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THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

THREE POEMS
OF THE WAR *By*

PAUL CLAUDEL · *Translated*
into English Verse by EDWARD J.
O'BRIEN · *With the French Text.*
Introduction by PIERRE CHAVANNES

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*These poems were recited
for the first time by
Mlle. Ève Francis.*

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FRENCH

Introduction to Three Poems of the War.

IN France and elsewhere these three poems have been greeted by different critics as the most beautiful that the war has so far inspired; and as they have won over the critics they have also won the applause of vast audiences. They have done more, perhaps, for the fame of Claudel than all the work he has accomplished in the course of a life that has already entered upon its second half. And in this fact there is something strange. Claudel is not a "national poet" in the ordinary sense of the term. He is solitary, even in his own country. He is so partly by the force of circumstances: nearly always away from France, first as consul in America, then in China, lastly in Germany, he was not borne to fame by any literary school or coterie. But solitary he is by the very nature of his mind and art. In the French literature of yesterday Claudel appeared as something of a stranger. Whence came he? He is not like any other poet, the logical and incontestable heir of a clearly traced lineage; he does not belong to the French tradition of clearness, elegance, measure, perfec-

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tion, united in a form that is far removed from all excess and from all extremes. His originality is baffling, and his form is strange. His *vers libre* may be linked, perhaps, with that rhythm of Rimbaud, Maurice de Guérin, Châteaubriand, and with the beautiful tradition of French poetical prose; but based as it is on a personal theory of respiratory rhythm, stamped with the seal of an originality that is forceful, conscious, meditated, it is his alone, it is "Claudelian verse." Furthermore, Claudel is a religious genius. The faith he holds is not a comfortable, reassuring, accommodating and modern one; but a harsh and inflexible faith which sometimes seems to delight in all that shocks reason and terrifies sensibility in dogma and discipline. He has lived the long drama of the pursuit of absolute truth alone, and in proportion as he entered more deeply into the possession and the knowledge of that truth it seemed as if he were drawing away from his contemporaries; he is the man who embarks for a mysterious voyage and has left wife, children and friends behind on the quay; his words, coming out of the distance, arouse, among those who hear them, only "a little amusement, a little fear"; and their own words are not understood any better by the traveller!

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“. . . Art, science, the life of freedom . . .” O brothers, what is there between you and us?

“Only let me depart, why will you not leave me in peace?

*We will come back no more among you.”**

* * * * *

War breaks out, disrupting everything, entailing the brusque separation which suddenly carries the present back into the distant past. The poets, surprised by the cataclysm, attempt to sing, and into their songs they put, no doubt, all their soul and energy. But who does not feel how thin, feeble and inadequate are their voices? They are lost in the mighty unbridling of forces, in the great anonymous conflict of nations in arms, of civilisations at grips with one another, of opposed ideals,—a confused mêlée from which will be born in woe some unknown future. This is true of all; but the voice of those poets who seemed so much of their age is just the one which now seems to us to come from afar, from a world that is dead. Why, then, is it the voice of the solitary traveller in metaphysical lands, which is after all nearer, firmer, less unworthy of these events which are

* “Corona Benignitatis Anni Dei.”

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carrying us along, and, as they bear us away, are infinitely beyond our comprehension?

Claudél's art explains much of this apparent anomaly. His art, which unites different, and at times contradictory, elements with unequal success, has been much discussed; and on so controversial a problem time alone can pronounce a definite verdict. But we must recognise in it the quality of greatness. Claudél's art did not have to exert itself to attain that gravity, to sound that Dorian mode which alone is worthy of the poetry of war: he was at once equal to events; he was ready. In these poems, in which Claudél's qualities seem to have attained a happy equilibrium, his poetry—as always with Claudél—is like some massive piece of architecture, the logical arrangement is rigorous and simple, a help rather than a hindrance to the sentiment. It is clothed in a wealth of images, full of fresh power culled directly from life by a poet whose vision is both naïve and studied. Claudél, by the rugged freshness of his images and by this direct contact with the world, resembles Whitman a little, but he is the Whitman of an older traditional civilisation, the old peasant, warlike, Catholic nation of France.

