

RYAN FOX

Massacre en Corée

The village lay behind them now, for good.
Had one of them tucked the child against her shoulder,
Turned, and looked again, she would have seen

The wall of smoke they knew already rose
Behind them, swelling louder than the sea.
What work the fire undoes, of course we know:

Their bracelets will be melted, coined, and stamped
With eagle's wings or Caesar's fattened face,
And spread among the merchants like disease.

What will become of them, we also know:
These women led away, not even forced,
With nothing left to do but follow hard

On the black-booted soldiers' ordered heels—
They will be dealt with shortly. First, the earth
Is opened, shovels turned inside it, dirt

Flung back and falling softer than the rain
That starts, and halts, and starts to fall again.
Here there's no past: wind on the Trojan plain

Sweeps hard but blows no dust today, for once:
The ground is soaked with blood. The Spartan dead
Lay heaped and piled at red Thermopylae,

Obedient to their orders. At Ardenne,
The trenches fill with rain, while all Atlanta
Burns against the sky. The hole is dug.

And so, as custom dictates, they're aligned
Between the armored squadron and the pit:
These women led away, not even forced

By the black-booted soldiers. Since there is
No common tongue between them, nor a god,
No prayer is offered as the guns are raised.

The women hear the orders shouted, loud
And louder, echoing from the valley walls.
But the stunned vortex of one gunman's eye

Is all I know of pain. For when it's done,
The work complete, the hole filled in again,
He'll take the pen and paper from his sack,

Sit down, and, since it's Wednesday, write: *Dear Mother—*