

Four Poets in the Second World War

by [Peter Dreyer](#) (August 2024)



Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Southampton Water (James Abbot McNeill Whistler, 1872)

“No remedy, my retrospective friend,
We’ve found no remedy
. . . for our split mind,” wrote Drummond Allison.
“No room for mourning,”
Sidney Keyes explained.
Both died in ’43, Drummond just twenty-two,
at Monte Cassino in Italy,
Sid, not yet twenty-one, in North Africa.
“And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities

Exhorting us to slaughter, and the herded refugees,"
Alun Lewis recalled, who died on the Arakan front
in Burma (Myanmar) in '44.
"Blood, spirit, in this war. But night begins,
Night of the mind: who nowadays is conscious of our sins?"
Thus Frank Prince, born in Kimberly in 1912—
not far from the Big Hole
with its diamondiferous blue earth
and the Old Mint Building,
where I once clerked—summed up.
Frank survived—thanks to the random gods of war
and lived on till 2003
expounding Milton in Southampton by the sea.

Allison, "No Remedy"; Keyes, "William Wordsworth"; Lewis, "All
Day It Has Rained"; Prince, "Soldiers Bathing," in *More Poems
from the Forces*, edited by Keidrych Rhys (1943);
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Hole.

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Peter Richard Dreyer is a South African American writer. He is
the author of *A Beast in View* (London: André Deutsch), *The
Future of Treason* (New York: Ballantine), *A Gardener Touched
with Genius: The Life of Luther Burbank* (New York: Coward,
McCann & Geoghegan; rev. ed., Berkeley: University of
California Press; new, expanded ed., Santa Rosa, CA: Luther
Burbank Home & Gardens), *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa
and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Secker
& Warburg), and most recently the
novel *Isacq* (Charlottesville, VA: Hardware River Press, 2017).

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