

# AFTER A WAR IS LOST

## (NACH EINEM VELORENE KRIEG)

WRITTEN BY GEORG KAISER

TRANSLATED BY KEVIN VIOLETTE

After a war is lost, when starvation and degradation rule, and all values are sold down the river, a bunko artist sees his chance. He senses, because he is himself filled with basic instincts, that he can rule everyone if he promises them a way out of the hopeless situation. And so he promises — promises the moon, if they will follow and obey.

And this folk that has lost everything and sees no way out, believes in its dullness his empty rant, which bespeaks not the good of the many but only his own lust to power, to rule. At first the number of believers is small, but the shriek and hubbub grows ever louder, the lying promises ever more audacious and cunning — uncontrolled and uncontrollable. Those who have nothing to lose, who do not want to think or analyze, follow the siren song of the seducer. Which leads to ruin. Giddy with hunger, deafened by the tumult of the masses, driven by the longing for peace and freedom, they scream for that which they crave.

The Great Scoundrel has reached his goal — now he presses those who were deceived by his lies into a tortured mass, which he exploits and toys with. His sadism drives him to have a prison built next to his palace so that he can hear the chains rattle. The groaning and bleating of the prisoners is music to him. Now he has the power over life and death. And every day, while the mass hungers and suffers, a truck crosses the prisonyard to his palace laden with luxuries of food and drink. His tongue is strengthened with bon-bons to tell sweet lies, which must remain unfulfilled.

But slowly the folk realize that none of the promises have come true. Their awakening is strongly repressed, but the number of unbelievers grows swiftly. A whisper campaign begins, a plan is formed: a plan to cast down the deceiver. One day the truck is wrecked and the sweet-meats are spilled on the street for all the hungry to see. The signal is given. A few prisoners succeed in wrenching loose from their chains — soon the guards are overpowered and the palace stormed. The mob rushes in, intent on vengeance.

The object of their rage thinks quickly. He is far too cowardly to face the consequences of his misdeeds, and he flees through a secret tunnel to his prison. He changes his hair and beard just enough to deceive the casual glance. He cunningly chains himself to an iron ring and then cries to be freed. Upon his release he storms ahead of the mob, screaming for the blood of the tyrant — *himself*. He promises that he will free the people from their bondage, and again no one notices his deception. He leads them on in search of himself, and jubilantly they follow the very one they wish to destroy. He mocks and reviles the cowardly tyrant who has flown from them. He puts a price on his own head and becomes a hero of the revolution. The folk willingly follow him and do not learn that they have been deceived.

And he amuses himself before his expensive mirror, trying out new faces to deceive the folk. What shall he be this time? A reporter who earns money writing muckraking exposés of himself? Or perhaps a movie star....

But no, he has a better plan. He becomes a holy man, a man of God. Fasting and praying, he lives in a hut in the woods, and the folk he betrayed, whom no earthly power can help, make the pilgrimage to him, the demigod. The ultimate victory is his! He can promise that which he cannot fulfill, and be prayed to.



EMIL NOLDE, 'THE PROPHET' (WOODCUT 1912)

Georg Kaiser, the author of *Nach Einem Verlorenen Krieg*, was born in Magdeburg, Germany in 1878. He lived in Buenos Aires from 1898 to 1901. In 1921 he abandoned a career as a merchant to become a freelance writer. In 1933 his books were banned by the Nazis, and in 1938 he fled to Switzerland, where he died in 1945.

Kevin Violette, who translated *After The War Is Lost*, is a third generation Oregonian of French-Canadian descent. He was raised in Garibaldi and worked for a number of years on his father's commercial fishing boat. He spent a year in Germany and is currently studying for a teacher's degree to teach German and Spanish. He is a member of the famous Astoria rock band, *The Pagan Pancakes*.

## LOOKING FOR TRUTH IN LABELING

BY MARGI SHINDLER

It's Friday night and I'm driving home after a good day's bookselling. There remains one last errand before my official 'evening to myself' begins. I have promised a customer I would deliver his special order book, because it's on the way and I'm glad to do it. I have not met the man to whom I deliver this book except over the phone. I find the house, verify twice that the address is correct, and ring the bell. It takes a bit of time before the doorbell can be heard between the loud voices of a talk radio show. Those self-importantly angry tones scare me these days more than ever, but I have a book to deliver.

