We take the soup tureen and fall silent in awe
The flame leaped out from the city and the fish stand in rank and file
Behold the postman and the bosom of the prima donna
The clergymen have organized themselves
The ash cans have organized themselves
Murder is trumps
Thus be blessed among women
Old boy (it's time – it's time)

--RICHARD HUELSENBECK

HYMNUS I

Thou lord of the birds, dogs and cats,
of spirits and bodies,
of spooks and dingbats,
Thou above and below,
by the right, by the left,
straight on, about turn and halt,
The spirit is in thee and thou are in it,
and you are in you
and we are in us.

Thou are resurrected, who once was vanquished.
The unbound one who tore his chains,
The almighty art thou, the all-nightly, most knightly,
with a burning pot on your pate.

The thunder in thy box has exploded in all directions and languages.
Thy tin-neck towers and thy spoke soars,
in reason and unreason,
in the realms of the quick and the dead.

Thou camest with might roars,
basinet of rebellion, crowing-trumpet, son of the earth.
In fiery chasms and the bullets' hail,
in dying whimpers and endless curses,
In clouds of printer's ink, communion wafers and cakes,
and countless blasphemous verses.

So we behold thee, so we hold thee,
in a rain of faces carved from agate.
On toppled thrones, ruptured cannon,
on tatters of newspaper, foreign notes and shares,
Gaily adorned dolly,
thou has held the sword of justice above the doctrinaires.

Thou God of maledictions and sewers, demon prince,
God the the possessed.
Thou mannequin with violets, garters, perfumes
and painted with a whore's face.

Thy seven kooks are cocking snooks,
thy great aunts are miscreants,
thy headgear's a red sphere.

Thou prince of sickness and remedy,
Father of the Bulbos and Tenderendae,
Of arsenics and salvarsans, gas taps,
soaped nooses and booby traps,
Thou undoer of all ties, casuist of every twist and turn,
Thou God of lamps and candelabras,
thou nourishest thyself on light cones, triangles and stars.

Thou torture wheel,
Ferris wheel of pain, homocentaurus,
thou sailest in winged trousers through the sick bay.

Thou wood, copper, bronze,
zinc, gable and mast,
an iron bell,
thou whirrest smoothly past.

Thou magic quadrate, now it's too late,
thou mystic *quartier*, Ambrosian steer,
Lord of our denudation,
they five fingers are the foundation of our salvation.

Lord of our dog Latin and hunter's cant,
lament-o-tympani of our existence,
eternalist, communist, Antichrist,
Oh! most sagacious sagacity of Solomon!

--HUGO BALL

HYMNUS 2

Thou who hast pushed our maids of honor,
our posies and perfumeries
and our intoxicating drugs to one side,
We greet thee with bombards, pipes and chimes,
with ringing cymbals and torrents of words.

Thou who has cast our moon-calves,
our cook-book and astrologies onto the streets,
Who has cried out with the voice of ten thousand changelings,
Who drew near and made his entry,
laughing kite and triumphator,
We greet thee with promissory notes, tin,
enamel, paper and pin money.

Thou who holdest in custody scrofulous children and zebras
in the cheek pouches of thy be-horned head,
The dallying poet, the passionate pleb,
the newspaperman and the priest
have offered themselves up for a Mark.

Pierce our noses with the ring of thine omnipotence,
place a fence in our jaws and bridle our splendor.

We make a great song and dance in raiments of rags and paper,
of window glass, tar-board and cement.

We swing our pan-Germanic crab-sticks,
painted with runes and swastikas.

Thy kingdom stretcheth from the navel to the knees,
and the Lutheran codfish barks.

Save us, O Lord,
from the persecutions of the heretics and utopians,
the Fiend and prophets.

Save us, O Lord,
from the conceits of the theoreticasters and liturgists,
from the united bell-ringers.

Lead us, O Lord,
from this land of duty-bigs,
of cold damp cakes and towns cobbled with death certificates.

Cease thy beating on wood, copper,
bronze, ivory,
stone and thine other mighty drums.

