

Fall 12-1-2016

Conflict

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Recommended Citation

Shubert, Jessica (2016) "Conflict," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 39 : No. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol39/iss1/7>

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Conflict

Is it courage, then
To use glass as my cannon fodder
To use that fragile, see-through pretense of confidence
Mimicking styles of war I've seen used with such ease by ally and enemy
For whom such interactions come as naturally as breathing
Mimicking, firing off empty charges that set the ground trembling
And leading my thunderous, thoughtless armies
Marching forth into hostile territory—
A social interaction—
Destroying the ultimate adversary, my own self?
Is it bravery to conquer fear and foe
By means of force, of blast and blade
To shatter my own silence?
The price I pay, the blood, sweat and tears shed to do so
And the cost I see, the solid, jagged fragments of things once stoic and strong
Choke back the drive and I pause, poised in the face of that after-battle quiet
Suddenly at a doubt as to whether it need be destroyed after all,
If the world needs more empires and more empires destroyed
If mercy is so weak and obsolete in the face of a new world
Of conquering and constructing,
I question whether it is valiance to attempt to exchange

The artillery of words,
To partake in that cordial warfare
Though battered by the simplest reply,
As I know I have no real place among these experts
And so I allow them to destroy me out of common habit.

I wonder whether it is with boldness that I plan each formal battle
Poring for long minutes over the curled maps,
Weighing every word on a set of balances,
Then go out and face my opponents, moving deeper,
But with less care,
Until I come off as one of these hollow giants
These masters of war and artists of our natural world
Providing both the backdrop of small talk,
Subdued shades of gray and murmured nothings out of focus,
And the centerpieces of introspection and philosophy,
Those brilliant tales to mark and mar our history,
With which I cannot and have no wish to compare.
I am speechless
Or simply without mind for speech
But when in Rome, one must fight like the gladiators--
And yet I feel my armies
Have swelled in number and shriveled in worth.

Is it cowardice, then
To fly a flag I do not believe in
And break from isolation into the pretense of a superpower
I never meant to become,
To be swept up in that war fever,
Or to keep my silence and be left behind in sweet but invisible peace,
Never to fly a flag at all?
War is not, after all, a spectator sport
And though unfit, I have no choice
Except to play and be without meaning
Or to sink into the battlefield,
Silence being among the first casualties of this war,
To go down with my ship and be without purpose.

Jessica Shubert



Ready, Set, Fire
Photography by Jamie McCreedy