

# PEACE AND WAR

A WCC ANTHOLOGY • EDITED BY TOM ZIMMERMAN



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This *Peace and War* anthology is a production of the Bailey Library and the WCC Poetry Club, at Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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## Aging but Still Raging

The security of walls  
accompanies each step I take.  
I know them like the back of my hand.  
When they move farther away I find  
my steadfast cane, woody and serviceable.  
But I still refuse a walker, to soothe  
the indignity of my wobble.

The security of prayer  
accompanies my heart.  
When God's voice grows faint I rely on  
other's words—Mary Oliver, Ted Kooser,  
David Whyte, Wendell Berry, Buddha.  
I refuse to believe no one hears.

The security of words  
accompanies my grieving.  
When they won't come easily I write anyway,  
secure in the knowledge that my muses,  
my mentors, my writing family will show up  
to guide my pen.  
I refuse to believe there are no words  
for healing.

## As Good as Anything

The air I breathe is as good as anything—  
it's free, plentiful, primal,  
necessary, a bit messed up.

The water I drink is as good as anything—  
it costs no matter where you live  
by the liter or by the well-stroke.

The ground I stand on is as good as anything—  
it's solid, it's fertile, it's minerally rich,  
it spins about without going anywhere.

The trees I shelter under are as good as anything—  
green to a fault, strong, firm, rooted,  
breathing the same foul air without falling down.

The tomatoes I plant are as good as anything—  
Best Boy, Bonnie Girl, red as red can be, acidic,  
squishy, prime fodder for birds of all feather, and bunnies.

The flowers in the meadow are as good as anything  
I can seed and grow. None are perfect,  
no two alike, little bursts of heaven on Earth.

The birds on the wing are as good as anything  
man has ever imagined his flying machine to be—  
they're compact, compass driven, an economy of motion.

Yet, our husbandry lacks commitment.  
It's as good as no care at all—fouling the air and water  
our children will bathe in, scarring the ground  
to over-mine the good stuff we'll eventually run out of.

And as to the plants and herbs and flowers,  
we over-feed and under-appreciate, they will  
eventually lose their ancestral purity  
and be mocked as too precious.

The birds eye us already as the worst neighbor—  
as good as any ravager, as foul as any venom.  
They watch us hold our wings taut against  
the nuclear wind and crash.

They laugh as I look out the window at them  
and think the view perfect when really it's only  
as good as my ocular props and covered nose  
can make of my fear.



## As long as there is Love

Wherever you look in the world  
Where there is light and good, shining brightly,  
There will also be darkness, selfishness and greed.  
The shadows will seek to dampen the light,  
To consume and shape this reality to hell.  
Peace and War are byproducts of this constant struggle,  
Between those who seek justice and  
Those who seek vengeance.  
Those consumed by selfish love and  
Those consumed by endless hatred.  
These are like strings always connected,  
Always tugging, always pulling.  
Never balanced, never equal.  
Peace can only be found when hell is banished from this world,  
For as long as there are winners, there will be losers.  
As long as there is love, there will be hate.

## Dear Brother

I've lost you even though your heart's still beating  
Time is ticking by it's fleeting  
Your eyes have gone cold and distant  
Lost all fight and resistance  
Reach my hand to help you feed the killer  
Just to catch that fun that never ending thriller  
You're a stranger in my brother's skin  
Same eyes, same nose, same grin  
Tainted now by what you thought would set you free  
All I see is what you were, what you could be  
Will I ever get you back?  
Or will you remain in that shamble of a shack?  
We had so many plans and ambitions  
Now your visits come with overbearing conditions  
All how you can stay confined in shambles  
Hearing the same excuses and rambles  
I miss you, I loathe you but please return soon  
I fear if you don't you will soon face doom  
The cold eyes that I hate I will gross to miss  
As I know the road you take will lead to a dark abyss



## Defence

Sometimes, feels like,  
I got nothin' to say  
so I sit stayin' puffin away  
Not today  
Cause today  
Up in arms, like pumping up weights  
Bars,  
Wait—  
My regular day rate is  
Rage.  
Wage war  
but,  
Words are my swords  
cause,  
My horse on all fours  
with the cavalry coming forth  
Toward Marine Corps teamed with Supreme Courts  
to,  
not give a shit where they leave corp-ses.  
Feel Fetuses need-born  
but then ignore-them,  
Till kindergarten when they get floored  
So they Think for them  
Thoughts and Prayers like a sink for them  
Wash their hands of  
The Children's blood.