The door opens and the smiling friendly faces of a couple somewhere in their 70s greet me. The petite woman is drying her hands on a dishtowel. 6:00, so they are either preparing dinner or cleaning up after it. The house is filled with cute things, a homey, modest little abode. I am warmed by their smiles and the familiar domesticity of this couple, reminiscent of my grandparents. I greet them and hand the book to the man. They both tell me they are so grateful that I would do them the kindness of delivering their book. I smile, enjoying the effect of this small town customer connection thing.

"Anytime!" I say, thinking of how our little store relies so heavily on the locals to keep us alive. I almost begin to say goodnight, but not before one more exchange.

The man looks at me expectantly. "You *must* be a Christian!"

I am like a deer caught in the headlights. What am I to say? I do not want to offend, and yet I have sworn myself to uphold ideological honesty.

"No, I'm not." Their faces fall. They look pained for a response. I implore them with my eyes to see me as they had only a minute ago. A woman delivering a book, in a second-hand skirt, sensible shoes, plain hair and a non-threatening personage. The girl my parents raised me to be.

"You just seem like you must be Christian." The man does not want to let this go.

"Well, I was raised Catholic."

"Oh, well, *that's* Christian," they both chime in, glad to have a label.

"But I don't practice it anymore." Confused looks. "I don't do religion," I emphatically add. Why do I feel bound by social

convention to replace the lack of a label with something? I cannot just be, in their eyes, no religion, but I do not feel like explaining my spirituality to strangers. This would feel like taking my clothes off. Why should I be bound to expose something as personal as my spiritual quest to someone I don't know?

This is what frustrates me about religion. It allows an easy label, and those who adopt it, especially if it is the socially accepted label, feel safe and protected behind it. The mere word "Christian" has been given massive connotations in our culture, despite its actual denotations.

Think about it — Christian = good person. Atheist is the only other word for the absence of religion. Atheist = ? Hard hearted, antisocial, amoral, going to hell. The word is literally political suicide.

I am not an atheist either, but Pat Robertson would probably call me that. While I'm on that subject, he is one with whom I could *never* share the same label in any form, any at all.

### WHOM

After Sept. 11, 2001: New York City,  
Washington, D.C.,  
Pennsylvania field

To whom am I speaking?

To all now gone, and (see) right here:  
to the cattails along the slough,  
to the lightning beyond the tamarisks in the gully,  
to the owl's call into first light,  
to the groans of schist at the great canyon's bottom,  
to the rising of our mothers' laughter, and to our fathers' grins;  
to our children, who are loud with life, but whose voices  
now  
fall like first  
drops of rain  
on silky stone —  
halting, silence-infused, here...  
Luxury is whom you're with.

-CAROLYN DUNN

All the years of philosophical arguments with my good father (who took such comfort in making sure I was baptized) have not left me with the answer for these folks. There is no pithy, succinct response which explains the frustrations of my spirit, what Christians call my "immortal soul."

"Well, it just seems like everyone is turning to religion, now that we're at war." The man is trying hard to figure me out.

"I'm a pacifist," I finally add. They both nod in understanding and relief to have a familiar label for me once again. "I don't believe war is the way to solve anything, and it is wrong."

They seem to agree as we all three shake our heads at the way the world is going. I stammer something about humans evolving past violence. They seem to take this into account.

I bid goodnight before I have to navigate any further into an awkward exchange. As I drive home I wonder what impression I have left with them, especially in the area of a business relationship. Will they call me again to order a book, or is there just a bit of reticence now? I feel unsettled, unlike I usually feel after a simple book delivery. My cheeks feel hot, the familiar sense of self-consciousness which originated back when I was just a little kid in Catholic school. My idealistic heart grew in a strange mix with the child who prayed hard and took confession seriously. I still carry an overdeveloped propensity to seek acceptance and validation. Combine this with the cognitive dissonance of what religion is and what it does in the world, and I can find no immediate sense of where to put this dilemma. So I write.

I am a rat caught in the maze into which I was born. It could be worse. (I hear that phrase a lot these days.) I could have been born a female under Islam, which is a notion best described as *cold comfort*.

Should it matter when, why or to whom the phrase "Do under others..." was first written or spoken? Isn't the important thing that it is a darn good motto, and deserves our attention?

There is another one I like. "Give peace a chance." If I must wear a label, this is one I can live with.

Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

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