

donnarkevic

Burying the War Dead

*Being wearied with burying,
he came to his house and cast himself down
by the wall and slept.*

—Tobias 2:10

One day, someone who did not soldier
will name this war.
Annalists will estimate the dead,
irrational numbers
recorded for historians to argue.

Now, I tidy the battlefield.
I bury both friend and foe.
Some have torn at their clothes
in vain attempts to tend wounds.
Some pose awkward, positions
gruesome as the limbs of a Gallows Elm.
Some nestle like babies asleep,
forever awaiting a mother's waking touch.

Once, I squatted,
staring at a dead youth,
wondering if he ever kissed a girl.

I remember this one skull,
a moustache still attached,
how it must have tickled
the cheek of his daughter.

How can I describe the smell
no flower can triumph over,
how it clings to my clothes,
my hands as I try to eat
mid-day rations meant for others?

The armies advance/retreat
like a prodigal streak of lightning,
so I bury bodies only arm-deep.
To the religions of clay gods
I commend spirits
while summer rains
and hogs root out the bodies
that predators will scatter
long before the mercy of grass.

At night I will sleep
against the geography of a stone wall,
dividing one man's land from another's.
For I have learned that stars are endless
as the campfires
around which warriors will pray
the gods be with them
when their bones rise with the sun
and their enemy's fall beneath the spade.

donnarkevic: Weston, WV. MFA National University. Recent poetry has appeared in *Bijou Poetry Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Prime Number*, and *Off the Coast*. Poetry Chapbooks include *Laundry*, published by Main Street Rag. Plays have received readings in Chicago, New York, and Virginia. FutureCycle Press published, *Admissions*, a book of poems, in 2013.