Fucking Eeyor, they makin us asses of us  
while there's killins in the classes—  
they ask us to trust  
The Slave Catchers rebranded (same badge) ready to bust  
'Cept when there's a kid on the cusp of

surpassing their bloodlust  
And “the kids that he wiping out ain’t white enough for us”  
the captain radios  
“Hold back the parents they can see their kids in Hades yo”  
“Anybody hungry? See I got amazing cravings fo'  
Donuts”  
Sure a low blow, but I'll go nuts  
when some fucks would rather duck then buck up.  
Protect and serve, when it’s to your benefit  
When the niggas ya kill are still and defenseless  
End his—  
or hers  
Hear their  
last words  
Back to work  
next thurs  
Day  
Sometimes it feels like I got nothing to say.  
Now I got a whole speech to relay.  
In braille, reads like mountain range.  
“Outrage, outrage”  
This first page  
like the receipt—  
but where’s the change?

“It was never really offered, congress pocketed-it  
Trust me I’m an operative  
Risking every last drop of this kids crass confi-di-dence  
to talk on this  
obvious  
homicidal  
incompetence.”

And they budget grow bigger  
Squeezing us like a finger on a  
—Pshhh nah—

leave the drama  
for the soaps.

Like I'm goin close, bare fisted kick the pigs to ropes,  
I'll back em in the corner, call the coroner, I hope—

Oh no!

oh shit. . .

Stretchers already here, I seen it in a news clip

This what news is

But this news old

How many times for we get the Memo

(How many times is it incidental

How many times will they ignore mental?

How many times they give the finger to the females?

How many times 'for we flip these scales?)

Memo

Remember though

never to their level, sink low

Keep peace unloaded, don't sink soul



## Fen babies

Seven\* cygnets spawned  
Second successive season  
Celebration swim

*\* Turns out there were eight this year*

## How to Survive a Feeling

I thought it was “Can’t Stop this Feeling” in my body-the pleasure just emanates. It rises up, it crescendos-the music accompanies-I hear waterfalls. The wind sways.

But, then, I must survive the aftermath. I must endure, embrace, plug along into acceptance.

Have I just described transcendence? I can describe it -actually doing is so monumental. How darn proud of myself would I be for that? Am I not encouraging, suggesting, even sweet talkin’ folks to do just that? So is that my life’s mission or am I just on a roll here?

Feelings about feelings-I’ve got plenty of those, by George. I could sell ‘em cheap. Well, a few I would just auction off. How much would you pay for overcoming disappointment? Or turning that frown upside down? What about rearranging the pain of criticism?

Or the big one-taking the bite out of shame-then you really have something.

That’s what you write home about, tell all your friends, one day get published in the New York Times. You get so good at it folks start murmuring Nobel Prize.

Finally, your mom takes notice.

## I Am a Magic Wand

I am a magic wand.  
I swish and flick  
and turn all manner of things  
into other things—  
mangos into marbles  
nightingales into divas  
thunderstorms into bananas.

I am a magic wand.  
Sometimes I brighten a room  
darkness into light  
terror into comfort  
unseen into seen  
gray into green.

I am a magic wand.  
I turn unfathomable sorrow  
into solace.  
I turn all guns  
into fishing poles.  
I turn dead children  
into angels.  
I turn tears  
into raindrops.



## The Ideal

Bright sunlight, robin's egg-blue sky, a mind  
unbounded or at least decluttered:

this

is the ideal I'm straining for today.

Beethoven's on the playlist, cello moaning  
like a man who's lost his eyes—but sees,  
frail tragic hero, feelingly.

