

Nine for Peace

MENNA ELFYN

translated from the Welsh by Robert Minhinnick

'Catonsville nine' peace activists including poet-priests
Daniel and Philip Berrigan, May 17th 1968, Maryland

Because if this seems disruptive—
comrades we apologise—
incinerating draft papers
instead of infants
with our home-made napalm
because with Vietnam
such a bloody conflagration
we think it's imperative

Because we shared the Lord's Prayer
quietly before court—
our shackles ensuring silence
no-one should pity us
because we slept that night
dreaming a desert of ashen earth

Because we nine pledged
with heaven on earth our plea
each voice a step closer to peace
because countless went to war
towards sunset without sanctuary
restless and unrecorded
honest folk ripped away from their roots

because men can be vicious
our language teems with violent verbs
but trust the poet
to spoil death's party
using words that challenge war's hardware
and memories of its maiming

Because hellfire we must learn
is more than a missile
but such is its accursedness
that its lesson leaves us no choice