This grave eloquence, present in all three poems, differs

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somewhat in each. Familiar and popular in the first, it shows something of the brusqueness, fervor and intensity, that hallucination—or illumination—which is seen in the eyes of those who return from the combat; at the same time it has the great impassioned movement and the sublime inspiration which bear up a whole nation through the suffering and horrors of the conflict, enabling it to make its willing and supreme sacrifice:

“As often as you will, Sir! O France, as often as thou wilt!”

The second poem is the most Claudelian. Châteaubriand, speaking of the murder of a poor Italian fisherman by Napoleon, said: “There is blood that is dumb, and blood that cries aloud: the blood of the battlefield is drunk silently by the earth; the peaceful blood that is spilt spurts out, groaning, towards heaven. God sees it and avenges.” Claudel takes over this mystical idea and gives it a deeper significance; it is the earth itself which revolts against the slaughter of the innocent: the crime is contrary to her nature; and the corpse of the innocent, terrible seed, germinates like corn in the ground, producing slowly its harvest, the terrible harvest of justice and

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anger. The guns may thunder; they will not succeed in destroying silence:

“You will not succeed in replacing in your hearts the voices now forever silent,
The unforgiving voices of those you killed and who nevermore will speak.”

The vision develops with a Biblical strain: the condemned army, “doomed never to return,” hopelessly caught between two armies, in front the army of the enemy, and *behind them* another army, the army of the murdered, rising again:

“Hear the dead reviving just at thy back, and behind thee in the God-filled night,
The breath of resurrection passing o’er thy crime on the crowds!”

After the heroic fever of the assault and the mad sacrifice, after the prophetic imprecation and the cry of the “blood of righteous Abel spilt on the ground,” the third poem unfolds its broad harmonies, sad but serene. After the long and cruel winter, there is in the air a breath of spring: can it be the breath of victory? After this clear

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allegro, still touched, like a March morning, with the thought of winter, comes the poignant theme of the great *adagio*, "To the Dead in the Armies of the Republic."

"Is it true you will not see victory? is it true you will not see summer?"

O our brothers intermingled with us, O dead, is it true that you are wholly dead?"

And the theme develops solemnly, mingled with sadness and hope, with death and victory; but at this altitude of the soul, where is life and where is death? Death creates life, triumph pierces the gloom and shines over the deepest sadness; the dead in the armies of Justice fight by the side of the living, not "behind them"; and this is why these armies of Justice are also "the armies of Justice and Joy," the "armies of the living and the dead all together."

This same plenitude of power and richness, and this same certainty, are also found in the language of the poems. Every word in them expresses its full meaning and all its meanings: an intellectual and mystical symbol and at the same time a sensible reality; and bold comparisons derive from the words a fresh resonance, in the same

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way that the attentive ear catches, as they rise one after another, the most hidden and distant harmonies from an instrument played with accurate intonation. The Yale University Press has rendered to this poetry the homage which is its due by recognising that it could not be translated, and by reproducing the French text side by side with the English rendering.

* * * * *

But Claudel's art does not explain everything. Moreover, if this art is so sure of its purpose, is it not because faith animates it and certainty carries it along? This faith and certainty is that this is a holy war, and that it is necessary to fight and to die "so long as there is this injustice, so long as there is this power rearing itself against all powerful Justice;" and if Claudel has been so little surprised by the catastrophe, it is because this certainty is only a result of his faith, this hope of victory only an aspect of his eternal hope. But this certainty is not Claudel's alone, it is the certainty of France. In these poems Claudel is no longer the stranger and alarming *solitaire*. Here he expresses through his soul the great soul we have in common. And no doubt this is because

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the traveller has "returned to us," and because it is not only the Catholic but the man, and not only the man but the French man who speaks to us; but it is also because many of us have also moved nearer to him and have left the unfruitful lands of appearances, petty interests, and comfortable life and opinions. For two years and more France has offered the spectacle—unsurpassed by anything in history—of a great nation unitedly raising its soul to those higher regions whereto, in ordinary times, only some few souls attain; she has penetrated into those regions of the absolute, of certainty and of sacrifice, whose appeal in a not distant past used to awaken "only a little amusement and a little fear"; and from this flow that naked simplicity in heroism, and that great calm. These great, glorious, suffering armies are doubtless not comprised wholly of Christians, and the eternal things in which these men believe are not always those of the Catholic faith; many who do not believe or know themselves to be Christians might say that Claudel's thought is too much inspired by the Old Testament, and, leaving vengeance to God, fight without anger and prefer to think of a better world which may result from their sacrifice. But whatever the belief of her soldiers and the hope of