How quickly

day turns into night within six lines  
of verse!

No beer for me, just water now,  
remembering how lightly we are here.



## Leaving Oklahoma

When your soul gets tired  
Get up and go  
It's time for you to grow

Feel new sun between new trees  
Dig in,  
New roots  
Fresh dirt,  
Between your toes  
Search profound sunsets for your prose

Leave your troubles for the trees,  
They will not share them with the world  
Solely,  
With the leaves that grow  
From the words you whisper  
Serenading the Mother with the troubles that burden you so

Climb the mountain side  
Slowly  
Taking in the monstrosity of God  
Knowing that you are God too

Leave the old boots that you never took off  
Let them melt, in the desert sand  
Remember that the boots belong under hot sun and gunfire  
Not you

Breathe in the air so hot  
Such a familiar sting  
Keep your hands off scorched pavement

Laugh,  
At how strange the West is standing upright

Read a book or two  
Take on the sufferings of:  
Dharma Bum  
And  
Becoming What You Are

Leave those scars in the desert  
On the mountains,  
Make sure to fall and scratch up your new soul

When your soul carries  
A war you  
Never went through  
It's time for you to go  
Get up and grow  
Learn to let go

*Author's Note: I served in the US Army National Guard for two years, and this is a piece I wrote for my best friend, who served with me, a few days before she passed away from cancer. I was on a 8,600 mile road trip trying to write about my life and letting go of my military identity.*

## Ned Kahn

Barely june, bright sun  
The wind doodles clouds in the hay  
Lambs seem unimpressed



## Peace Brings War

The day begins with silence and calmness overshadowing the great doors of Pandora's box. Then and now, horns blow, cannons beam with light and smoke through the darkness of the grave troops armed with heavy artillery and swords.

Tramping through the gates of evil opponents, as they charge towards them, the gates rise open. Within a second too soon, the sounds of cannon balls gloom up in the sky. Charging, the oncoming troops duck and shield themselves with iron shields of steel metal covers strong as the wall of bulletproof glass.

As the sun dims and simmers, all is well. Cool and calm as the peace of war, they celebrate victory with scotch on the rocks, shaken not stirred, with coconut shrimp and crab legs.

## Peace can be found in Dreams

Peace can be found in dreams  
Dreams that are subversive waking ones  
Ones filled with hope and joy, these are lies  
Lies that cause us to create wars  
Wars to protect those we love  
Love that births hatred to save it,  
Hatred that is born from a self centered desire to live in peace,  
Those who are forced to wage War become ghosts,  
Things to be ignored, feared, and forgotten,  
Walking through homes that have long since rotted away.  
We cannot understand each other when we wage war,  
Our reasons do not matter, and justice dies under the banner of patriotism.  
And our warriors become ghosts, to be ignored, feared, and forgotten.  
Even as we seek the same love, the same justice, the same Peace.

## Penitencia

The house is quiet, the man is sleeping in his bed, the bed had a brown and dirty texture to on it, the layout had a table in front of the window, a coat rack with black jacket and hat with silver lining, the quiet is broken by the house's door being broken down, the man yelps from the bed, he does not have time to react, before he pushed out of his own home, two town folks walk over, with torches in their hands, the man begins yelling, telling them to stop, some men start beating up the man, painting the sand with bright red, a man who is tall, wear a red hat gets out a knife and stabs out his eye, he begins to scream louder begging them to stop, a man in a fancy outfit walks slowly towards him "this is what you get, for making love to my son, you freak" he drops a torch on the man "see you in hell, freak" the man begins to burn, he gets up on fire and puts out his hand to anyone who would help, his pled were met with stares and silence, he collapses on a ground, as his body burns, a cicada flies near him, it lands near him, it flies away, the man's body was tossed into the valley, with disrespect and with pride, they felt happy about killing a freak, a sinner.