Cease parading our dead before our eyes
and disturbing our warmth,
Oh Lord, we pray thee.

Cease placing the ghosts on our table,
the ghosts in our coffee cups,
and the incubi will stop rustling in the stair joists.

--HUGO BALL

DENISE WAS SAYING TO THE WONDERS:

Evening was drawing swallows in its wake. The owls
Were taking turns in the sun and weighing on the earth
Like the untiring steps of a lonely man
Unnaturally pale and sleeping while he stood.

Evening was drawing white weapons over our heads.
Courage burned the women in our midst,
They were weeping, crying out like animals,
Troubled men had fallen to their knees.

Evening, a trivial thing, a swallow flying by
A little wind, the leaves no longer falling,
A fine detail, a magic stripped of power
For eyes without experience of space.

--PAUL ELUARD

BENEDICTION

Wandering, in a boat, up north
In the trumpet of birds
Fish in their element.

The man who hollows his crown
Ignites a brazier in the bell,
A beautiful anthill-brazier.

And the warrior cased in steel
Who is roasted on a spit.
Learns love and music.

--PAUL ELUARD

GOSPEL SILENCE

We are sleeping with red angels
who show us the desert without small letters
and those sweet desolate awakenings.

We are sleeping.

A single wing destroys us, evasion,
we have wheels older than the feathers
flown away and lost,
with which to explore the graveyards of slowness,
the only lust.

The bottle we surround
with the bandages of our wounds resists no longing.

Let's take the hearts, the brains,
the muscles of rage,
let's take the invisible flowers
of the pale girls and children joined together,
let's take the hand of memory,
let's close the eyes of recollection,
a theory of trees delivered by the thieves
strikes us and divides us,
all the pieces are good.
Which will gather them up:
terror, suffering, or disgust?

Let us sleep, my brothers.
The inexplicable chapter has become incomprehensible.
Giants go by exhaling terrible laments,
gigantic laments,
laments of the kind the dawn wants to utter,
the dawn now no longer able to complain,
since then,
my brothers,
since then.

--PAUL ELUARD

PERSPECTIVE

A thousand savages
Are fixing for a fight.
They carry weapons,
They have mighty courage
As they slowly form a line
To face a thousand green trees
Which, despite appearances,
Still value all their leaves.

--PAUL ELUARD

PARIS IN WARTIME

Animals coming down from the suburbs aflame,
Birds agitating murderous feathers,
A terrible yellow sky, clouds that are bare,
To that one statue, all year long, bring praise.

Beautiful is the living statue of love,
O noontime snow, bellies warm in the sun,
O flames of sleep on an angelic face,
On all of the nights, on each and every face.

Silence. Resounding silence of her dreams
Caresses the horizon. Her dreams are ours.
From the blade of her sword, forced to desire's hands,
Tempests intoxicate the world set free.

--PAUL ELUARD

from **LIKE AN IMAGE**

IV

Armor of prey black perfume radiates
trees are trimmed from a landscape in almond
cradle of all landscapes keys dice
marigold plains alabaster mountains
suburban lamps prudence storms
unexpected gestures sworn to the fire
the routes that separate the sea from its dead
all the indecipherable riddles.

The thistle flower builds a castle
it climbs the ladder of the wind
and seeds momento mori.
Ebony stars on glistening windows
promise everything to their lovers
the others who fake it
maintain the leaden order.

The silent unhappiness of the man
his face early morning
opens like a prison
his eyes are severed heads
his fingers serve to count

to measure to take to convince
his fingers know how to bind him.

Public ruin
its emotion in pieces
its enthusiasm at sea
finery suspended by the terrors of the lightning
livid pastures where rocks bounce
to an end
a tomb decorated by three pretty trinkets
a veil of silk over the slowness of lust
to an end
an axe in the back with a single blow.

In the ravines of sleep
silence addresses its infants
here the fatal noise that splits the eardrum
the dusty death of colors
idiocy
here the first laziness
and the mechanical motions of insomnia
the ear the reeds bow like a helmet
the demanding ear a forgotten enemy in the fog
and the inexhaustible silence
that upsets nature in not naming it
that spreads smiling snares
or absences that frighten
shatter all the mirrors of the lips.

