

War Reportage

The war began about six feet from victory
and crawled there over the eyes of a child.

In the beginning soldiers walked up the road,
never minding that as they did so the road got them
pregnant with map in their own private Gethsemane.

Then a mother, crucified on coming unwantedness,
bled son from the poem nailed into her trees.

Therefore, one by one, the Europes came to explain themselves.
After that we hoisted up crows and made love in stones.

Satan then picked up the throat of the town
and drank from it until there was no more sleep.
The town died then woke up again because of its smell.

“That’s when Satan returned, sir,
and ate what happened in the field.”

But here in the camera one can see
where bleeding and bleeding, and where “so on.”

One can see where two men revenged themselves on a dog,
where a moiety revenged itself on a people, and where a ditch
revenged itself on a shovel by spitting up church.

But then you knew all that, from the gap
between fingers and from the distance between wolves.

You knew it, but you forgot it somehow.

The Night Before The Battle In Which I'm Killed

Someday it won't be moonlight
coming down to this field
but it will be the actual moon.

The moon will fill the land with its priests,
igniting highways and water
buffalo with desperate passions.

Trees will strain with the hatefulness of the moon
before snapping under its high tiredness.

The moon's pilgrimage down to this field
will split the brains of crows and carp
will die on their feet with that kind of light in their hair.

Someday the moon will present itself,
along with its card, as the last actor of grief
in this waiting room of bones and milk.

The world's infantry will be as surprised
to be visited by the moon as pigs entered into by demons

and driven off a cliff.

The moon, pushing us into the earth
like a baby's thumb
pushing a strawberry into the mud.

Wounded In The Black Forest

Over there, by the X, is the place I was hit.

I was cut down in the dusk by an absence of face
in the midst of this forest of Hansel and Hitler,
this forest of make and believe.

I think you've guessed by now
that my human strategy was saddened by truth,
my forehead used as a plow.

My company found me minutes later, clothes
emptied, entered by rain.

They found me and took me straight to a grotto,
where landed snow made it seem like the end of the century.

There they left me to turn into a priest.

And that's how I ended up here at this midnight
surgery being stepped on by swans.

Returning Home On Sick Leave

I, who emigrate, walk
in on the rampage of the library.

The windows have been emptied.
In any one corner there's very little room.
Books torment.

Above desire, a globe burns with odorless rhyme.

“Is anybody home, there on the stairs
where the dogs...?”

The estate is missing, taken
on the road where it bleeds.

Home, where spouses, abundant, surge,
and where kiss gathers in its sheets and tatters.
Home, where the breast and its shepherd,
a hand, fly like rice before the coming bride.

Is anybody home?

I doubt it, with a whip in the thorax,
while the bones breathe.

“Hello?” hangs there in birds.

Eventually, I look into
my own face again, and touch
on the fat of “place.”

The Meaning Of War

I was at a party when someone asked “What is the meaning of war?” I was about to answer when someone else said “Hey, what the hell do you know about war? Were you ever a soldier?”

Well, let me say this: I’ve traveled with a skull and I’ve drunk its water. After a long and brutal firefight I’ve stumbled out of my barracks, well after dark, and dropped to the ground, sick from the earth’s rotation, and there held onto the grass as if holding someone’s hair. And let me ask you this: Isn’t one a soldier who has slept with soldiers and woken up like that, eyes raw with smoke, but not the smoke from wood or leaves?

I’ve participated in the wars of the church and in the militarisms of fame and shallow hope. Just by taking a look at my fist you’d know that I know how a soldier feels after being fighting with luxury.

(If you had the time I could explain what it feels like to go to war pregnant and then come back a spirit, the only thing rendering you visible being survivor’s guilt on the lips.)

My information would indicate to you what it feels like to darken after years and how to stumble beneath a pile of graves under water.

But I can’t tell you the meaning of war because it’s an impression left like fire on a guitar in the form of dried wax. The meaning of war can’t be said but can be eaten like dust from the basement of a church; and it can’t be told but only heard, like past-sounds traveling through us at the speed of regret; and it can’t be confessed but must be held, like a tattoo of a heart blazoned onto a heart; and it smells like that most violent of all human emotions—fresh air.

But of course that doesn’t explain the meaning of war, which is why, after the party, I go home, then into my son’s room and take him, crying, out of his crib and put his bare flesh against mine because he’s strong and we’re both upset. Then I sing, not a song, because my singing is awful, but a death chant; I do this because although it’s morning it’s only 3:00 in the morning and he’s mean and spirited and would like nothing better than to sleep, and my death chant can help him enter the land of visions it will be hard to remember upon waking, and that, more than anything, is the meaning of war.

