

War

When reading poetry on the subject of war, one's own feelings regarding the subject are evoked. This makes it easier to feel the words and what they say to you. Crane's selection, "War is Kind" presents a dilemma from the outset as it uses two words "war" and "kind" that are dissimilar. Crane then highlights acts of destruction and despair with the "kindness" of war. He notes that a child should not weep when his father was killed, "Do not weep, babe, for war is kind. Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches, Raged at his breast, gulped and died. Do not weep. War is kind." As if a child could think that someone who killed his father was kind. Or he contrasts "virtue" with "slaughter" ("Point for them the virtue of slaughter") and "excellence" with "killing." ("Make plain to them the excellence of killing"). War may be honorable, purposeful, or necessary, but it is not kind, there is no virtue in slaughter, and there is no excellence in killing.

Whitman notes in "Beat! Drums! Beat!" that when war comes, everything stops, including the sense and reason of the moment. No matter what is happening, there is no excuse for attending to anything else. The urgency of the moment rules. "Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? no sleepers must sleep in those beds", "Make no parley - stop for no expostulation." "Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties, Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,".

In "The Arsenal at Springfield", Longfellow notes the senselessness of war. "The cries of agony, the endless groan, Which, through the ages that have gone before us, In long reverberations reach our own." He also indicates that war could be avoided if man would be more caring and try harder to avoid it. "'Were half the power, that fills the world with terror, Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts, Given to redeem the human mind from error, There were no need of arsenals or forts."

Crane and Longfellow point out the cruelty of war and note the harshness of it. Whitman points out the equal sense of a loss of reason in the name of war, but putting aside all else. All three authors appear to hold war in low regard.

Sandburg's "Grass" and Macleish's "Lines for an Interment" appear to question the validity of war. They both note that after all is said and done, one wonders why the war took place and what was learned or gained from it. In "Grass" it is noted, " Shovel them under and let me work. Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor: What place is this? Where are we now?" In "Lines for an Interment" one reads, "It's a long time to lie in the earth with your honor: The world, Soldier, the world has been moving on.", and wonders what has been learned or gained.

The subject, "War" may raise many questions and feelings, but all the authors noted here found objections to war and reasons to question its importance and validity.

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