At sea in delicate arms
happy days waves at full said
and the blood leads to everything
A place without a statue

Without rumors without black pavilions
an iridescent nude place
where all the wandering flowers
flowers at the will of the light
have hidden audacious fairies
A jewel of indifference
equal to all hearts
a chiseled jewel of laughter
A mysterious house
where children baffle adults.

In the periphery of hope
in pure loss
calm creates a void.

--PAUL ELUARD

THE VICTORY AT GUERNICA

1

Lovely world of cottages
Of mines and fields

2

Faces good in the firelight good in the frost
In refusing the night the wounds and blows

3

Faces good for everything
Now emptiness fixes you
Your death will serve as example

4

Death the heart turned over

5

They made you pay your bread
Sky earth water sleep
And the misery
of your life

6

They said they wanted intelligence
They measured the strong judged the mad
Handed out alms split a cent in two
They greeted the corpses
They abounded in politeness

7

They persevere exaggerate are not of our world

8

Women children have the same treasure
Green springtime leaves and pure mild
And enduring
In their pure eyes

9

Women children have the same treasure
In their eyes
Men defend them as they can

10

Women children have the same red roses
In their eyes
Each shows his blood

11

Fear and courage to live and die
Death so hard and so easy

12

Men for whom this treasure was sung
Men for whom this treasure was spoiled

13

Real men for whom despair
Nourishes hope's devouring ardor
Let us open together the last bud of the future

14

Pariahs the death earth and ugliness
Of our enemies have a color
Drab as our night
We shall win out

--PAUL ELUARD

MAY—1941

It will make the muslins drop,
the wind stumble in the grasp of May
like shells, corals unlasting

Let us walk like the wind in the ropes of war
we have to die soon
go down in the water,
explode like mines
in May --

Break the chain of this marriage
of my heart, of my spades,
of your kisses,
of the moonlight on the windows,
of your day smell, the smell of only love
found in the rocks, bas-reliefs, grottoes,
the silk under the breasts going to Camden Town.

 They are going
 to dip in the fire
 rise as they can
under the water of the pump, the sand of the bombs,
and no anemones.

The buds won't finish out this war,
the brick woman with hollow cheeks
gave me good advice though,

with her good hand wiping my forehead.
But no – take one by his uniform buttons,
far from the faded slopes,

fade in the burned wood,
on the eaten glass,
the old throat of what is melting,
melting the same, cooing the same,
Oh turtle-dove of always on the branch of May.

Here they are gathering in the black circle,
eyes open on the split stone no longer on the bird
Here are the deadly trucks,
striped to a dull music --

Cold dust – on the other side of the flint of the gash,
his arms crossed, all the sicknesses,
lying down in London,
under the Twins.
 London.

--VALENTINE PENROSE

HEALTHY REMEDIES

Friends whose names smell powdery
friends to pick up from the gutter
friends named like cosmetics
friends whose portraits rush away
get some lovely dogs
some chains of ignorance
some mighty weapons
some holy prayer
some unwanted musicians
some stabs in the back
some lengthy absences
in necessity's chalet
in the lascivious city
the city in ashes
the city in tears
the city in red
where fingernails flourish inside
and nerves outside
where flowers flourish only in mouths
friends alike and gone before your time
get some long days of rainfall
and may your conscience envy
nothing in that iron to sell
but keep quiet!
in the distance you hear a great noise of eyebrows
by chance they are thieves
coming to free us from thieves' fear
pirates coming to free us from the storm
it's what's AFTER US coming to free us from the DELUGE.

