

1. Conscientious Objector

by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

I shall die, but
 that is all that I shall do for Death.
 I hear him leading his horse out of the stall;
 I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.
 He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, 5
 business in the Balkans, many calls to make this morning.
 But I will not hold the bridle
 while he clinches the girth.
 And he may mount by himself:
 I will not give him a leg up. 10

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip,
 I will not tell him which way the fox ran.
 With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where
 the black boy hides in the swamp.
 I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death; 15
 I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends
 nor of my enemies either.
 Though he promise me much,
 I will not map him the route to any man's door. 20
 Am I a spy in the land of the living,
 that I should deliver men to Death?
 Brother, the password and the plans of our city
 are safe with me; never through me
 Shall you be overcome. 25

2. Poem

By Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1981)

I lived in the first century of world wars.
 Most mornings I would be more or less insane,
 The newspapers would arrive with their careless stories,
 The news would pour out of various devices

Interrupted by attempts to sell products to the unseen. 5
 I would call my friends on other devices;
 They would be more or less mad for similar reasons.
 Slowly I would get to pen and paper,
 Make my poems for others unseen and unborn.
 In the day I would be reminded of those men and women, 10
 Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,
 Considering a nameless way of living, of almost
 unimagined values.
 As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,
 We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,
 To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile 15
 Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,
 Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means
 To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,
 To let go the means, to wake.

I lived in the first century of these wars. 20

3. Gunner

by Randall Jarrell (1914-1965)

Did they send me away from my cat and my wife
 To a doctor who poked me and counted my teeth,
 To a line on a plain, to a stove in a tent?
 Did I nod in the flies of the schools?
 And the fighters rolled into the tracer like rabbits, 5
 The blood froze over my splints like a scab --
 Did I snore, all still and grey in the turret,
 Till the palms rose out of the sea with my death?
 And the world ends here, in the sand of a grave,
 All my wars over? How easy it was to die! 10
 Has my wife a pension of so many mice?
 Did the medals go home to my cat?

4. Killers

by Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

I am singing to you
 Soft as a man with a dead child speaks;
 Hard as a man in handcuffs,
 Held where he cannot move:

Under the sun 5
 Are sixteen million men,
 Chosen for shining teeth,
 Sharp eyes, hard legs,
 And a running of young warm blood in their wrists.

And a red juice runs on the green grass; 10
 And a red juice soaks the dark soil.
 And the sixteen million are killing. . . and killing
 and killing.

I never forget them day or night:
 They beat on my head for memory of them;
 They pound on my heart and I cry back to them, 15
 To their homes and women, dreams and games.

I wake in the night and smell the trenches,
 And hear the low stir of sleepers in lines
 Sixteen million sleepers and pickets in the dark:
 Some of them long sleepers for always, 20

Some of them tumbling to sleep to-morrow for always,
 Fixed in the drag of the world's heartbreak,
 Eating and drinking, toiling. . . on a long job of killing.
 Sixteen million men.