

to think he is living at the end of an era; he has, at the very least, the security of his dissolution. I would also suggest that for Merwin and the line of poets he follows (Eliot, Yeats, Pound, St.-John Perse) The End has already taken place; their prophecies tell us nothing we have not known for a long time. Merwin's particular contribution has been a language and rhythm cleansed of all raw specificity which render how it feels to live in the polity of the credibility gap, among those who make revolution for the hell of it, and under those who make war to guarantee their own destruction. Perhaps such poetry can offer a measure of protection even though words are thin armor against the enemy, even though the poet makes his ritual disclaimer:

And that my words are the garment of what I shall never be  
Like the tucked sleeve of a one-armed boy

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W. S. Merwin

### The Night of the Shirts

Oh pile of white shirts who is coming  
to breathe in your shapes to carry your numbers  
to appear  
what hearts  
are moving toward their garments here  
their days  
what troubles beating between arms

you look upward through  
each other saying nothing has happened  
and it has gone away and is sleeping  
having told the same story  
and we exist from within  
eyes of the gods

you lie on your backs  
and the wounds are not made  
the blood has not heard  
the boat has not turned to stone  
and the dark wires to the bulb  
are full of the voice of the unborn