

ROB JACQUES

War Dead

More civilians than soldiers now, or just ghosts,
We honor them in their blasted midnight,
Their unyielding dark where they lie unperturbed,
Forever principled and without our nagging fears.
Do they glower as in a haunting when we philosophize?
Isn't death much too long a time to hold grudges?
Haven't they yet forgiven? Do they yet recall?
Are they harpies for justice or angels of letting go?
Do they flutter about the lights of intellect on bats' wings
Or soft, silken wings of doves? Do they know?

Last night in memory among them,
I stood aside to watch moonlight coat grass
Like stoic frost across our war lost where they lie heroic
In their sacrificial falling. I said a solemn word,
Whispered a little sorrow as a solace to them listening
If they listen to such a living thing any longer,
If they listen to human voices reminiscing still,
These eternally entombed who've heard their fill.

War Poet

Not an oxymoron, contradiction in terms,
I am what I am, solemn, stressed, proud.
Glory and shame are my oil and water,
Battle my canvas: open ocean or city street
Or dark cellar where hell awaits replete
With all manner of devilment allowed.

My verbs jangle brutal Anglo-Saxon
With beautiful Latin. My rash nouns
Are serviceable good and bad, often clashing,
Often bloodied, wounded, fouled with filth,
Often given to bodies flayed, delimbed, disemboweled,
Often death watches sitting awhile on a medic's shoulder
Before suddenly spreading wings and descending.

I pen medals appropriately enough
In highfalutin language suitable for framing,
For cutting into brass or iron or stone
Or even marble. The praise I give is universal
For the fallen everywhere. My inspiration
Comes from heroes and their long pull
From beginning of combat to the end,
From beginning of death to the end.
My images do not do justice to the actual
Bayonet plunge, its twist, its awful twist,
Its slicing viscera into red-pulp salad.

Don't turn away! Give violent work respect.
You pacifists make me sick, your puling
As if nothing were fit to die for,
As if submission were victory of sorts,
Tolerance not loss, cowardice pretending to be nice.
You would have us all die in bed for nothing,
But I tell you those who hold still
Never know the rush, the honorable horror,
The cause enshrined in a family's plot,
Whose name cut into fearsome stone
With birthday and deathday
Translates "You have no idea."

A US Navy veteran of the Vietnam-era, **ROB JACQUES** is a technical writer living on Bainbridge Island in Washington State. He teaches technical writing part-time at Olympic College, and his poetry has appeared in several journals.