THE ACHAIANS HAVE GOT TROY,  
UPON THIS VERY DAY  

from AGAMEMNON

The Achaians have got Troy, upon this very day.  
I think the city echoes with a clash of cries.  
Pour vinegar and oil into the selfsame bowl  
you cannot say they mix in friendship, but fight on.  
Thus various sound the voices of the conquerors  
and conquered, from the opposition of their fates.  
Trojans are stooping now to gather in their arms  
their dead, husbands and brothers; children lean to clasp  
the aged who begot them, crying upon the death  
of those most dear, from lips that never will be free.  
The Achaians have their midnight work after the fighting  
that sets them down to feed on all the city has,  
ravenous, headlong, by no rank and file assigned,  
but as each man has drawn his shaken lot by chance.  
And in the Trojan houses that their spears have taken  
they settle now, free of the open sky, the frosts  
and dampness of the evening; without sentinels set  
they sleep the sleep of happiness the whole night through.  
And if they reverence the gods who hold the city  
and all the holy temples of the captured land,  
they, the despoilers, might not be despoiled in turn.  
Let not their passion overwhelm them; let no lust  
seize on these men to violate what they must not.  
The run to safety and home is yet to make; they must turn  
the pole and run the backstretch of the doubled course.  
Yet, though the host come home without offence to high  
gods, even so the anger of these slaughtered men  
may never sleep.—Oh, let there be no fresh wrong done!

Aeschylus  
Translated by Richmond Lattimore
http://www.greatbooks.org/soul/sample.html

The Diameter of the Bomb

Yehuda Amichai

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimeters
and the diameter of its effective range about seven meters,
with four dead and eleven wounded.
And around these, in a larger circle
of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered
and one graveyard. But the young woman
who was buried in the city she came from,
at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers,
enlarges the circle considerably,
and the solitary man mourning her death
at the distant shores of a country far across the sea
includes the entire world in the circle.
And I won't even mention the crying of orphans
that reaches up to the throne of God and
beyond, making
a circle with no end and no God.

I SAW THE VISION OF ARMIES

I saw the vision of armies;
And I saw, as in noiseless dreams, hundreds of battle-flags;
Borne through the smoke of the battles, and pierc'd with missiles, I saw them,
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody;
And at last but a few shreds of the flags left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men—I saw them;
I saw the debris and debris of all dead soldiers;
But I saw they were not as was thought;
They themselves were fully at rest—they suffer'd not;
The living remain'd and suffer'd—the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child, and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remained suffer'd.

WALT WHITMAN

Civil War

Whitman served as a nurse.
Certain words such as glory, honor, courage or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. —Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribner: New York, 1929/1957) pp. 184-185
Dulce Et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound’ring like a man in fire or lime...

Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

BM has two drafts, the earlier of which gives, beneath the title,
To Jessie Pope etc (cancelled), and To a certain Poetess. HO has two
drafts, one subscribed To Jessie Pope etc, the other, To a certain
Poetess.
In a letter to his mother, dated August 1917, Owen wrote _Here is a gas poem, done yesterday._

1. 8: BM (a) has _tired, outstripped_ (gas-shells deleted, and the line reads _Of gas-shells dropping softly that dropped behind._ EB amended to _Of gas-shells dropping softly behind._ The earlier BM draft shows two alternatives for this line, both of ten syllables. HO (a) gives _Of tired, outstripped fiv-nines that dropped behind._ HO (b) gives _Of disappointed shells that dropped behind._

After line 8, BM (b) has four lines which in the later version were first altered a little, then cancelled—

Then somewhere near in front: _Whew...fup...fop... fup..._
_gas-shells or duds? We loosened masks, in case—_
_And listened... Nothing... Far rumouring of Krupp..._
_Then stinging poison hit us in the face._

I. 20: HO (b) _His hanging face, tortured for your own sin_
I. 23: EB omits _Obscene as cancer_
II. 25–6: these were substituted, at a late stage of composition, for
_And think how, once, his head was like a bud,
Fresh as a country rose, and keen, and young,—_
WWI

my sweet old etcetera

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister

Isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds) of socks not to
mention fleaproof earwarmers
etcetera wristers etcetera, my
mother hoped that

i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my

self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et

cetera
(dreaming,
et
cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)

ee cummings

Cummings served in ambulance corps
and was mistakenly identified as
a combatant
III. – I HATE THE MOON

(After a moonlight patrol near the Brickstacks)

I hate the Moon, though it makes most people glad,  
And they giggle and talk of silvery beams – you know!  
But she says the look of the Moon drives people mad,  
And that’s the thing that always frightens me so.

I hate it worst when it’s cruel and round and bright,  
And you can’t make out the marks on its stupid face,  
Except when you shut your eyelashes, and all night  
The sky looks green, and the world’s a horrible place.

I like the stars, and especially the Big Bear  
And the W star, and one like a diamond ring.  
But I hate the Moon and its horrible stony stare,  
And I know one day it’ll do me some dreadful thing.

A DEAD BOCHE*

To you who’d read my songs of War  
And only hear of blood and fame,  
I’ll say (you’ve heard it said before)  
‘War’s Hell!’ and if you doubt the same,  
To-day I found in Mametz Wood  
A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,  
In a great mess of things unclean,  
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stank  
With clothes and face a sodden green,  
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,  
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.
The Kiss

To these I turn, in these I trust—
Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
To his blind power I make appeal,
I guard her beauty clean from rust.

