

Lullaby, 1941

It is seldom night comes everywhere at once
I have never seen an evening so immense,
To drowse with moonlight in the present tense—
Sleep

The houses sleep with blackout at their panes
Lulled into slumber by the hum of planes
And cities with the gunbeat in their veins
Sleep

Soldiers in bivouac, girls in their beds alone
Twist the skein of living flesh and bone
To the factory's lever or the levelled gun—
Sleep

The mind lies down somewhere behind a word
Stamped on a press or bulletined or heard
Across terse airwaves in the great absurd
Sleep

The heart between tomorrow and the day before
Island explored too late and the land it may never explore
Furls its dreams and waits and does not stir
Sleep

O sleep in channel or furrow, earth or air
Pillowed upon a slogan or a prayer
And dark be swift and day be swift and sure.

ELIZABETH TRAVERS.



Pen and ink sketch, by Philip Reisman.

Marse Brown

A POEM FOR THE UNION

You're on the far side of the grave now, Dred
(you've been dead a year), but you're freer
than I am—and I'm white and still living.
I won't be living long, though, friend,
and I'll end as black in the face as you:
they're going to hang me high in an hour.
I draw my last breath where you drew your first,
and I rejoice because, if given my choice,
my place of death would be your place of birth:
Virginia.

I could've lived to be older than fifty-nine;
I could've lasted out this outcast century:
I had the frame for it, but not the frame of mind.
If I'd been blind to you and deaf to God,
if I'd loved myself more and money most,
if I'd kept my nose clean and my soul snotty,
if I'd valued my skin, if I'd thrown no stones
at the sin of slavery, if I'd passed the buck
and left such things as bravery and broken bones
for fools (in short, if I'd been a sleeping dog),
they'd have let me lie till the nineteen-hundreds.

I die sooner, but with nothing done that I'd undo
if my life were spared: the slavers slain
on the Pottawatomie would be slain again,
all five, and more if found; the battle once
won at Black Jack Oaks would be twice won;
the raids made on Sugar Creek and the fight
lost on the Marais des Cygnes would be made
and lost in the future as they were in the past;
the same slaves would be taken by force
from Messrs. Hicklin, Larue, and Cruise,
of Missoura,
and Cruise would be shot dead a second time
if he cocked his Colt in his second life;
and lastly, the same treason would be committed
at Harper's Ferry, and when brought to book,
I'd give you the same reason that I gave in
Kansas:
nits grow to be lice!

Knowing that delay would merely change
the number of the day and the name of the month,
knowing that at some later date, as the same
traitor, I'd dance on air for the same crimes,
I say, let them crack my spine now and here.
Commend me to your only Master, Dred, and mine.

JOHN SANFORD.

New Poet to Old

(on reading Robert Frost)

He seems to shun
This age when things are done,
When from wounds of time
Blood has run.
His life is one long thinking afternoon,
Taking notes on sun and moon.

He seeks a prophecy
In rare moth's wings;
And, finding dust in pockets,
Writes lines on the millennium.

His is a search for specific:
The precise trill of whippoorwill,
The undercurrent of now and still;
A symbol in a microscopic speck;
All things brief as a spent breath.

A grandfather in a twilight pose,
His mind with simplicity shows
The utter good of evening,
The still excursion under stars,
After days which as dried leaves are burning.

In these things he has a part:
The smell of death between hunter and gun,
Outracing a deer in the winter sun;
The quality of heart
Between neighbors;
The zealotry of worms
At undermining earth;
The strength of hair and grass
As silently they grow in graves.

But what are epitaphs
Or delight of secret country paths
When an age has an engineering eye,
And vision leaps as with the span of bridges.
We are still in thrall
With beasts and angels,

And in a crimsoned world of combat
Come forward in a cleansing wave.
The future is cupped in our bringing palms;
With infinite love we have steeled our arms.

Old poet,
The thrush is not supreme;
And harking and halting on tiptoe
Drowns in a midnight dream.

Out of the blunt hunger of thunder,
The dark eruption of guns;
Hear the flute call of morning
Growing like veins of body
Over the grandeur of land;
Soon we will cease and still the storming,
And come out of our hard house
To stand for history in heroic story;
Cool and free with building hands.

And will you, old poet,
Lover of landscape,
Whittler of word,
Wander through our firmament
Still looking for your bird?

DORIS BAUMAN.



Edith Glaser.

The German

Fearless on a day of wind
the child of the free peasant
sings in the winter forest.

Suddenly bare of snow
the German soldier leans
on the tree as though alive:

the museum of natural history
saved the insignia, the boots
on their eastward stride, the
tunic as winding-sheet.

(He came in the white year.
He talked under the dangerous trees.
He took the next to the last step.

The Russians passed him
in the western direction.)

Of the complex metals
Of the tables of organization
Of the dream-like maps
the unmelted gunman remains
in the year of the child.

The grandfather will tell him what
is in the forest. . . .

of the glacier: of the pits
in the terrain of the heart:

of the fathers who endured the
ice age: of their colder will:

of the numbness upon the enemy,
the flight to the polar cap.

He saw in the forest the edge
of the tide, a mauled particle
thrown up by that weather.

DON GORDON.

July 31, 1945 NM