

# CORONAMUNDI



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# The sacred war

by René Daumal

Translated by Louise Landes-Levi  
Athala, Amsterdam, 1982

In Memory of Max

"Des que leurs visages furent tournés vers le dehors, les hommes devinrent incapables de se voir eux-mêmes, et c'est notre grande infirmité. Ne pouvant nous voir, nous nous imaginons. Et chacun, se rêvant soi-même et rêvant les autres, reste seul derrière son visage."

--Rene Daumal "L'Envers de la Tête"

"Rajāna Minel Jihādil nqghar ila l-jihādil Akbar"

--The Prophet

I am going to write a poem about war. It may not be a true poem but it will be about a true war.

It will not be a true poem, because if the true poet were here, and if the rumor spread out into the crowds to which he was going to speak--

then a great silence would develop, a heavy silence would swell up, a silence thick with 1000 thunders.

Visible, we would see him, the poet; seer, he would see us; and we would pale in our poor shadows, we would wish him to be so real, we the sickly, we the troubled, we the anything-at-all.

He would be here, exploding with the 1000 thunders of the multitude of enemies contained within him -- for he contains them, and he pleases them when he wants --

incandescent with sorrow and sacred rage, and yet peaceful, like an artisan, in the great silence he would open a little faucet, the little faucet of the mill of words,

and from there he would lance a poem, a poem from which one becomes green.

That which I will make will not be a poet's true poetic poem, for if the word "war" were said in a true poem --

then the war, the true war of which the poet would speak, the war without mercy, the war without compromise, would irrevocably illumine itself in the interior of our hearts.

For in a true poem words mean what they say.

Neither will this be a philosophic discourse. Because to be a philosopher, to love truth more than oneself, it is necessary to have died to error, it is necessary to have killed the complaisant traitors of dream and easy illusion. And this, this is the purpose and end of the war, and the war has only begun, there are still some traitors to unmask.

And neither will this be a scientific work, because to be a scientist, to see and love things as they are, it is necessary to be oneself, and to like to see oneself as one is. It is necessary to have broken the mirrors which lie, it is necessary to have killed with an unpitying look the insinuating phantoms. And that is the purpose and end of the war and the war has only begun, there are still some masks to tear away.

And neither will this be an enthusiastic chant. For enthusiasm is stable when god has arisen, when enemies are no more than forces without forms, when the ringing of war rings to break-up everything, and the war has only begun, we have not yet thrown our bedding into the fire.

And neither will this be a magical invocation, because the magician tells his god: "Do that which pleases me" and he refuses to make war with his worst enemy, if the enemy pleases him. And nor will this be a believer's prayer, for, at his best, the believer demands: "Do what you will," and for that he had to put the iron

and fire in the intestines of dearest enemy -- which is the work of war, and the war has only begun:

It will be a little of all this, a hope and effort towards all this, and it will also be a call to arms. A call which the play of echoes will be able to return to me -- and which, perhaps, others will hear.

You now guess of which war I wish to speak.

Of other wars, of those one endures, I will not speak. If I spoke of them, it would be ordinary literature, a substitute, a default, an excuse. As if I were to use the word "horrible" when I did not have "goosepimples" on my skin, if I were to use the expression "die to hunger" when I had not yet stolen from the storefronts, as though I spoke of madness before I had tried to see infinity through the key-hole. As if I spoke of death, without having felt my tongue taste the salt of the irreparable. As certain speak of purity, who have believed themselves superior to domestic pork, as certain speak of liberty who adore and rethread their chains, as certain speak of love, who love only the shadow of themselves. Or of sacrifice who would not cut off their little finger for anything. Or of knowledge who disguise themselves to their own sight. As it is our greatest sickness to speak in order to see nothing.

This would be a powerless substitute, like old men and ill people who enthusiastically speak of blows given or received by young people in good health.

Do I have the right to speak of this other war, that which one does not only endure, when it may not be irreparably lit up within me? When I am still in the skirmishes? Certainly, I rarely have the right, but "rarely" the right, this also means, "Sometimes the duty," and above all, "the need" -- I will never have too many allies.

I will therefore try to speak of the sacred war.