He spins and burns and loves the air,
And splits a skull to win my praise;
But up the nobly marching days
She glitters naked, cold and fair.

Sweet Sister, grant your soldier this:
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward darting kiss.

The Hero

'Jack fell as he'd have wished,' the Mother said,
And folded up the letter that she'd read.
'The Colonel writes so nicely.' Something broke
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.
She half looked up. 'We mothers are so proud
Of our dead soldiers.' Then her face was bowed.

Quietly the Brother Officer went out.
He'd told the poor old dear some gallant lies
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt.
For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes
Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,
Because he'd been so brave, her glorious boy.

He thought how 'Jack', cold-footed, useless swine,
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried
To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care
Except that lonely woman with white hair.
Enemies

He stood alone in some queer sunless place
Where Armageddon ends. Perhaps he longed
For days he might have lived; but his young face
Gazed forth untroubled: and suddenly there thronged
Round him the hulking Germans that I shot
When for his death my brooding rage was hot.

He stared at them, half-wondering; and then
They told him how I’d killed them for his sake—
Those patient, stupid, sullen ghosts of men;
And still there seemed no answer he could make.
At last he turned and smiled. One took his hand
Because his face could make them understand.

The Tombstone-Maker

He primmmed his loose red mouth and leaned his head
Against a sorrowing angel’s breast, and said:
‘You’d think so much bereavement would have made
‘Unusual big demands upon my trade.
‘The War comes cruel hard on some poor folk;
‘Unless the fighting stops I’ll soon be broke.’

He eyed the Cemetery across the road.
‘There’s scores of bodies out abroad, this while,
‘That should be here by rights. They little know’d
‘How they’d get buried in such wretched style.’

‘I told him with a sympathetic grin,
That Germans boil dead soldiers down for fat;
And he was horrified. ‘What shameful sin!
‘O sir, that Christian souls should come to that!’
THE DEATH OF THE
BALL TURRET GUNNER

FROM my mother's sleep I fell into the State
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

RANDALL JARRELL

A REFUSAL TO MOURN THE DEATH,
BY FIRE, OF A CHILD IN LONDON

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.
I shall not murder

SONG

The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grace beyond age, the dark veins of her mother
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.

DYLAN THOMAS

[200]
What Were They Like?

1) Did the people of Vietnam use lanterns of stone?
2) Did they hold ceremonies to reverence the opening of buds?
3) Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
4) Did they use bone and ivory, jade and silver, for ornament?
5) Had they an epic poem?
6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
   It is not remembered whether in gardens stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom, but after the children were killed there were no more buds.
3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
   All the bones were charred.
5) It is not remembered. Remember, most were peasants; their life was in rice and bamboo.
   When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces, maybe fathers told their sons old tales.
   When bombs smashed those mirrors there was time only to scream.
6) There is an echo yet of their speech which was like a song.
   It was reported their singing resembled the flight of moths in moonlight.
   Who can say? It is silent now.
ALLEN GINSBERG
1926–

A Vow

I will haunt these States
with beard bald head
eyes staring out plane window,
hair hanging in Greyhound bus midnight

leaning over taxicab seat to admonish
an angry cursing driver
hand lifted to calm
his outraged vehicle
that I pass with the Green Light of common law.

Common Sense, Common law, common tenderness
& common tranquility
our means in America to control the money munching
war machine, bright lit industry
everywhere digesting forests & excreting soft pyramids
of newsprint, Redwood and Ponderosa patriarchs
silent in Meditation murdered & regurgitated as smoke,
sawdust, screaming ceilings of Soap Opera,
thick dead Lifes, slick Advertisements
for Gubernatorial big guns
burping Napalm on palm rice tropic greenery.

Dynamite in forests,
boughs fly slow motion
thunder down ravine,
Helicopters roar over National Park, Mekong Swamp,
Dynamite fire blasts thru Model Villages,
Violence screams at Police, Mayors get mad over radio,
Drop the Bomb on Niggers!
drop Fire on the gook China
Frankenstein Dragon
waving its tail over Bayonne’s domed Aluminum
oil reservoir!

I’ll haunt these States all year
gazing bleakly out train windows, blue airfield
red TV network on evening plains,
decoding radar Provincial editorial paper message,
deciphering Iron Pipe laborers’ curses as
clanging hammers they raise steamshovel claws
over Puerto Rican agony lawyers’ screams in slums.

October 11, 1966
Facing It
By Yusef Komunyakaa (b 1947, Vietnam 1965–67, this from Dien Cai Dau 1988)

My black face fades,
hiding inside the black granite.
I said I wouldn't,
dammit: No tears.
I'm stone. I'm flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me
like a bird of prey, the profile of night
slanted against morning. I turn
this way—the stone lets me go.
I turn that way—I'm inside
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
again, depending on the light
to make a difference.
I go down the 58,022 names,
half-expecting to find
my own in letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
I see the booby trap's white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
but when she walks away
the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
wings cutting across my stare.
The sky. A plane in the sky.
A white vet's image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I'm a window.
He's lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman's trying to erase names:
No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

http://www.ibiblio.org/ipa/komunyakaa.php

has an oral version.