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her crowds, a vision is set up for all; there is, as a young soldier wrote a few weeks before falling in an attack, a "spiritual element in this war, a dove of purest white which hovers over our armies." They all feel—even the most unenlightened souls and the most doubting minds—that if they are willing to die, it is not only in order that France may live, it is that something better may be born to the world; that it is better they should die in order that conscience and faith in justice may live among men, that they must conquer in order to save the gentle virtues and elevated human beliefs, the rights of the weak, and freedom for each man to live and possess his soul. This is the reason why through all this conscious barbarity, homicidal science and the horror of these monstrous death-dealing machines, they remain men, "the sons of women"; and why through the agonies of grief, fatigue, physical fear and death, they go with the certainty of the believer who forgets the things which are behind, and no longer sees anything save the things which are before, the task that lies at hand:

"Nothing before me in the deafening roar and the thunder, save my sacrifice to make!"

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In a word, the strength of these poems is that their art and their soul have made them less unworthy than others to present a reflection of the beauty of France, the France of to-day, which is the same as that of yesterday and for ever, the France that is "gay" and yet so grave, the France of clear vision and great-heartedness, the France which has courage to understand and not to say "I believe" when she only wishes to believe, the "sceptical" France which has faith to risk great hazards for the sake of humanity, the France which is "terrible as the Holy Ghost."

PIERRE CHAVANNES.

February, 1917.

I.

*Yes, General, as Often as
You Direct!*

TEN times we have attacked in there,
“with a purely local effect.”
We must go in there once more? Yes,
General, as often as you direct!

A cigarette first, and a draught of wine. How good
it is. Your health, old man!

There are too many of them still on their legs in the
three-seventy-seventh since the fight began.

Your health, old comrade! What were you then in
the comical days of civil life, when we were
alive in the land?

A hairdresser, eh? My father's a banker, and I be-
lieve his name is Legrand.

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Butcher, cheeseseller, curé, farmer, lawyer, pedlar,
leather-cutter,

A little of everything here in the trenches, and those
opposite us will see what will emerge from all
this slaughter!

We are all brethren as like as apples, even as perfectly
naked children.

It's in civil life that we were different, here in the
ranks we are only *men*.

Fatherless, motherless, ageless, only claiming my
personal rank and number,

Claiming only the comrade who knows his duty to
me, at the vital time.

Behind me the second echelon only, with me only the
task that is mine,

Before me only what I must deliver, amid the deafen-
ing roar and thunder!

Body and blood that are mine to deliver, soul that is
mine to deliver to God,

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

The thing in my hand that I must deliver to those before me who sully our God!

(So long as I shall be living flesh, while there is a notch to make in his belt,

So long as there still exists this kind of man to confront, my blow shall be dealt!)

If the shell does its work, well, after all, 'tis a human soul that is going to spring!

The bayonet then? The iron tongue that draws *me* is more just and a thirstier thing!

Attention, all in the trench, to our Chief when he starts to lift his gun! And a host

Of us will go forth, for we are France, and terrible as the Holy Ghost!

While those confront us who hold what is ours under the soles of their dirty boots,

While this injustice of force confronts our justice which has the stronger roots,

While there is one who does not succumb, whose face responds to the summons of right,

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

While a Frenchman lives with a laughing face who
believes in the things of eternal light,

While his future exists to be laid on the table, while
his life survives for him to give,
His life and the lives of all his people, my wife and
children for me to give,

While fire and steel are the only things to halt the
advance of a living man,
While living flesh of France can cross your accursèd
threads of steel in the van,

While a child of woman can march across the poms
of your science and chemistry,
While the honor of France shines more clear in our
hearts than the light of the sun on a noonday sea,

While the glorious land behind us listens and prays
and is silent through the night,
While our everlasting vocation shall be to trample
upon your paunchy might,

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

As often as you direct, to the end! while a single man
of them survives! While a single living man
survives, our living and dead shall fight to
effect!

Yes, General, as often as you shall order! O France,
as often as you direct!

June, 1915.

II.

Behind Them.

