

to have open counsel with those who might be able to redirect lies to honesty, and egoism to selflessness, then soldiers (and their commanders) are placed in a terrible situation. Under these circumstances, the force administered at their hands, and the risks to their own lives, are destined from the outset for misuse and waste.

"Reverence...is the virtue that separates leaders from tyrants, as the old Greek poets knew well...Reverence is the capacity to feel respect in the right way toward the right people, and to feel awe towards an object that transcends particular human interests." (p.175).

When leaders cannot be found who embrace such a capacity, or who lose reverence once they are in power, we are caught in a world of pain. We find the rage and cycles of retribution which Homer expressed in the *Iliad* enacted before our eyes. Objectification and dehumanization become the accepted way of both civilian life (which takes on more and more of the characteristics of war), and the battleground itself. As the 20th century French philosopher Simone Weil says in an essay titled "The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force":

"To define force — it is that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing*. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all; this is a spectacle the *Iliad* never wearies of showing us...No comforting fiction intervenes, no consoling prospect of immortality; and on the hero's head no washed-out halo of patriotism descends."

(pp.4-5 in *The Proper Study*, Anderson & Mazzeo, eds., St. Martins, 1962).

Yet it is this harsh force, and the transformation it demands from human being to thing, which we ask of our warriors. If legitimate, we ask for that brutal personal transformation of human to thing in the name of higher goals and for purposes determined by the nation's leadership that should inspire humility. But if a war is based on a long series of deceptions, for what then does a soldier face his or her own possible death? For what purpose does that soldier learn to kill another human being? The warrior in such a cheapened situation is left without any dignity whatsoever.

Defense Secretary Rumsfeld dashed off this answer to the chaos unleashed in Iraq after we decided that the bulk of our devastation was over: "I think we're unlikely to be successful in changing the nature of human beings. That's for others. What we need to do is recognize that we live in a world that's a dangerous world, it's an untidy world." (*The Nation*, Jonathan Miller posted online 4/25/03)

It is a relief to know that there have been in the past, as there are now, "others." The rejection of war has a long history. As long as humanity has been using force to gain its wants there have been objectors to that means. The poet Zbigniew Herbert reminds us in one of his essays how long that has been:

"The Cro-Magnon probably originated in Asia; his progression toward Europe started after the last glaciation some thirty or forty thousand years before Christ. He pitilessly exterminated the less advanced Neanderthal, usurping his caves and hunting grounds. Man was born under the star of Cain."

(from *The Barbarian in the Garden*, Harcourt Brace, 1986, pp.8-9)

But we know that that was not the only star under which we were born. The third and last book for our consideration is *Down In My Heart* by poet William Stafford, written in his late 20's about his conscientious objector internship during World War II. He spent most of his time doing forest fire control and trail repair in Civilian Public Service camps. He was not alone. I have read at least two *Oregonian* obituaries in the past year which indicated the World War II conscientious objector status of the men written about. They lived into their late 80's the kind of lives any of us would have been proud to claim.

