

**New Poetry by Jehanne Dubrow:
“Poem for the Reader Who Said
My Poems Were Sentimental and
Should Engage in a More
Complex Moral Reckoning with
U.S. Military Actions”; “Epic
War Poem”; “Tyrian Purple,”
and “Some Final Notes On
Odysseus”**



PLUM OF GALAXIES / *image by
Amalie Flynn*

**Poem for the Reader Who Said My Poems Were Sentimental and
Should Engage in a More Complex Moral Reckoning with U.S.
Military Actions**

Today I didn't say divorce
 because I was sickened by
 the news
from Afghanistan, translators and their families
 left waiting at the gates,
while American personnel
 lifted off
in the wide indifference of their transport planes.
I said *divorce* because
 I hadn't made room
 in the cabinet for my husband's things,
and he was angry
 I did not leave
a vacancy for what he carried home from war.
I was tired of him
 stacking bowls
 on the top rack of the dishwasher,
a policy
 I can't abide
when the lower rack is an open country
 waiting to be washed clean.
 Forgive me, reader,
for the weakness
 of my marriage.
I didn't say divorce
 because my husband would rather a drone
 hover above
a wedding procession,
 the party far below,
embroidered dresses glinting, small mirrors sewn into the
hems.

He prefers the drone
fire from a distant, unendangered screen.
And I believe
killing should come
with a risk of dying for the killers.
But that's not why I said divorce.
Forgive me, reader, for the poems
of shelf space and kitchens.
Marriage is not
two ideologies fighting at a table,
while the soup goes cold
on the spoon.
Marriage is two people
shouting about spices,
the ordering of jars—by alphabet or continent—
as if everything depends
on an ounce of turmeric fading
under glass.
Perhaps, I said divorce
for all the wrong reasons.
Forgive me
for scrubbing the pot with a bristled brush.
My fury
at the gold-stained enamel
is almost the same size as my rage
that somewhere a helicopter
strikes on civilians in the dark.
Forgive my sentiment.
All I can do is keep scraping
the dried burning from the pan.

Epic War Poem

What else but a soldier raging
by his shield. What else but the dutiful.
What else but a battle muralled on a wall,

and Troy a piece of artifice to gaze upon.
What else but the voice a garment
shredded in its grief. What else but ash.
What else but men on wooden ships for centuries.
Their keening is an arrow to the throat.
What else but kings. What else but
the trebuchet of years. What else
but sawbuck fences leaning near a field.
What else but America. What else but
daguerreotypes, a line of corpses posed
within the frame. What else but the guns.
What else but the trenches stuck with mud.
What else but modernity and the long
parade of after. What else but cinders
mixed with milk while the gone are drifting,
processed into smoke. What else
but the skirmishes of scholars,
that language is too little and too much.
What else but brief eras of indifference
when the dead are left alone. What else
but the forged and hammered thing
of poetry, all the failures of our making.
What else but the litany of bombs.

Tyrian Purple

Please, understand: to heave Hector
through the dirt, Achilles must first
cut holes in his enemy's heels,
Hector threaded like a needle
with leather cord and tied to a chariot
that will pull him around the walls.
Imagine a body strong enough
to be strung like this. Imagine such
stitching is an art, and we call it battle.
Andromache deep in the palace

is weaving a cloak on a wide loom,
wool like the amethyst shadows
beneath her eyes, that vivid sleeplessness.
She's tacking flowers to the fabric
when she hears the weeping everywhere in Troy.
The bobbin unspools from her fingers
because the warp is a place of order,
and death the cutting shears.
It's understandable why Andromache
would sit at the loom for hours,
rectangular world where nothing extends
beyond the cloth's perimeter.
At this point in the war, everyone has lost
the thread of narrative, any reason
beyond armor and the carrion birds
with their beaks like sharpened secateurs.
Who wouldn't want to take up some craft,
pottery, perhaps, or painted scenes
on funerary stones. Don't hands need
occupation when the city is besieged.
Probably, a reader believes it frivolous—
these fibers dyed the plum of galaxies,
all that great, oppressive sky
and the murdered looking down
from their fixed constellations.
Even Andromache finds a pastime.
It's late in our history to condemn
the ways people spin out a war,
how they twist the days like fibers
on a spindle. Imperial purple.
Purple of bruised loyalties. Unfadable
purple that stains the maker's skin.

SOME FINAL NOTES ON ODYSSEUS

Ithacans!

*Stop this destructive war; shed no more blood
and go your separate ways, at once!*

– The Odyssey, 24.531-533

When the goddess cries out,
her voice is a mountain against
the fighting. But the old soldier
keeps running—war like weather
in his ears, a summer storm,
in his pulse the tossing waves.
At such a time it is difficult to see
Odysseus was a child once.
He learned from his father
the names of trees, the orchard
full of gleaming suns called apples,
the private ripeness of figs, grapes
clustered like families on the vine.
He touched their dusty skins.
Yes, even he had been a boy
who held a wooden sword,
the shadows creeping on, and
they lengthened with the night.
There are decades of water,
islands and islands between
that child and the man.
The body is said to harden,
the heart of course as well.
For someone like Odysseus anger
is an unrestricted flame.
When the goddess cries out
she is saying, worship reason
instead. But it takes her own father—
a god and his thunderbolt
—to cut through the battle.
Stop this war, he says.
According to the story, Odysseus
lays down his weapons then.

And what then? What then?

Poems always end before the peace,
the orchard overgrown now.

No one wants to read a scene
of the old soldier pulling weeds,
pruning the wildness back, his arms
still strong but not with violence,
and the air no longer stings
like lightning touching down.

No one wants the old soldier slicing
a plum the way he used to take
his dagger to the belly of a rival,
the war that fed him once a taste
he barely can recall. Most nights
his chin is red and syrupy with juice.