“They will assemble behind them.”—*The Curé of Ars.*

THE blood unjustly shed sinks slowly
into earth.
The simple skyey dews and great clean
rains give birth
To fertile harvests, corn and grain, the pride of Hes-
baye and Brabant.
Yet gentler to its veins for that it mingles with our
blood to plant
The red soul of her sons in her, the offering of milk
and wine
The soldier gave defending her in death, erect and
armed in line!
A solemn gift, his love defined in stubble field and
deep-ploughed land,

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Old Adam's clay rewatered now, man bound to dust
by a noble band!

But your conscription, chalked like cattle, of children,
women, and old men,

This heap in a corner, helter-skelter, suddenly foaming,
still hot with life, in the smoking gutters of
the pen,

Like the grapes in the winepress, the black blood
spurting unchecked from the wounds of men,

This fearful vintage smearing all things, of which
we all perforce have quaffed,

Are things of which the earth has horror, a deed that
nature spurns, the draught

Of which flows slowly in her veins, and rises, murderers,
ever deeper, ever greater than your
thirst!

Are you unmindful she conceives of seed which you
have planted first?

As the long winter's maceration and the brooding of
three seasons' fold

The grain, long dreamed, before it sprouts and

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

climbs and shows a blade, to promise a harvest
rich a hundredfold,
Lo, more truly you have buried the seed and stamped
it with your foot,
And out of the womb of the slain shall flower the un-
conquerable fruit!
Discharge and rumble, day and night! shoot all your
pieces together! thunder, German guns!
Fire your four-twenty mortar at heaven like a dark
smoky volcano, Huns!
Across the unceasing assault of your power which we
have yet unceasingly checked,
Troops, marked to return no more, our impregnable
silence you cannot affect!
You shall never replace in your hearts the voice you
have forever killed,
The mouth that pardons not of the slain whose words
your will has forever stilled!
Intrench yourselves, beleaguered people! spread
your net of impassable steel!
Grave-diggers of your own battalions, dig without
rest your own graves in the field!

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What stamps in your ranks all day and night, what
gladly rings in your ears is not all!

A mighty and soundless army assembles behind your
ranks, though you hear no call!

From Louvain unto Réthel, from Termonde to
Nomény,

The heaped earth stirs with life, and a great black
spot spreads free!

A frontier stands behind you closed more firmly than
the Rhine!

Hearken, O you people standing among us others,
hearken, Cain!

Hearken to the dead behind you stir again; this night
behind

You breathes the day of resurrection passing on your
populous crime!

Race of locusts eating men, the time comes when you
must recoil!

Step by step the time comes when you must repass
the bloody soil!

Come with us, O race of helmets. Too many meshes
hold us lest we bend!

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Object of our long desire, we hold you firmly to the
end!

Behold the fordless stream of Justice, innocent arms
around you clinging inescapable as briars!

And feel with all our dead beneath your feet the earth
that yields and sinks to everlasting fires!

June, 1915.

III.

To the Dead in the Armies of the Republic.

OUR days of gloom recede. The lovely
sun anew
Shines in a sky of blue.
Now is the end of winter, now is the
coming of spring,
Morning in flaxen robe doth sing.
After the raven's alarms and the whistling wail of
the wind
The blackbird's note is kind!
From his hole in the hollow plane just now I have
seen creep
An insect slow with sleep.
The world is alight, the world is warm, it opens, it
is free,
A white serenity,

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A pure and simple joy in bud and bloom,
Faith in the summer that comes soon.
I feel on my cheek the caress of a breeze with its
gentle dance!
I know it, it is France!
Soft and simple, but urgent! yes, it is she!
The wind of victory!

Heroes, whose lives have been sown in mass in the
ground, like grain,
Pure wheat, whose narrow furrow they shall not pass
has been filled with slain,
Whose flame and thunder roars from the Vosges to
the North Sea,
To you the dead, in the steps of the living, my
thoughts now flee!
Is it true you will never see the victory, never see the
summer light?
O dead, our brothers mingled with us, is it true you
are lost in the endless night?
You whose youthful bodies piled filled the winter's
abyss with slain,

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Dimmed by the left bank of the Yser, dimmed by the
right bank of the Aisne,
You who far from the light of the sun and the
laughter of hope have fought,
Obeying orders, strictly forbidden any other thought
Than to do what the general told you to do, and at
any cost hold fast,
Soldiers of the great buried Reserve, has the roar of
the cannon ceased at last?
Do you not hear our line advancing, tearing itself
from the clinging Earth,
Nor feel the enemy yielding a little, in the wonderful
hour of our Victory's birth?
Ah! we have held them with us too long in the depths
of that gloomy track,
Body to body with striving muscles, heart against
heart and back to back!
Rise, intermingled brothers, rise, lo! space is free for
our armies in flower,
Tremendous battalions marching on in golden sun-
light and April shower!