III. Down In My Heart: Peace Witness in War Time

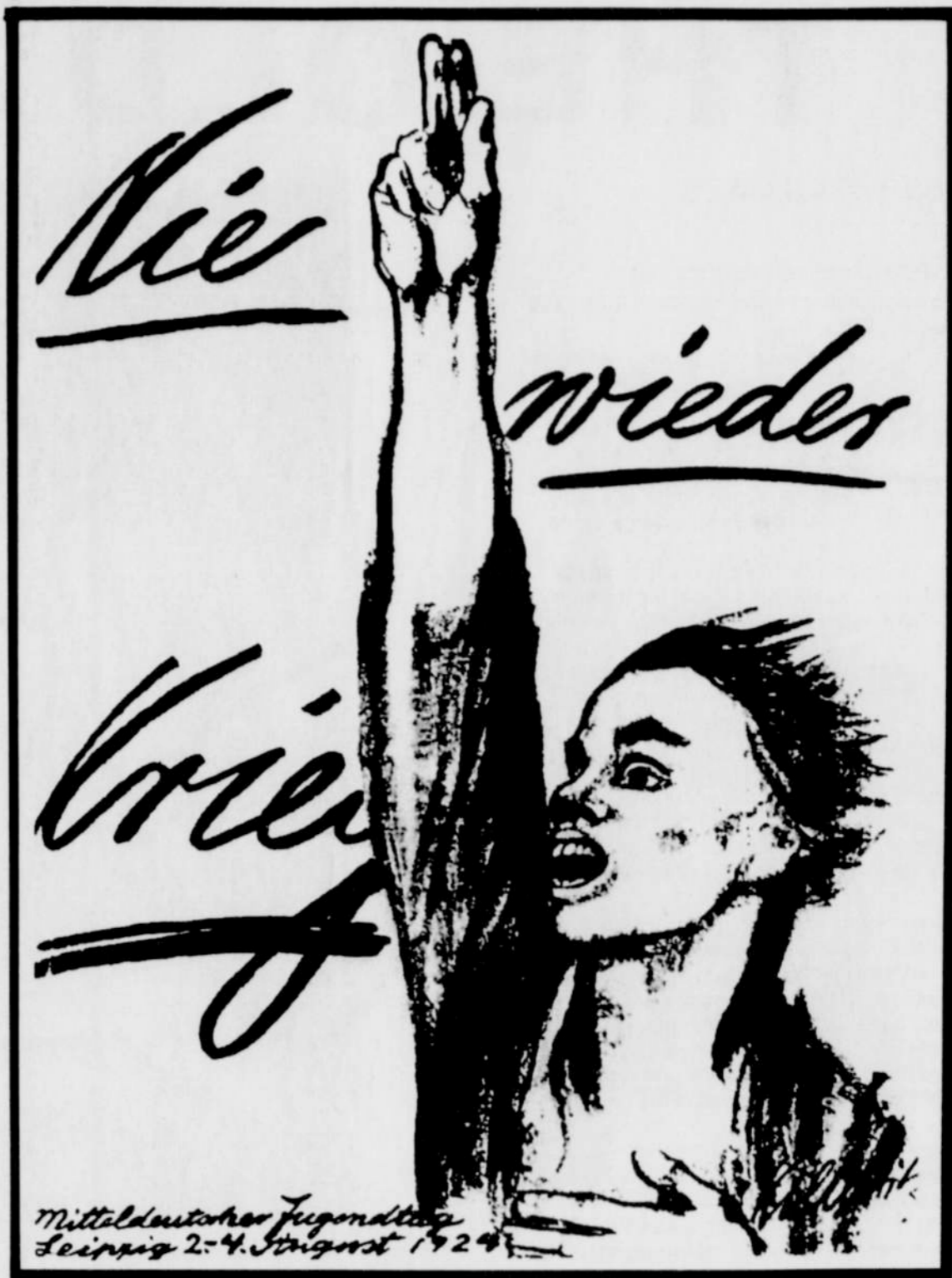
"nothing we say has the quickness, the sureness the deep intelligence living at peace would have."
~DENISE LEVERTOV (from the poem 'Life At War')

What glued me to the pages of William Stafford's account in *Down In My Heart* of his years in conscientious objector camps in Arkansas and California was the way in which he and his fellow CO's dealt with a pressing problem inherent in their situation. As pacifists they believed in dealing with all events, whether between nations or between individual people, without physical violence. Yet during World War II, in the camps and in the towns they visited on their short leaves, they met with the potential for physical violence toward them almost everywhere. Certainly they were ostracized, and they were prepared for that, given the often negative feelings they received in their hometowns before reporting for duty at the camps. But to come up against the fact that their country's citizens had cast them out to the extent of physical violence toward them was a new, and I think surprising, reality.

Conversations among the CO's after such encounters centered on maintaining their pacifist beliefs and practices, and strategies for staying physically safe or even alive. When even camp managers (Forest Service men, mostly) are described as not knowing whether they should view themselves as foremen or "wardens," it was clear to Stafford and his campmates from the start that they had some serious opposition to face, and peace-work to accomplish. Kim Stafford has written about the physical danger his father faced, in his book *Early Morning* (Graywolf Press, 2002):

"...the glance of a nation at war aimed at the puny life of a pacifist, a 'conscientious objector,' a CO — in 1942 was severe. Yet despite his vulnerability, my father's ambition was boundless. A target of his own country's disdain, even hatred, he had begun his mission of universal reconciliation." (p.41).

The chapter called "The Mob Scene at McNeil" is a model for how CO's must come to terms with the fact that not only does society just barely tolerate its dissenters — in this case pacifists in a time of war — but in addition can barely contain its desire to physically harm them. It tells of a Sunday afternoon outing in a small Arkansas town of McNeil — reading, writing and painting with two of his friends from camp — which almost turned into a lynching. His narrative of this incident shows us the thoughts and adaptations required to be a peaceful person in a life-threatening confrontation. William Stafford later wrote encouragingly of others who do not use violence, the nonviolence he believed in and lived himself, both then and for the rest of his life. The final three lines speak both directly and metaphorically of what life at peace is:



KÄTHE KOLLWITZ, "NEVER AGAIN WAR" (1924)

There are people in every country who never turn into killers, saints have built sanctuaries on islands and in valleys, conquerors have quit and gone home, for thousands of years farmers have worked their fields. My feet begin the uphill curve where a thicket spills with birds every spring. The air doesn't stir. Rain touches my face.