It has been years since the cleansing of the town, the town celebrates by burning down a scarecrow representation of the man, after this eventful evening, a man stumbles into the empty bar and helps himself to the drinks, he begins dancing around, he falls over laughing, knocking over tables and chairs, he gets up and sees a man with black hat and uniform, the man yells "nice outfit, sir" the Stranger doesn't respond, he stands there silently, the man walks up to him saying "react to me-" before he can finish his sentence he is pushed back to the wall, the man extends his arm and points at the man, a swarm of cicadas fly into the bar, making loud noises, the cicadas enters the man's mouth, he begins to choke, he pukes out blood and one Cicada bathed in red, he looks at the man begging him for help, but he was met with silence, the man pukes more blood, he collapses on the blood covered ground, the cicadas fly out of his body and flies around the Stranger, after they disports, the Stranger vanishes. Leaving the drunk man lifeless

Crowds of people are gathered in front of the police station, sharing the same face of fear and anger. The Sheriff steps out the porch and yells, "ok, calm down"

someone responds with, "how can we calm down when people are getting murdered on this day every year" everyone yells, "yeah!" the Sheriff looks down, pinches the bridge of his nose and mutters to himself "I am getting too old for this." He swings his head up, takes a deep breathe, "the devil is trying to scare us, he is taking us all out, reminding us we cleanse the earth of his filth. We don't fear him and his-" he is interrupted by a thunderstorm, a bolt of lightning strikes at the old burnt house, the Stranger steps out. He slowly walks forwards to the crowd of people, unnaturally, finally stops and stares at the Sheriff. "is that how you justify it, by blaming the devil, by saying I sinned since was love a sin?". The Sheriff stares at the figure in disbelief. He yells out, "we burnt you alive! You should be dead." The Stranger responds with, "my thoughts exactly" The Stranger brings out a gun and shoots the Sheriff in the stomach. The crowd prepares to run to the Stranger; they stop at the sound of noise, a bunch of cicadas flies through the public, the group starts to scatter. The Stranger walks through the chaos. The Sheriff runs inside, crunching his stomach, he goes into a safe and gets a shotgun, he aims at the door, he begins to tremble, The Stranger kicks down the door, the Sheriff fires into The Stranger, The Stranger gets pushed back a little, "that tickled" remarked The Stranger. The Stranger saunters to the Sheriff, and Sheriff gets backed up against the wall. The Strangers gets out a match and lights it; Sheriff says nervously, "what are you going to do with that" The Stranger smirks, he throws it at the Sheriff and lights the Sheriff on fire, The Stranger remarks, "doesn't feel too good doesn't it"? The Sheriff extends his hand towards the Stranger, his attempt to get help, and is met with a glare. The Strangers walk out, past all the chaos. The horde of Cicada begins to surround The Stranger. After they disperse, he is gone.



## Pride Month



## *Shrine in the Woods*



# ERIN RABIDEAU-NOBBS

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## *Suppressed Rage*



## Tides of War

There was a crackling in the air,  
as the wind kissed the water,  
the electricity was thick with the sorrow and joys of ages passed.  
Each drop told stories of the scars worn and of a weathered past.  
Thunderous sounds echoed in the air, stirred up the waves,  
until a tide was roaring with the salt of a thousand tears.  
The sky raged on, while underneath the growing pull - a new story is told.  
One booming of bustling life and of ageless wonders.

\*\*\*\*\*

The air is electric...  
LOUDER NOW

Vibrations shake the earth.  
The tide comes in,  
smashing hard against the shallow's rocks.  
Sabers rattle in bright flashes ---  
With each thunderous roar.  
Clouds of anger sweep in over the sky  
Rain like singing ice,  
Flash of light...

BOOM

Dry exhalation of clouds,  
...colliding and descending upon the earth

BOOM

The wind bellows down, sweeping up the tide....

BOOM

Mist sears through the air,  
giving way to the lightning's glare.

BOOM

The earth shakes sending a crack of heat  
far out into the night...resonating air.  
Bright white wavers and flickers

BOOM

The wild winds sweep  
The water rises, tossing turning, the tide churns  
The bellows of the shore echo through the air...