--GEORGES HENEIN

OUTPOST

On the edge of the woods
Someone is hiding
We could making no sound approach
Nearer the abyss or the enemy
As it fell night split apart
Two arms remain extended
In the shadow a fixed stare
 A flash of frenzied light
 To go on toward the cross
Everything one sees
 Everything one believes
That's what leaves
There or elsewhere and not to our knowledge
With the fear of going too close
To the black ravine where everything is wiped out

--PIERRE REVERDY

SENTINEL

The chimney keeps watch on the roof
As the summit the mountain
The sky passes behind and the low cloud
Level with the watching eye
 Midnight
There is still a little noise in the depths of the air
A muffled song rising
What we hear is more attractive
Eyes close
 Death could happen
 The rest didn't get out
Because of fear the door has been closed again
 That was too strong an emotion
The glow that rises and falls
 Like the pulse of a breast

--PIERRE REVERDY

SURPRISE

There is no one left in the city
Climbing up through the woods
A few fall down
 And those who will get there too late
You
 And I
Smoke from the chimney behind
 He is still lying there at the bottom
 And you go down on your knees forever
His head and his heart are heavy
 And the song forgotten
 The hours that we skipped over
 Asleep with open eyes
Don't look at this picture
It's a broken mirror
And your eyes
 your eyes aren't used to it yet

--PIERRE REVERDY

THE PEACEFULLNESS INSIDE

 It's all so peaceful
During the winter
 In the evening when the lamp lights up
 Through the window we see it racing
Over the tablecloth dancing hands
On the ceiling a swaying shadow
 Our voices are lower now
In the garden the trees are dead
The fire sparkles
 And someone falls asleep
 Lights play on the wall
A sliding leaf on the ground
 The setting has changed to night
For disasters no one sees going on outside

--PIERRE REVERDY

STOPPING PLACE

The dying horseman managed to raise his head
 Under the fusillade from the stars
The black hedge of dream is still too thick
Whatever happens to captives will happen to us
But already we can see what's being done
In the houses or on the roofs
And piling up on that enormous block
 Even the men who are there
The piles of animals follow
 The wide road with its waves of dust
The river of drowning reflections
 The memories stirring
In the newborn universe turning before your eyes
 In a swift moment
The tree over there has broken
The bank climbs up the sore
 Everyone has bowed
We have to proceed more slowly
 Because of the projects that intersect
 Because of the open graves
 And the disappointment when we open our eyes
 Under the tears of the sky

--PIERRE REVERDY

NIGHT

In my hiding place behind the door
Evening is slow in coming

Through this diamond-shaped eye there's the sky

Midnight

Almost all the warplanes went by
Straight through the alarm

In my pocket I had a firearm

A wing beating now not so high

Tears that the moon withholds

And mocking laughter in the curtain's folds

--PIERRE REVERDY

NIGHT SOUNDS

At the moment when the horses were passing by
the hanging lamp started to quiver.

The ceiling threatened to lean to the right,
against our heads;
but the windows remained upright with the sky,
and the nocturnal landscape was visible.

No longer were there owls among the ruins,
nor moon beams among the trees,
but a factory chimney and --
around it --
houses whose roofs seemed to grow.

And the horses --
whose hurried steps were heard --
transported into the accomplice night
the metal wagons of death.

--PIERRE REVERDY

BATTLEFRONTS

On the rampart where ruins are trembling
an echo of drums is heard.
They had been shattered.
Those of yesterday still respond to each other now.

Once night is finished,
the noise dissipates the dreams and bared foreheads
where a wound is bleeding.

Amid the smoke,
men are lost and already the sun
pierces through the horizon.

Who rang the sounds of victory:
The volley laments those fallen.

A trumpet rallies the tatters of squadrons
and the snake holds up the horses
whose hoofs no longer touch the ground.

But he who would have painted them
was no longer there.

--PIERRE REVERDY

BATTLE

In the chest the love of a flag discolored by the rains.
In my head drums are beating.
But where is the enemy coming from?

If your faith is dead,
what will you answer to their command?

A friend dies from enthusiasm behind his cannons
and his fatigue is stronger than all else.

And in the fields bordered by the roads,
in the corner of the woods
differently-shaped because of the men hidden there,
he walks, macabre as death,
in spite of his stomach.

The ruins dangle their cadavers and hatless heads.

