

NED BALBO

Lost Prayer in Time of War

A variation on Rimbaud's "Le Mal"

When machine gun fire sprays tirelessly
under a blue sky endless, sunlit, empty,
and the troops – oppressors, terrorists,
heroes, or freedom fighters – fill the lists

of casualties whose names will be released
not yet, but soon – the wounded, the deceased –
poor soldiers, what will find you in the field?
Artillery; the choice – kill or be killed –

and, somewhere, maybe, God, if He exists,
waking once more, perplexed, nourished by worship,
flattered by prayer in any tongue or faith,

yet unimpressed, indifferent to requests,
and tired, so tired, His sole reward this sleep
too easily breached and not enough like death.