

# Ode for the American Dead in Asia

POETRY OUT LOUD 

By Thomas McGrath

1.

God love you now, if no one else will ever,  
Corpse in the paddy, or dead on a high hill  
In the fine and ruinous summer of a war  
You never wanted. All your false flags were  
Of bravery and ignorance, like grade school maps:  
Colors of countries you would never see—  
Until that weekend in eternity  
When, laughing, well armed, perfectly ready to kill  
The world and your brother, the safe commanders sent  
You into your future. Oh, dead on a hill,  
Dead in a paddy, leeches and tumbled to  
A tomb of footnotes. We mourn a changeling: you:  
Handselled to poverty and drummed to war  
By distinguished masters whom you never knew.

2.

The bee that spins his metal from the sun,  
The shy mole drifting like a miner ghost  
Through midnight earth—all happy creatures run  
As strict as trains on rails the circuits of  
Blind instinct. Happy in your summer follies,  
You mined a culture that was mined for war:  
The state to mold you, church to bless, and always  
The elders to confirm you in your ignorance.  
No scholar put your thinking cap on nor  
Warned that in dead seas fishes died in schools  
Before inventing legs to walk the land.  
The rulers stuck a tennis racket in your hand,  
An Ark against the flood. In time of change  
Courage is not enough: the blind mole dies,  
And you on your hill, who did not know the rules.

3.

Wet in the windy counties of the dawn  
The lone crow skirls his draggled passage home:  
And God (whose sparrows fall aslant his gaze,  
Like grace or confetti) blinks and he is gone,  
And you are gone. Your scarecrow valor grows  
And rusts like early lilac while the rose  
Blooms in Dakota and the stock exchange  
Flowers. Roses, rents, all things conspire  
To crown your death with wreaths of living fire.  
And the public mourners come: the politic tear  
Is cast in the Forum. But, in another year,  
We will mourn you, whose fossil courage fills  
The limestone histories: brave: ignorant: amazed:  
Dead in the rice paddies, dead on the nameless hills.

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