BOOM

Nothing could stop the triumphant tide



## To Fall

Oh how enticing to fall into madness

to fall

to fall

to fall

Choking by the own grip of my hand  
right to be exact  
it's stronger and dominant to my body  
the left limply reaches upward to the light  
if it ever does ever reach it would be too weak to grasp  
legs will remain stiff and wobbly like a new born calf  
to stand is to run and to run is freedom  
how can one run if they're afraid to stand?

Once in the dark the light begins to burn  
people will say the light feels warm and bright  
dark to light would feel like an unimaginable shock  
you can make comfort in the dark  
it plays those nasty tricks on you to keep you planted  
light and warmth sounds too sweet too sickening  
the clean open air would be intimidating  
you remain in the dark you can predict its movements  
escaping it would lead you blinded and vulnerable  
comfort in what is dark and depressing  
fear in what is bright and beautiful  
contradicting to some but perfectly sane to others

Oh how enticing it is to fall into madness

## To Ukraine

If I were half a world away  
on this sixth day of April 2022 I'd be  
hard pressed to find joy in a world  
so broken it may never be habitable.

Home is no longer home. Peace  
is no longer peace. Blue skies  
are no longer blue, so choked  
by plumes of bombs and fire and hatred.

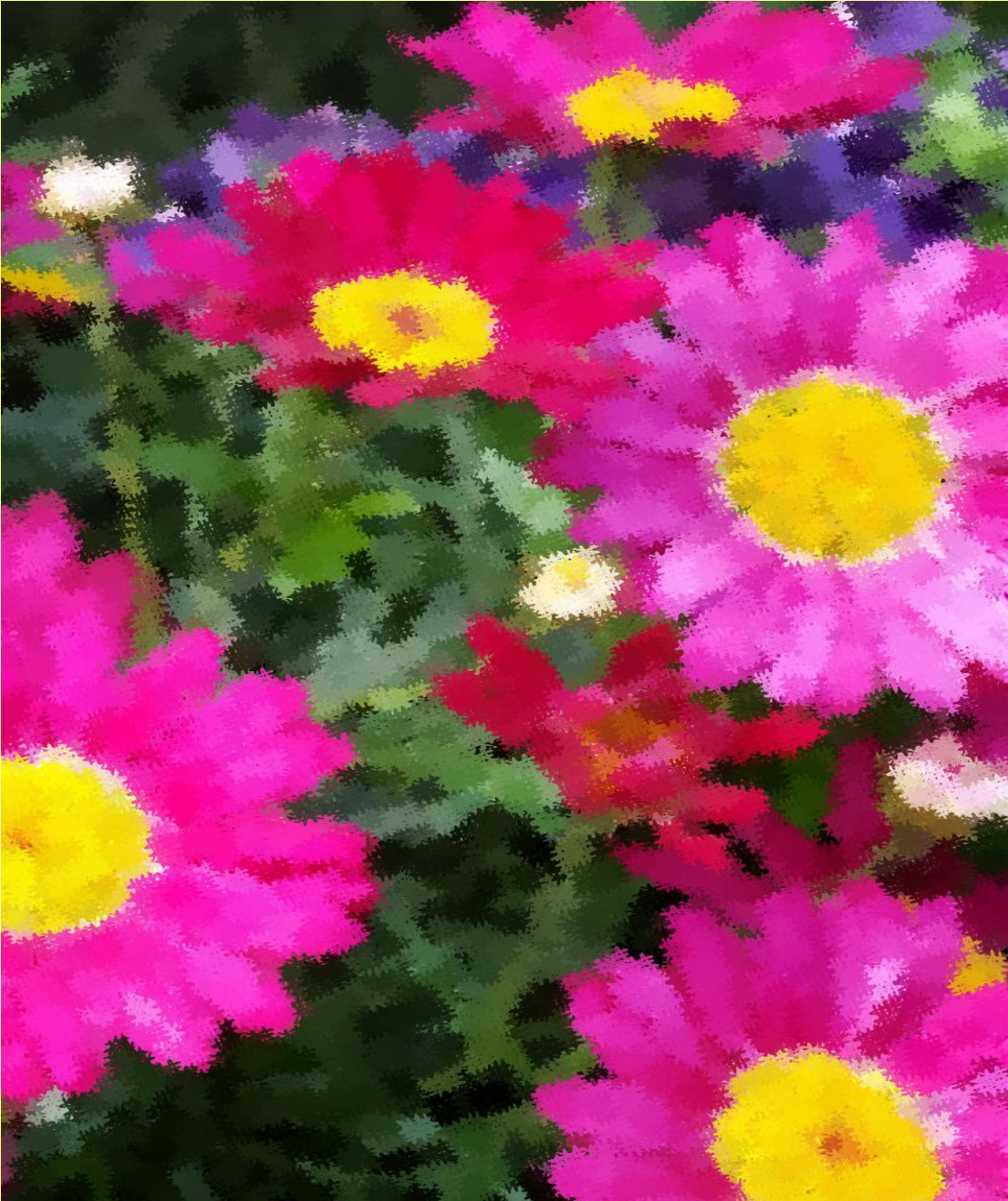
Life there is no longer a given,  
but reduced to a commodity to be traded  
on the open market for freedom.  
It is a serious thing to be alive.