This painting, soldier,
when will you finish it?
Did I dream I was still there?
In any case I was doing a funny job.

When the sun,
which I'd taken for a lightening flash,
darted its beam on my deaf ear,
I quenched my thirst,
under the green and white willows,
in a stream of pink water.

I was so thirsty!

--PIERRE REVERDY

MOVEMENTS ON THE HORIZON

The horsemen keep to the road,
and in profile.
How many they are no one knows any longer.
Against the night closing the path,
between the river and the bridge a spring weeping,
a tree following you.
You could look at the crowd passing by without being seen.
It's a veritable army marching or else a dream --
a backdrop of a painting on a cloud.
The child is crying or sleeping.
He gazes or dreams.
The sky is encumbered by all these armies.
The earth shudders.
The horses are sliding along the water.
And the procession slips by
also in the water
washing out all these colors,
all these tears.

--PIERRE REVERDY

WALKING BESIDE DEATH

I have lost this white figure which guided the roofs.
The spirits of the roofs,
the weathervanes --
and the tips of the fingers.

At the same time we have lost all the lines
which linked the stars of the sky and sky to earth.
The metal lines.
All the preparations are done,
the birds are taking flight,
leaving the earth for another pavement.

The guards of the regular currents are present,
and the horsemen,
and I lose my head in the wind
sweeping the open path and the dust
across countries as yet unknown.
In the water's mirror deformed men are seen.
I think they are coming forward.
But the opposing current brings them back,
bends them, or lets them float.
Yet these are only images.
The images of men deformed
in the great draught of air or another mirage.

And step by step --
they are coming closer --
against the edge of the frame with the hard face.

--PIERRE REVERDY

CASCADE

What sort of arrow split the sky and this rock?
It quivers, spreading like a peacock's fan
Like the mist around the shaft and knot-less feathers
Of a comet come to nest at midnight.

How blood surges from the gaping wound,
Lips already silencing the murmur and the cry.
One solemn finger holds back time, confusing
The witness of the eyes where the deed is written.

Silence? We still know the passwords.
Lost sentinels far from the watch fires
We smell the odor of honeysuckle and surf
Rising in the dark shadows.

Distance, let dawn leap the void at last,
And a single beam of light make a rainbow on the water
Its quiver full of reeds,
Sign of the return of archers and patriotic songs.

--ROBERT DESNOS

THE VOICE

A voice, a voice coming from so far away
That is no longer rings in the ears,
A voice, like a drumbeat, muffled
Reaches us even so, distinctly.
Though it seems to issue from a tomb
It speaks only of summer and spring,
It fills the body with joy,
It kindles a smile on the lips.

I'm listening. It's only a human voice
Coming across the din of life and of battles,
The crash of thunder and the babble of talk.

What about you? Don't you hear it?
It says "The pain will be short-lived"
It says "The beautiful season is near."

Don't you hear it?

--ROBERT DESNOS

THIS HEART THAT HATED WAR

This heart that hated war
here it is beating for combat and battle!
This heart that only beat at the rhythm of tides,
seasons, hours of the day and night,
Here it is swelling sending to the veins
a blood burning with saltpeter and hatred
And making such a noise in the brain that the ears whistle
And this noise spreads in city and country
Like the sound of a bell calling for revolt and combat.

Listen, I heard it coming to me sent echoing back.
But no, it's the sound of other hearts,
millions of other hearts
beating like mine throughout France.

They are beating at the same rhythm
for the same task all these hearts,
Their noise is that of the sea breaking against cliffs
And all this blood bears in the millions of brains one mottoe:
Revolt against Hitler death to his partisans!
Yet this heart used to hate war
and beat to the rhythm of the seasons,
But a single word:
Freedom was enough to waken the old anger
And millions of Frenchmen
are getting ready in the shadows
for the duty that the next dawn will impose on them.
On these hearts that hated war beat for freedom at the same rhythm
of the seasons and seas,
of day and of night.

--ROBERT DESNOS

from **THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD**

I struggle on
the anger the happiness admitted
day for day and tooth for tooth

Here's the hour that stirs night strikes.