(from the poem, "Five A.M.", in "Learning to Live in the World", 1994)

Perhaps you tell yourself sometimes, as I do, that you would not have the courage to hold onto nonviolent beliefs or actions if your life or the lives of those closest to you were in danger. But William Stafford's accounts and stories in this remarkable testament leave one with a sense of hope and even excitement — it tells us we can have that kind of courage. It seems to require two important things which must already be in place, internally, at times of challenge: a clear sense of what your values and beliefs are, and a steady, problem-solving head. It helps, too, if you have or can acquire even a small group of sympathetic friends with whom you can talk over

events, and strategies for physical and spiritual survival. It is obvious that William Stafford possessed these things. And though he does not say so, it is also clear that he possessed the ability to lead others in this ongoing effort, quietly and by example. Kim Stafford confirms this by relating an incident in William's childhood which points to both his early pacifism and to his innate leadership:

"Somehow our father had become a pacifist in the cradle of his own family from very early on. There is a story that when he was first in school, he came home to report that two black children on the playground had been taunted by the others.

'And what did you do, Billy?' his mother asked.
'I went and stood by them'
He didn't taunt, he didn't turn away, but also he didn't fight. He stood by them."

(*Early Morning*, p.39).

In a 1955 Quaker statement of nonviolent values and strategies which came into my hands as I did research for this essay, many expected points were offered: nonviolence is desperately needed, war has not worked, it's not easy but it can be done, it's part of Christian ethics, etc. But the thing that surprised me was their statement that it wasn't important that everyone become a pacifist:

"In thus insisting on the rejection of violence as a method, we do not imply that all men must become pacifist... (however) without the unconditional acceptance of an ideal by a minority, the vision and perseverance required to move the world in the direction of that ideal will be lacking."

(*Speak Truth to Power*, AFSC, p.53)

A minority believing in nonviolence insures, they believe, that a constant pressure will be applied to the eventual reforming of national policy and the making of new laws which will support the goal of ending wars. And this is also an encouragement to those of us like myself who have felt it needs to be an "all-or-nothing" kind of project. The Friends rightly remind us that it is a process. As the pacifist A. J. Mustie is often quoted: "There is no path to peace; peace is the way." There is a very human anecdote in *Down In My Heart* about one of "our most forthright" members of a CO camp that speaks to the condition of how against the grain pacifism is in much of society, and how tiring it can be (especially if one is already worn out with a day's work on the firelines) to explain one's position: "When a ranger asked him why he wasn't in the army, he said: 'Do you have two hours to give to that question? Well, then, forget it — I'm tired of trying to set right in two minutes what the radio and the papers and the movies have been setting wrong for years.' Peace is a way of life. And we are allowed to be human while we're at it.

It is hard to act on new conceptions of how to live together. The Japanese film critic Donald Richie wrote this about the great Japanese director, Ozu: "...one never finds 'representative types' in his films. Just as there is no such thing as Nature, only individual trees, rocks, streams, etc., so there is no such thing as Human Nature, only individual men and women." (*New York Times Book Review*, 5/15/03, p.15, by Ian Buruma). It is one by one that we embrace the new. It is one person by one person that we find our reconciliation of body and spirit, of power wedded to the spirit of love. William Blake, as always, knew how to say it:

*For mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.*

~from "The Divine Image"

GO CLOSE

Slip into the fighting
Into a low-sky site crammed with huge men,
Attractive men, brave, loyal, fit, slab-sided men,
Men who came face to face with gods, who spoke with gods,
Leaping onto each other like wolves,
Screaming, kicking, slicing, hacking, ripping,
Thumping their chests:
"I am full of the god!"
Blubbering with terror as they beg for their lives:
"Laid his trunk open from shoulder to hip —
Like a beauty queen's sash."
Falling, falling.
Top-slung steel chain gates slumped onto concrete,
Pipko, Bluefisher, Chuckerbutty, Lox:
"Left all he had to follow Greece."
"Left all he had to follow Troy."
Clawing the ground, calling out for their sons, for revenge.

Sparks from the bronze, lit splinters from the poles:
"I am hit."
"Take my arm."
"I am dying."
"Shake my hand."
"Don't leave me. Don't let me go."
"Goodbye little fellow with the gloomy face."
As Greece, as Troy, fought on and on.
Or are they only asleep?
They are too tired to sleep.
The tears are falling from their eyes.
The noise they make while fighting is so loud
That what you see is like a silent film.
And as the dust converges over them
The ridge is as it is when darkness falls.

Silence and light.

~CHRISTOPHER LOGUE

Christopher Logue published *All Day Permanent Red*, the fourth volume in his version of the *Iliad* in April.

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