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

Feed the storming van of our host with your inexhaustible yield,

Our people striding slow and sure like a man in sabots who sows his field,

Crested with our birds of war, followed by our wagons and trains on a line of six hundred miles, until

Little by little the other people is thrust and driven back biting and stamping, but feeling the power of its master's will!

As a wealthy farmer looks all around, and sees his lines of mowers advance,

Lo! nearer and nearer the bank of the Meuse, singly approaches the yoke of all the armies of France!

And now the German forests and mountains trembling emerge in the distant haze!

O dead, do you feel the heavenly fragrance, eternal reward of heroic days,

Won at last the sight and scent, body and soul of it all at hand,

Slaking your thirst for ever and ever in the conquered enemy's land!

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

The frontier trampled oaths have opened, force it
with your swelling bands!

Enter, Armies of Justice and Joy, enter your freely
Promised Lands!

Ah! the bread in my mouth is bitter, sour indeed is
my draught of wine,

Armies of the quick and the dead, till we slake our
thirst in the deep Rhine!

March, 1915.

TROIS POÈMES DE GUERRE



I.

*Tant Que Vous Voudrez, Mon
Général!*

DIX fois qu'on attaque là-dedans, "avec résultat purement local." Il faut y aller une fois de plus? Tant que vous voudrez, mon Général!

Une cigarette d'abord. Un coup de vin, qu'il est bon! Allons, mon vieux, à la tienne!

Y en a trop sur leurs jambes encore dans le trois cent soixante-dix-septième.

À la tienne, vieux frère! Qu'est-ce que tu étais dans le civil, en ce temps drôle où ç' qu'on était vivants?

Coiffeur? Moi, mon père est banquier et je crois bien qu'il s'appelait Legrand.

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Boucher, marchand de fromages, curé, cultivateur,
avocat, colporteur, coupeur de cuir,
Y a de tout dans la tranchée et ceux d'en face, ils
vont voir ce qu'il en va sortir!

Tous frères comme des enfants tout nus, tous pareils
comme des pommes.

C'est dans le civil qu'on était différents, dans le rang
il n'y a plus que *des hommes!*

Plus de père ni de mère, plus d'âge, plus que le grade
et que le numéro,

Plus rien que le camarade qui sait ce qu'il a à faire
avec moi, pas trop tard et pas trop tôt.

Plus rien derrière moi que le deuxième échelon, avec
moi que le travail à faire,

Plus rien devant moi que ma livraison à opérer dans
l'assourdissement et le tonnerre!

Livraison de mon corps et de mon sang, livraison de
mon âme à Dieu,

Livraison aux messieurs d'en face de cette chose dans
ma main qui est pour eux!

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(Tant qu'il y aura quelqu'un dans ma peau, tant
qu'il y aura un cran à faire à sa ceinture,
Tant qu'il y aura le type en face qui me regarde dans
la figure!)

Si la bombe fait de l'ouvrage, qu'est-ce que c'est
qu'une âme humaine qui va sauter!
La baïonnette? cette espèce de langue de fer qui me
tire est plus droite et plus altérée!

Y a de tout dans la tranchée, attention au chef quand
il va lever son fusil!
Et ce qui va sortir, c'est la France, terrible comme le
Saint-Esprit!

Tant qu'il y aura ceux d'en face pour tenir ce qui
est à nous sous la semelle de leurs bottes,
Tant qu'il y aura cette injustice, tant qu'il y aura
cette force contre la justice qui est la plus forte,
Tant qu'il y aura quelqu'un qui n'accepte pas, tant
qu'il y aura cette face vers la justice qui appelle,
Tant qu'il y aura un Français avec un éclat de rire
pour croire dans les choses éternelles,

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Tant qu'il y aura son avenir à plaquer sur la table,
tant qu'il y aura sa vie à donner,
Sa vie et celle de tous les siens à donner, ma femme et
mes petits enfants avec moi pour les donner,

Tant que pour arrêter un homme vivant il n'y aura
que le feu et que le fer,

Tant qu'il y aura de la viande vivante de Français
pour marcher à travers vos sacrés fils de fer,

Tant qu'il y aura un enfant de femme pour marcher
à travers votre science et votre chimie,

Tant que l'honneur de la France avec nous luit plus
clair que le soleil en plein midi,

Tant qu'il y aura ce grand pays derrière nous qui
écoute et qui prie et qui fait silence,

Tant que notre vocation éternelle sera de vous
marcher sur la panse,

Tant que vous voudrez, jusqu'à la gauche! tant qu'il
y en aura un seul! Tant qu'il y en aura un de
vivant, les vivants et les morts tous à la fois!

