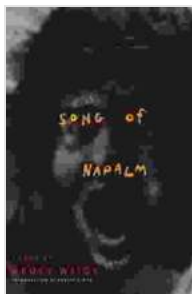


# Bruce Weigl's "Song of Napalm: Poems" as a Subversive Elegy to the Vietnam War

Bruce Weigl's "Song of Napalm: Poems" (1988) is a powerful and unflinching collection of poems that examines the physical and psychological horrors of the Vietnam War. Published during the postmodern period, the collection stands out from its contemporaries for its brutally honest depiction of the war's horrors and its refusal to offer easy solutions or patriotic platitudes.

This article will delve into Weigl's "Song of Napalm" and explore its significance as a subversive elegy to the Vietnam War. We will examine how the collection deconstructs traditional war narratives, provides a voice to marginalized experiences, and offers a profound meditation on the complexities of loss and grief.



## Song of Napalm: Poems by Bruce Weigl

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 525 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Lending	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Print length	: 52 pages
Hardcover	: 160 pages
Item Weight	: 15.2 ounces
Dimensions	: 7 x 0.6 x 9.8 inches

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## **Subverting War Narratives**

Unlike many war poems that glorify the heroism and sacrifice of soldiers, "Song of Napalm" challenges the dominant discourse around the Vietnam War by presenting a searing indictment of its violence and futility. Weigl's poems portray the war not as a heroic struggle but as a brutal and dehumanizing experience that left countless lives shattered.

In "Song of Napalm," Weigl's poetic lens focuses on the victims of the war —both Vietnamese and American. He exposes the horrors inflicted upon civilians, including the unspeakable brutality of napalm attacks. The poem "Children of War" captures the devastating impact of war on children, describing their bodies as "broken toys" and their faces as "twisted with pain."

By depicting the war from the perspectives of its victims, Weigl deconstructs the heroic narratives that often characterize war literature. He forces readers to confront the true cost of armed conflict and the profound suffering it inflicts on innocent lives.

## **Marginalized Experiences and Voices**

"Song of Napalm" also challenges the traditional focus on the experiences of white male soldiers in war poetry. Weigl gives voice to the marginalized experiences of women, children, and the Vietnamese people, who have often been silenced or overlooked in war narratives.

The poem "Song of the Vietnamese Prostitute" paints a vivid portrait of the exploitation and abuse faced by Vietnamese women during the war. The speaker, a prostitute, recounts her experiences of being used and discarded by American soldiers. Weigl's poem not only exposes the sexual

violence and exploitation that occurred during the war but also highlights the voices of those who have been marginalized and silenced.

The collection also gives voice to the Vietnamese people, whose perspectives are often neglected in Western accounts of the war. Poems like "My Lai" explore the horrors of the My Lai massacre, where hundreds of Vietnamese civilians were killed by American soldiers. By including these perspectives, Weigl challenges the dominant narratives that have often erased the experiences of non-Western people in war.

### **A Profound Meditation on Loss and Grief**

Beyond its subversion of war narratives and its focus on marginalized voices, "Song of Napalm" offers a profound meditation on the complexities of loss and grief. Weigl's poems explore the devastating impact of war on individuals and communities, capturing the pain, anger, and despair that linger long after the fighting has ended.

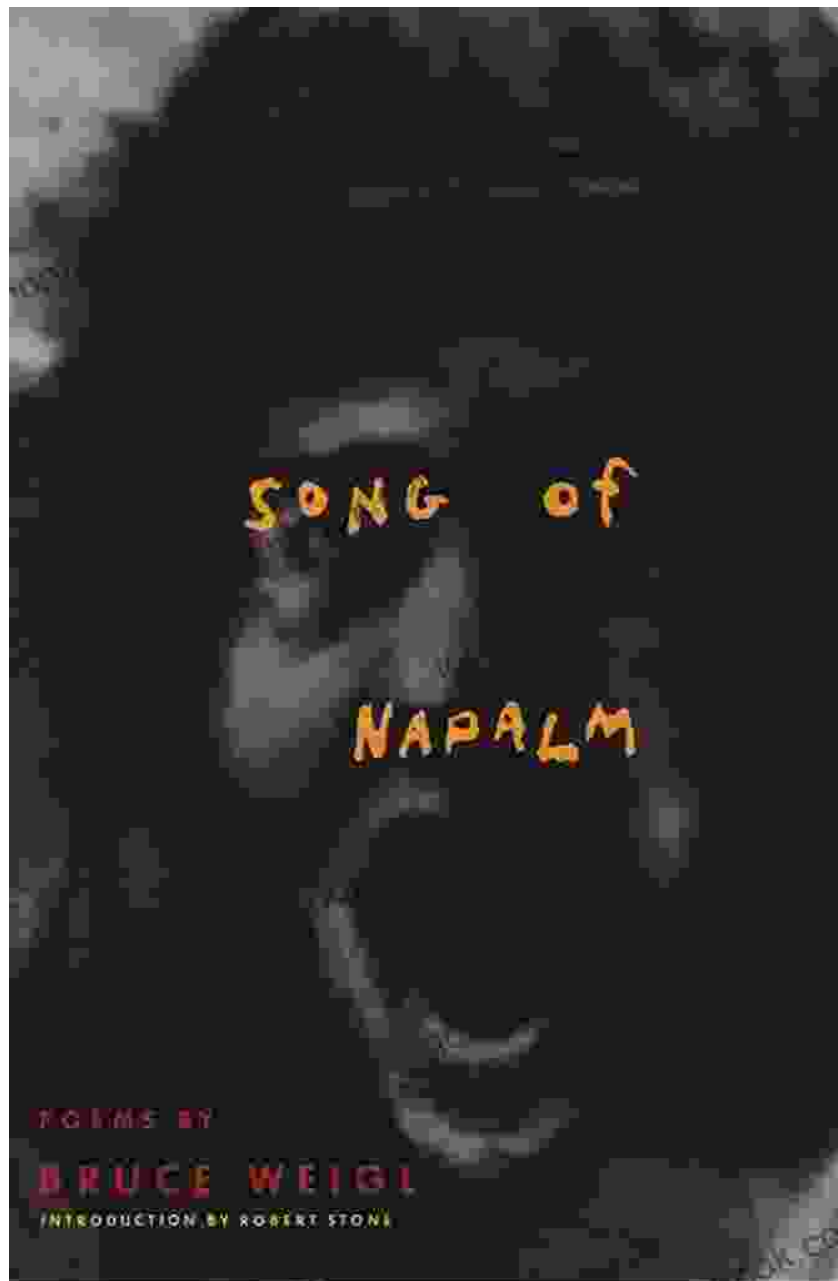
In the poem "Casualties," Weigl writes about the psychological wounds inflicted by the war, describing veterans as "casualties without wounds" who are haunted by their experiences. The poem "Elegy for a Young Soldier" explores the grief of a mother who has lost her son to war, capturing the rawness of her pain and her struggle to find meaning in his sacrifice.

