

Melissa Green

Casualty

for David Ferry

They carried him from the sea on his shield,
His greaves gushing what he thought were golden fish.

He did not know the ones who bore him
Nor which of Poseidon's horses frothed at their bits.

Asclepius rolled back his white sleeves.
There was incarnadine clotting the water,

Gouts of blood on the sandals of the stretcher bearers.
There was nothing to be done.

They carried him across the moors, the mossy stones
(*Actium, Ardennes, Bannockburn, Borodino,*)

Along the marshy bank, the footpath rising up
(*Bosworth Field, Bull Run, Crécy,*)

Over the star-like daisies in the field grass of the vineyard,
(*Constantinople, Corregidor, East Timor,*)

Beside the ivied trees, under the theatre of the moon,
(*Damascus, Da Nang, Dresden, Dunkirk.*)



They carried him through shady groves of the Great Plains,
(*Gallipoli, Hiroshima, Jerusalem, Kabul,*)

The murmuring of cypresses urging them on,
(*Kandahar, Khe Sanh, Leipzig, My Lai,*)

The stretcher bearers printing the clay of Asia Minor
(*Nanking, Persepolis, Phnom Penh, Poitiers,*)

Through the tree trunks where the trail dissolved,
(*The Siege of Acre, the Siege of Austerlitz,*)

The mud, now frozen ruts on mountainsides,
(*The Siege of Leningrad, Sarajevo, Solferino,*)

They followed the snowy lanes through sleepy villages
(*Verdun, Vukovar, Wounded Knee*)

They carried him under the rustling live oaks
(*Through the blue-gray mists of Shiloh*)

Past elm and yew trees drenching every decomposing grave.