If I were half a world away  
in a country ravaged by lies and greed  
and lunacy and war, I'd think of  
the morning sunrise as a blessing, a gift.

I'd think, before I open my eyes,  
that life is good, the morning fresh,  
safety a given. But I fear today  
and every day from now on is broken.

The earth is broken, scorched, ravaged  
by untethered might and the deceit  
of one whose world is small and damaged  
and lacking humanity.

If I were half a world away, these words  
could not exist except in a dream,  
a serious dream about a serious longing  
to live one more day.





## Two Stripes: Azure Sky and Harvest Gold

*Because, outside the kingdom of the page, what can we do?*

--Julia B. Levine "The Poet Visits Me in Spring"

We can make small gestures to calm ourselves;  
the comfort spreads further, lasts longer  
if we break symbolic action into steps.

I call my friend, ebullient as warm Grape Crush  
I shook up for kicks when I was ten,  
and rode my sparkly purple, banana-seat bike  
to Mattingly's Dime Store  
in downtown Eldon, Missouri  
and slapped down two sweaty quarters  
on the counter for that purple elixir.  
Anyway, I call this foamy friend of mine  
and ask her for the name of the man who  
gives her thick, swirly topknot of hair  
a new, arresting hue every two months or so,  
making her as happy as an anime character  
with superpowers. Step one.

She gives me his name, Andy,  
and his location, Karma salon, and I write it  
on paper in purple ink that stains my palm. Step two.

I go online and make an appointment  
for a *Color Consultation*—  
thirty-five dollars for fifteen minutes—  
and he hands me on to a new, young stylist  
named Emma who is all about color;  
she says, *Oh, I like a challenge.*

*Azure Sky and Harvest Gold.*

Emma drapes me in plastic, lays out her tools. Step four.

As she begins, I quietly recite Psalm 31:21,  
the verse they've leaned on  
in Mariupol, in Kharkiv, in Lviv, in Kyiv, in Odessa:

*Blessed be the Lord,  
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me  
when I was beset as a city under siege.*

Words they have whispered  
under the whistling of shells and recited  
as they dug from the rubble a neighbor's arm,  
its yellow and blue armband singing  
an anthem of wheat and sky, a battle cry,  
a psalm for peace in a place  
so far beyond the power of my pen,  
or this brush painting twin stripes of color  
on the crown of my head—  
one small gesture in solidarity with Ukraine. Step five.



Amy Higgins writes, "I met Nadiya near Pike Place Market in Seattle recently. She said, 'I love your hair; is it for Ukraine?' She was from Kharkiv, and told me, I wear this scarf every day--it is my home town soccer team. Slava Ukraini! (Glory to Ukraine)."

## Ukrainian Easter Egg

When I was nine, my mom brought the three of us  
all down to the basement to  
make Ukrainian Easter eggs.

