

What Did I Learn in the Wars

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## What Did I Learn in the Wars

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What did I learn in the wars:  
To march in time to swinging arms and legs  
Like pumps pumping an empty well.

To march in a row and be alone in the middle,  
To dig into pillows, featherbeds, the body of a beloved woman,  
And to yell "Mama," when she cannot hear,  
And to yell "God," when I don't believe in Him,  
And even if I did believe in Him  
I wouldn't have told Him about the war  
As you don't tell a child about grown-ups' horrors.

What else did I learn. I learned to reserve a path for retreat.  
In foreign lands I rent a room in a hotel  
Near the airport or railroad station.  
And even in the wedding halls  
Always to watch the little door  
With the EXIT sign in red letters.

A battle too begins  
Like rhythmical drums for dancing and ends  
With a "retreat at dawn." Forbidden love  
And battle, the two of them sometimes end like this.

But above all I learned the wisdom of camouflage,  
Not to stand out, not to be recognized,  
Not to be apart from what's around me,  
Even not from my beloved.  
Let them think I am a bush or a lamb,  
A tree, a shadow of a tree,  
A doubt, a shadow of a doubt,  
A living hedge, a dead stone,  
A house, a corner of a house.

If I were a prophet I would have dimmed the glow of the vision  
And darkened my faith with black paper  
And covered the magic with nets.

And when my time comes, I shall don the camouflage garb of my end:  
The white of clouds and a lot of sky blue  
And stars that have no end.

*Translation from Hebrew by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav*