

# 20191007\_theslowdown\_20191007\_128

Wed, 9/30 7:45PM 5:00

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

war, soldier, poem, poet, toils, green, poetry, same sex relationships, aim, giggles, extreme, slow, puddle, helicopter, outcome, intertwined, dead, act, nape, life

00:05

I'm Tina Chang filling in for Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:21

Long ago, I watched my brother's play with a large collection of plastic green soldiers. They came in packets of 50 to 100 figures, one inch tall, with various stances and gestures. One soldier knelt behind a machine gun, while another charged with rifle in hand. And yet another crawled on his elbows to an imagined space for cover. The miniature green warriors were aligned in rows on the kitchen tabletop, and each time My brother is knocked over an enemy soldier, complete with shooting and explosive sound effects. They doubled over with uncontrollable giggles. This went on for hours and years. It all seems so innocent to me, young boys who developed into young men shouting, bang, bang, you're dead? Where do we learn the concept of war? And that loss of life equals victory? When we speak of war, from whose perspective are we speaking from? b where the toils of war, the mesh of the huge dragnet sweeping up the world, wrote Homer, or, quote, only the dead has seen the end of war, remarked to Plato, poets and philosophers have written about war, as they observed it, and none of them seemed able to justify the outcome. Poetry is a reminder of the extremes of the human condition, life and death, cruelty and humanity, creation and destruction. We are living in a most extreme time when conflict is commonplace, and war is a threat scattered like seeds to the hard ground. Our current culture, however, also calls upon the opposite concept of war, which is peace and the ability of the imagination to envision resolution. When I read a poem like new war, by Egyptian poet Merriam fire's, I am struck by the firm declaration of the title is no war, an outcome, a hope, a directive or a reality. The title is startling in its simplicity. While the world is warring, the poem focuses on a tender, intimate act of love and sensuality. This brief but powerful scene of two women intertwined claims its own political space. In Egypt, same sex relationships are not accepted and could result in isolation, abuse, or worse.

This compact poem is an act of protest in more ways than one, as it resists both war and romantic tradition. It is further proof of the fragility of humans in a world that is clashing beyond the quietude of a loving encounter. No war by meriam fires. They aim and it only takes a few seconds to make a man, a dead one. Someone and this mass of faces will never grow fingernails. Never step aside to avoid a puddle on the ground, or a pile of shit. They aim and somewhere I am drawing mountains on her sleeping back. The helicopter standing in for the eyes of God. I wonder if he's watching us living? Does he see me placing soldiers in the nape of her neck when the war comes? We are the smallest bullets. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily. Go to [slowdown show.org](http://slowdownshow.org) and sign up for our newsletter.