These are the clogs of those who set out to sea
to batter the waves
with the weight of their bodies
with their fists
with all their faith in life.

Upset the depthless drawers.
Their truth has no price.
It's the open laughter.
It urges on the daring of the world.

It causes the mountains of light,
torn from the seaweed's evasive kisses
to climb to the light.

It's the armed song on the fringes of light.
There is only one man to hear at the height of the brawl
tender cry of the babe-in-arms,
the future to cry still louder
and the flashing waves pile up the mounting clarities
surrounded by a thousand promised languages.

Joy I could foretell you
reinvent your dazzle
until your image on earth was hidden from me
under the dregs of grimaces,
the stinking rags of death.

I struggle on.
I've seen lost eyes the war
beseeching eyes turned away from the war.
Wide-eyed the war,
cowardly eyes low ignoble eyes.

The eyes of little girls lovers and mothers
but don't talk anymore of mother's eyes!

Their brightness has forever dulled the brightness of ours.

They've watched, wall of silence, for the fishermen's return,
Their foreheads pressed to the window-panes.

The storm burst out at sea,
a champagne cork lightning fastener,
the lightning all along the body of a naked woman
standing on the edge of the horizon.

The champagne gushes out.
It's a festival free for all,
the bass drum setting the earth afloat,
jump who can,
turn turn each one,
the storm around you
there are all kinds of people.

One's broken the bank,
another's dandled the little girly on his knee,
the little dancer you know the little girly.

The grand life
at last the grand
the grandest is so obvious,
while one by one the ships fall
on their knees.
It's better than at the slaughterhouse,
bodies tossed about like flies,
arms torn off,
endless tears,
coffins,
faces without noses,
I don't know what without mouths
without ears.

Put that back in order for me
and get on with it.

At your command general!
Deaths in shreds
deaths for nothing
comic deaths easy deaths.

Why haven't they waited for the grand dance that's coming here,
hardly noticeable,
button warfare closures lightning
neon warfare hesitation waltz.

Death by laughing,
forward the music,
dead people in lace
mangled
packed
liquified
tossed on the rubbish-heap.

What does the fitting song matter
love song
sad song
life song.

At your command general!

There's no possible song left,
love tossed in the dustbin,
suppression of sorrows cure
by the release of closures lightning.

You don't have to say it.

It's a frenzied dance,
block-head,
I ask you
it's the expressive waltz,
block-head,
devil's brass-foundry,
hag-head.

You want to laugh,
automatic release,
whore-head,
billiard-head,
headline pig-head,
king-head,
mule-head,
the war above our heads.

What?
the war?

Who's being fooled?

I struggle on.
I've seen the horror engraved right on the retinas
of those who by wanting to survive
have died a thousand times at the back of their eyes friends.

The bottom of a sea shows all the memories,
bottom of grief.

The dreams flow round there green cavalcades
with long strands of seaweed.

Deep is the breath of the wind between the rocks
and long long the history of tortures.

I struggle on.
The night is long.
The story for the rest of us
soon reaches its end.
Will we have stopped believing in grief?
We must take life
as it is again,
face to face,
good and evil,
always as a comrade,
shaking it from head to toe or talking to it gently
according to what it says,
according to what it thinks.

Take it round the waist,
shake it like a plum tree,
and perhaps we will have to fight
so that some life is left us comrades
that each one finds his share.

Filled with dreams sown with childhoods
the first clarity
common to all and which has no name.

The corn is still not ripe,
stalks paler than thistles in the autumn wind.

The vineyard still lies fallow.
Man has laid his greatness
at the foot of the abyss

The sun prepares peaceful fellings
the forests will pale
with an explosive thirst for greenery.

Where are you newborn youth,
the crimson flowers of youth
on your delicate cheeks?

Like the seagull's lost cry,
I've lost you the wind the night.

It's true I struggle on,
but in each laughing face appears apple of my eye,
my love,
the present and future love,
the weight of the world.

--TRISTAN TZARA