

A Lewis Chessman takes a Sabbath*

Caroline Johnstone

I am war weary. I have not slept in a thousand years.
I am scraped and battered, exhausted searching for peace.

My duty lay in all the corners of our world where we'd command
the land, observe the jab and slash of foot soldiers,
lost surcoats, mad dogs biting shields.

There was blood enough to paddle in, pieces of putrefying flesh
assaulted all our senses. East winds made us gag,
wove gangrene, charnel house fire into our clothes and noses.

As I wait on a coward's court martial,
pardon me as I try to recall
what I try so hard not to remember.

Yes, my enemy's sword gouged a crater
where my left eye was - but I would have gladly
plucked it out myself to stop me seeing lies in lore,
the gore of their battlefield tactics.

Not all my wounds are visible.

Buried in the silence of sock drawers,
muffled in darkness, memories raise nightmares.

Scratch me – touch the face of hell,
questions under the surface

for who can benefit from war? Knights and kings,
bishops, queens were always ready to play politics.

My mouth runs dry comparing lies,
sighs for the sanctity of life.

***Note one of the Lewis Chessmen was discovered in a sock drawer**