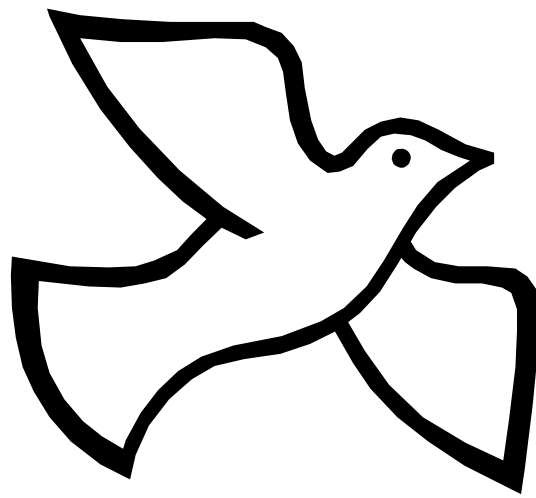


# American Poetry in the 1991 Gulf War



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## WE WERE WATCHING THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE WHEN THE WAR CAME ON

The T.V. was flickering  
and we were bickering  
about what show to watch  
but in the middle of "Wheel of Fortune"  
suddenly the war  
came on the tube:  
the famous T.V. anchor  
was interrupting  
the program in progress  
with news of the war,  
and we were watching  
the instant replay  
of the first  
shrill whistle  
of the first IBM missile,  
of the first  
ratatattat  
of the big guns:  
we were watching the live camera action  
of the first news briefing  
of the first furrowed brow  
of the first general:  
we were watching to see  
the unquivering chin  
of the secretary of defense  
and the stern faced president:  
we were watching the whole

Phillip Miller

company get on  
with the show:  
there on the screen  
we were watching all evening  
looking into our T.V.  
like a window,  
sitting comfortably  
in our recliner arm chairs  
popping some popcorn  
cracking a beer  
watching the war  
hoping to get a peek  
at the enemy,  
wishing to see  
the whites of their eyes  
wanting some blood -  
just a little -  
though we knew  
if watching the war  
got too much  
we could turn  
the damned thing off,  
with just a touch  
of our remote control  
if the going got  
too rough.

## I CAN'T FORGET WHAT HUSSEIN SAID

"The mother of all wars has begun."  
And I hear in the other ear  
Bush saying, "This will not be  
another Vietnam,"  
but already  
we are keeping death score  
not in bodies this time  
but planes  
and always, yes, we have downed  
at least one more of theirs  
than they have of ours.  
And already

we are perpetually winning  
with no end in sight.  
And already  
we are manufacturing  
reasons to be proud,  
putting a face on slaughter  
as truthful as make-up  
on a corpse.

Belinda Subraman

## EVERYONE SAID

"If it were done  
then 'twere well it were done quickly."  
Right?  
That's what everyone said.  
We gotta go in, do the job  
and get out fast  
I did notice that people who said  
we gotta go  
weren't going anywhere.  
they meant other people's  
children had to go

As wars go  
this was a wonderful war

as wars go  
Iraqi mothers saw their children  
incinerated  
That's the cost  
Cheap at the price  
Wonderful war  
So why am I sad?  
Cheap at the price  
the smart money said  
So why am I sad?  
If I'm sad  
how do you suppose  
that Iraqi mother feels?

Rita Nolan Giglio

## PARAPHRASING THE GULF WAR

Our government in Washington's intent  
to talk of war in language that is bent,  
citing bombing raids as "air sorties"  
as if it is discussing angered bees.  
It's eighteen thousand tons of TNT  
in ten hours drop on foreign entity.

The General in charge mouthes softly "KIAs",  
men blown to bits in one twelve-hour phase.  
Defense man labels Scud missiles "old-fashioned"  
and "weapons of terror", Iraq's inaccurate passion.  
"Precise and surgical devices" named "Cruise"  
and "Patriot" are deadlier than what Iraqis use.

Biological weapons we brand inhumane,  
but crippling Baghdad's water system is sane.  
And what if typhus epidemics break out?  
"Unintended collateral damage" we'll shout.

We say it's a test between evil and good.  
Do we always do what we properly should?  
"Liberation of Kuwait" has a lofty sound.  
It means restoring monarchy to former ground.

In this war, words used, soften actualities  
and phrases indirect, mask realities.

Ella Cavis

## THE RULES

This time the bodybags will be called  
"pouches"  
and the war, "a use of force."  
Murder will be known as  
"collateral damage"  
and missiles - "Patriots."  
And if by tomorrow  
Hussein is a "Hitler"  
we can justify every last act  
and each carpet-bombed "A-rab" village  
we will brag has been  
"liberated."

*Susan Erem*