Never mind we'd never done it  
before--never mind we weren't  
even Ukrainian, for that matter  
but, no matter, we would make them  
anyway--well,

she dripped the dye by accident in the  
candle she set burning on the  
third stair up and the flame shot  
up, four feet in the air, till it was as  
tall as she was.

We put the fire out, but, for the rest  
of the time that we lived in that house,  
that scorch mark shaped like the back end  
of a candle remained.

We never did end up making those eggs.

More than twenty years have passed;  
it is Easter time again,  
and I find my thoughts going once more  
to that day in the basement.

I am no more Ukrainian now than I  
was then, and I couldn't make a pysanka now  
to save my life.

But maybe, with my pen, I can try.

So I write now

of Easter in Ukraine 2022

when bombshells, not eggshells, are dropping

on homes.

Maybe, just maybe, I can succeed this time.

I write

of a spring, that will continue to blossom  
and come, despite advancing Russian tanks.

Of a time when the simple act of planting  
sunflower seeds feels like an act of defiance  
that flies in the face of

Hitler's avatar who from the safety of  
the Kremlin

is pulling the strings that decide

whether or not a newborn in a Ukrainian  
hospital, hundreds of miles away, lives to take  
her first breath

the fate of a white rabbit named Lucifer--  
of whose lives will be slashed to ribbons  
like paper confetti, like Easter grass

I write of my distant Polish cousins--

the ones I've never met--

coming out like droves of hens to take

Ukrainian children under their wings

who are fleeing like chicks from a relentless  
storm...

Finally, I write of the

resurrection of a country

whose citizens are fighting so bravely for  
the freedom of the land which gave them birth.

May their efforts succeed.

May peace return to the Ukraine.

And may my words leave a scorch

mark in their wake to remain for the rest of time.

## Untitled

After all the walls are shattered  
And I'm crumbled as a headstone  
I will raise my hands to heaven

To thank you for for taking me apart

So I can be rebuilt  
A house of worship;  
The penance as our consequence.

I can take one single brick  
From every skin I've been  
And make myself a monument

Of our misdirected sins.

## Who is the real monster now?

Here I shiver, and I here shake  
The more I think the more I break  
I'm a 1,000 piece jigsaw  
That final piece missing almost bylaw  
In this dark hole not much resides  
Still I find comfort here more than the bright hillsides  
Mirrors they scare me because of what I see within  
I look with uncertainty for what I see is akin  
I still feel distant even faced with that fact  
Not sure who they are the idea is abstract

3 o'clock in the morning  
Time flies, the conversations get boring  
Wondering am I even real again  
Seems like I always get stuck between here and then  
I reach my hand out for closure  
No one can find me when I'm stuck in this enclosure  
The one that I built with careful composure  
Run from the facts run from the fears  
But now I stay in the truth and drown in the tears  
The monsters within were once the monsters I seen  
What I would give to wipe the slate clean

At the end of the day I'm replaceable  
Pencil to paper, erasable  
After constant instability you think i'd be unfazeable  
But each and every day my mind is shot  
All the pressure I'm feeling, boiling over like lava, too hot  
I know it's time to take a step back and escape the flame  
But the fires still burning, the burning pit of shame  
The shame for my existence, feelings, or thoughts  
For the all the things I've done wrong or the good I have not

It never leaves my mind just turning and turning  
Water for relief is what I'm yearning  
The rivers they flow  
But where, where do I go?  
Can I find it if I search hard enough?  
Or will every road I travel be just as rough?





## Window on War

My father fought in Vietnam; Korea  
too, where Uncle Dave got killed.

I couldn't  
pass the eye exam to get me to  
West Point.

My bedside book's Euripides:  
the Trojan War the backdrop of so many  
Attic tragedies.

These thoughts explode  
then dissipate like smoke: my podcast Buddhist  
tells me they're not real.

But Putin's army's  
real for people in Ukraine. There's war  
in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria,  
and COVID's wounded everyone.

Aboard a train one time, a colleague  
told me war's a natural phenomenon:  
like weather, there's no stopping it.

Right now,  
my office window shows me sunny breeze  
and trees in bloom. How long before a storm?