May it light itself in an irreparable way. It kindles itself quite well, at times, but not for very long. At the first appearance of victory, I admire my triumph, I play the generous one, and I pacify the enemy. There are traitors in the house, but they have the appearance of friends, it would be so unpleasant to unmask them. They have their places by the hearth, their rocking chairs and their slippers, and they come when I am drowsy, offering me a compliment, a palpitating or funny story, flowers and delicacies, and now and then a beautiful feathered hat. They speak in the first person, it is my voice that I believe to hear, it is my voice I believe to transmit: "I am..... I know..... I wish..... Lies. Lies grafted to my flesh, abscess that cries to me: "Don't destroy us, we are of the same blood," blisters which burst: "We are your sole good, your only ornament, continue therefore to nourish us, it doesn't cost you so much!"

And they are numerous and they are charming, they are pitiable, they are arrogant, they blackmail, they form a coalition but these barbarians respect nothing, nothing true. I want to say,



because, before everything else, they are screwed tight with respect. It is thanks to them that I seem to be, it is they who take the space and hold they keys to the closet of masks. They tell me: "We clothe you, without us, how would you appear in this nice world?" O sooner nude like a larva!

These phantoms steal everything from me. Afterward, they amuse themselves by pitying me -- "We protect you, we express you, we give you value. And you wish to assassinate us! But it is yourself you lacerate when you push us away, when you wickedly tap us on our sensitive nose; we are your good friends."

And horrible pity, with her indifferences, comes to weaken me. Against you, phantoms, all the light! That I light the lamp, and you, you are quiet, that I open an eye and you disappear, for you are of sculpted void, of made-up nothingness. Against you the war of outrage. No pity, no tolerance. One right only: the right to be more.

But now, it is another time, they feel discovered. And so, they try to reconcile. "In fact, it is you who are master. But what is a master without servants? Keep us in your modest places, we promise to help you. Look, for example, imagine you wish to write a poem. How will you do it without us?"

Yes, rebels, one day I will put you in your places. I will bend you beneath my yoke, I will nourish you with hay, and thrash you each morning. But as long as you suck my blood and steal my words, O Sooner to write poems no more.

See the pretty peace that is proposed to me. Close your eyes in order to not see the crime. Agitate oneself from morning to night in order not to see death always yawning. Believe yourself victorious before having fought. Peace of lies! Adjust to one's cowardices, because everyone is adjusted to them. Peace of the vanquished! A little filth, a little wine-bibbing, a little blasphemy beneath the words of the spirit, a little masquerade, of which one makes a virtue, a little laziness and dream, and even a lot if one is an artist, a little of all that and surrounding it, a whole confectionery of beautiful words, this is the peace that is proposed to us. Peace of salesmen! And to safeguard this shameful peace, one would do anything, one would make war with his fellows. For there is an old and sure receipt to conserve one's peace at all times, it is always to accuse the others.

You now know that I wish to speak of the sacred war.

He who has declared this war within himself is in peace with his fellows, and, although he is the field of the most violent battle, within his interior reigns a peace more active than all wars. And the more that peace reigns in his interior, in the central silence and solitude, the more rages the war against the tumult of lies and innumerable illusion.

In this vast silence, heavy with the cries of war, hidden from the outside by the fleeting mirage of time, the eternal victor hears the voices of other silences. Alone, having dissolved the illusion of not being alone, alone he is no longer the only one to

be alone: But I am separated from him by these armies of phantoms which I must annihilate. May I one day install myself in the citadel, on the ramparts, may I be torn down to the bone, so that the tumult will not enter the Royal Chamber.

"But should I kill?" asks Arjuna the warrior, "Should I pay the tribute to Caesar?" asks another -- "Kill," it is answered, "if you are a killer, you don't have any choice. But if your hands are reddened with the blood of the enemies, don't let one drop splatter on the Royal Chamber where the immobile victor awaits." "Pay," it is answered, "but don't let Caesar cast a single glance on the Royal Treasure."

And I who have no other arm in this world of Caesar, than the word. I, who have no other money in the world of Caesar, will I speak?

I will speak to call myself to the Sacred War. I will speak to denounce the traitors whom I have nourished. I will speak so that my words shame my actions, until the day when peace, armored in thunder, will reign in the chamber of the eternal victor.

And because I have used the word war, and that this word today is no more a simple sound that educated people make with their mouths, because it is now a serious word, heavy with meaning, you will know that I speak seriously and that these words are not vain sounds that I make with my mouth.

Paris, Spring 1940

Additional Daumal translations available in English:

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