

"Sweet Jesus, Cap'n, time we oughta shoot!"
 My gunner cried, a black Telémachus,
 His tongue undone, his trigger in control.
 The radio confirmed no other tanks
 Of ours were in the sector. No more choice,
 Our time ran out. I ordered the attack.
 How many gods had we provoked? I prayed,
 Please my dear God, don't let us torch our own!

As images exploded we heard words:
 An error! Static. Curses. "Hold your fire!"
 We hit two U.S. tanks, off course for hours.
 No one survived our deadly friendly blasts.
 I could not break. I kept my men from breaking.
 Penelopes would learn their wait was done.
 And who explained such useless costs to them?
 And in this world who can explain to me?

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It seems just months ago, those scenes more real
 Than now. Yet over eighteen years have passed,
 My journal's pages yellowing, my mental
 Log still clear. I start another chapter.
 I'm in administration now, an aim
 At peaceful order. Just before I left,
 My students asked unanswered WHYS of me
 And Homer's "man of many wiles." Like him,
 I can't convince myself of what is right
 Or justified, what we have saved or bettered.

No end in sight, and here I fight again
 Sans tanks-- a stranger battle, secret foes.
 The desert is unchanged as are the questions
 Killing never solves and never stills.
 The face of war is veiled, unrecognized,
 Unseen for several days or weeks. Until
 The scrim of normalcy is jolted, shattered.
 Markets, bookstalls, offices or mosques
 Will instantly turn into flying chunks
 Of wood and metal, concrete, flesh and bone.

(cont.)