Tant que vous voudrez, mon général! O France,
tant que tu voudras!

Juin, 1915.

II.

Derrière Eux.

“On se réunira derrière eux.”—*Le Curé d'Ars.*

LE sang injustement répandu est long à pénétrer
dans la terre.
C'est la rosée des cieux innocente qui est
pour elle et la large pluie salutaire
Qui ressort en moissons plantureuses, foin et blé,
orgueil de la Hesbaye et du Brabant.
Plus douce encore à ses veines toutefois quand il vient
s'y mêler, s'il faut du sang,
L'âme rouge dans elle de ses fils et la libation comme
du lait et comme du vin
Du soldat qui pour la défendre est tombé, les armes
à la main!
Solennelle donation, définitif amour dans le labour
et dans l'éteule,

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Glaise réhumectée de l'antique Adam par quoi la
terre et l'homme redeviennent comme un seul!
Mais cette conscription et le marquage à la craie
comme des bêtes, pour la mort, des enfants, des
femmes et des vieillards,
Cette entassement pêle-mêle dans un coin, et tout à
coup écumeuse, et toute chaude encore de vie,
et fumante par tous les échenaux de l'abattoir,
Comme la grappe sous le madrier, cette sortie impé-
tueuse du sang noir,
Cette vendange affreuse dont on la barbouille et qu'on
lui fait boire de force,
Sont des choses dont la terre a horreur, et une œuvre
au rebours d'elle-même, et l'amorce
De cette coupe lentement dans son cœur qui remonte
vers vous, meurtriers, plus profonde et plus
large que votre soif!
Vous qui l'avez ensemencée, oubliez-vous qu'elle
conçoit?
Comme il faut la macération de tout l'hiver et la
pensée de trois saisons
Pour que le grain longuement médité germe et

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pousse et s'atteste épi, promesse d'une centuple
moisson,
Tel, et plus vous avez enseveli la semence et plus vous
l'avez piétinée,
L'incoercible fruit qui sort du ventre des assassinés!
Roule, fusillade, jour et nuit! feu de vos pièces toutes
à la fois! tonnez, canons allemands!
Que le coup du mortier de quatre cent vingt vers le
ciel dans une montagne noire de fumée se
décharge comme un volcan!
A travers le continuel assaut et la continuelle résis-
tance,
Troupes marquées pour ne plus revenir, vous n'arri-
verez pas à détruire le silence,
Vous n'arriverez pas à remplacer dans vos cœurs
cette voix à jamais qui s'est tue,
La bouche sans pardon de ceux que vous avez tués
et qui ne parleront plus!
Retranche-toi, peuple assiégé! étends tes impassables
réseaux de fil de fer!
Fossoyeurs de vos propres bataillons, sans relâche
faites votre fosse dans la terre!

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

Ce qui tape jour et nuit dans vos rangs, ce qui sonne
joyeusement en face n'est pas tout!

Il y a une grande armée sans aucun bruit qui se ras-
semble derrière vous!

Depuis Louvain jusqu'à Réthel, depuis Termonde
jusques à Nomény,

Il y a de la terre mal tassée qui s'agite et une grande
tache noire qui s'élargit!

Il y a une frontière derrière vous qui se referme plus
infranchissable que le Rhin!

Écoute, peuple qui es parmi les autres peuples
comme Caïn!

Entends les morts dans ton dos qui revivent, et dans
la nuit derrière toi pleine de Dieu,

Le souffle de la résurrection qui passe sur ton crime
populeux!

Peuple de sauterelles mangeur d'hommes, le temps
vient que tu seras forcé de reculer!

Le vestige que tu as fait dans le sang, pas à pas le
temps vient que tu vas y repasser!

Viens avec nous, peuple casqué. Il y a trop de

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

choses entre toi et nous à jamais pour nous en
dessaisir!