Through his poignant and evocative language, Weigl conveys the profound and lasting impact of war on human lives. His poems offer a space for mourning and remembrance, while also challenging readers to confront the true costs of armed conflict.

Bruce Weigl's "Song of Napalm: Poems" is a powerful and thought-provoking collection that stands as a subversive elegy to the Vietnam War. By deconstructing traditional war narratives, giving voice to marginalized experiences, and offering a profound meditation on loss and grief, Weigl's poems challenge us to confront the true horrors of war and its lasting impact on human lives.

The collection serves as a reminder of the importance of speaking truth to power, of giving voice to the silenced, and of remembering the human cost of armed conflict. "Song of Napalm" is a testament to the power of poetry to bear witness to history and to illuminate the complexities of human suffering.

### **Alt Attributes**



SONG OF

NAPALM

POEMS BY

BRUCE WEIGL

INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT STONE

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## Children Of The War

SHRUNKEN little bodies, pallid baby faces,  
Eyes of staring terror, innocence defiled,  
Tiny bones that strew the sand of silent places,  
— This upon our own star where Jesus was a child.  
Broken buds of April, is there any garden  
Where they yet may blossom, comforted of sun,  
While their sad Creator bows to ask their pardon  
For the life He gave them, life and death in one?  
Spared by steel and hunger, still shall horror blazon

Those white and tender spirits with anguish unforgot;  
Half a century hence the haggard look shall gaze on  
The outrage of a mother, shall see a grandsire shot,  
Man who wings the azure, lassoes the hoof sparkling,  
Fire-maned steeds of glory and binds them to his car,  
Cannot man whose searchlight leaves no horizon darkling  
Safeguard little children upon our golden star?

*Katharine Lee Bates*

Bruce Weigl – 3 Poems:

**Song of Napalm**

*For my Wife*

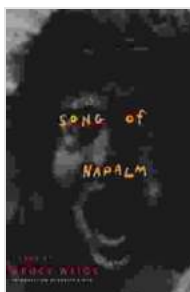
After the storm, after the rain stopped pounding,  
We stood in the doorway watching horses  
Walk off lazily across the pasture's hill.  
We stared through the black street,  
Our vision altered by the distance.  
So I thought I saw a mist  
Kicked up around their hooves when they faded  
Like carpet horses  
Away from us.  
The grass was never more blue in that light, more  
Scarlet, beyond the pasture.  
Trees scraped their voices into the wind, branches  
Cris-crossed the sky like barbed wire.  
But you said they were only branches.

Okay. The storm stopped pounding.  
I am trying to say this straight, for once.  
I was afraid to touch to parse and breathe  
On my old plans and after the hard rain  
I thinned my back on the old cushions. I believed  
They were finally away from me.

But still the branches are wire  
And thunder is the pounding mortar.  
Still I close my eyes and see the girl  
Running from her village, napalm  
Stuck to her dress like jelly,  
Her hands reaching for the one  
Who waits in heaven of him before her.

So I can keep on living,  
So I can stay here beside you,  
I try to imagine she runs down the road and wings  
Beat inside her until she rises  
Above the sinking sunlight and her pain  
Eases, and you can feel her name.

But the birds fly back again,  
The hawk works only as long as it takes to speak  
And the girl runs only as far.

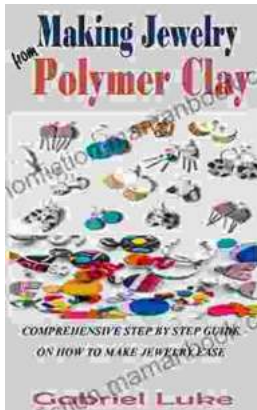


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