Nous te tenons donc à la fin, objet de notre long désir!
Voici le fleuve sans gué de la Justice, voici les bras
des innocents autour de toi inextricables comme
des ronces!

Ressens la terre sous tes pieds pleine de morts qui est
molle et qui enfonce!

Juin, 1915.

III.

*Aux Morts des Armées de la
République.*

DE nouveau après tant de sombres jours le
soleil délicieux
Brille dans le ciel bleu.
L'hiver bientôt va finir, bientôt le prin-
temps commence, et le matin
S'avance dans sa robe de lin.
Après le corbeau affreux et le sifflement de la bise
gémissante,
J'entends le merle qui chante!
Sur le platane tout à l'heure j'ai vu sortir de son trou
Un insecte lent et mou.
Tout s'illumine, tout s'échauffe, tout s'ouvre, tout se
dégage!
Peu à peu croît et se propage

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

Une espèce de joie pure et simple, une espèce de
sérénité,

La foi dans le futur été!

Ce souffle encore incertain dont je sens ma joue ca-
ressée,

C'est la France, je le sais!

Ah, qu'elle est douce, car c'est elle! naïve mais pér-
emptoire,

L'haleine de la Victoire!

Héros, qui avez été versés en masse dans la terre
comme du blé,

Froment pur dont l'étroit sillon impassable a été
comblé,

Qui flamboie et qui foudroie depuis les Vosges
jusqu'à la Mer du Nord,

C'est à vous que va mon pensée, vous surtout dans les
pieds des vivants qui êtes les morts!

Est-ce vrai que vous ne verrez pas la victoire? est-ce
vrai que vous ne verrez pas l'été?

O nos frères entremêlés avec nous, ô morts, est-ce vrai
que vous êtes morts tout entiers?

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

O vous qui de vos jeunes corps l'un sur l'autre avez
 comblé ce noir hiver,
Obscurcis de la rive droite de l'Aisne et de la rive
 gauche de l'Yser,
Vous qui sans aucun soleil et sans aucune espérance
 combattites,
Toute pensée autre que l'ordre à exécuter sévèrement
 interdite,
Autre que de faire ce que le général a dit de faire et
 de tenir bon,
Soldats de la grande Réserve sous la terre, est-ce que
 vous n'entendez plus le canon?
Est-ce que vous n'entendez pas notre ligne enfin qui
 s'arrache de la Terre et qui avance?
Est-ce que vous ne sentez pas l'ennemi tout à coup qui
 a plié un peu et le départ de la Victoire
 immense?
Ah, trop longtemps nous les avons tenus avec nous au
 fond de la funèbre piste,
Cœur contre cœur, corps à corps, dans l'étreinte une
 seule chose ensemble et le travail de nos muscles
 antagonistes!

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

Debout, frères entremêlés, et voyez l'espace libre
devant nous, et nos armées
Qui marchent par énormes bataillons dans le soleil et
dans la giboulée!
Nourrissez de vos rangs inépuisables notre front ful-
minant,
Notre peuple qui d'un pas lent et sûr comme l'homme
en sabots qui ensemence son champ,
Surmonté de ses oiseaux de guerre et suivi de ses
fourgons et de ses convois sur une ligne de neuf
cents kilomètres,
Refoule et renforce dans ses portes peu à peu l'autre
peuple qui mord et qui tape encore, mais qui sent
son maître!
Comme un puissant fermier de toutes parts qui voit
s'avancer la ligne de ses faucheuses,
L'attelage de toutes nos armées tire d'un seul mouve-
ment vers la Meuse,
Et déjà paraissent les forêts, les montagnes et l'hor-
izon germanique!
O morts, la sentez-vous avec nous, l'odeur de votre
paradis héroïque,

THREE POEMS OF THE WAR

La possession à la fin avec son corps de la chose qu'on
vous avait promise,
Le grand assouvissement pour toujours de la terre
ennemie que l'on a conquise!
La frontière que le parjure a ouverte, forcez-la de
vos rangs accumulés!
Entrez, armées de la Justice et de la Joie, dans la
terre qui vous a été donnée!
Ah, ma soif ne sera pas désaltérée et le pain ne sera
pas bon,
Armées des vivants et des morts, jusqu'à ce que nous
avons bu ensemble dans le Rhin profond!

Mars, 1915.

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