

Andreas Gryphius, “Tears of the Fatherland” (1636)

Abstract

Composed by Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664), “Tears of the Fatherland” of 1636 is the best-known surviving poem from the Thirty Years War. It was already reprinted several times during Gryphius’ lifetime. The version below is from a 1657 Breslau [today: Wrocław] edition. The poem describes the devastating effects of the war and the suffering visited upon the population. The title itself refers to these sufferings (tears). The war was understood as a conflict that brought particular misery to the German territories and their inhabitants, who function in the poem as representatives of the fatherland. The poem references death and violent acts (including rape) while gesturing toward the breakdown of political and ecclesiastical structures (e.g., the council board, the church); it also points out the religious and denominational dimension of this war.

Source

Tears of the Fatherland

Entire, more than entirely, have we been devastated!
The maddened clarion, the bold invaders’ horde.
The mortar thunder-voiced, the blood-anointed sword
Have all men’s sweat and work and store annihilated.

The towers stand in flames, the church is violated,
The strong are massacred, a ruin our council board,
Our maidens raped, and where my eyes have scarce explored
Fire, pestilence, and death my heart have dominated.

Here through redoubt and town runs always new-let blood,
And thrice within six years our very rivers’ flood
With corpses choked has pressed ahead in tedious measure;

I shall not speak of that which is still worse than death,
And crueller than the plague and torch and hunger’s breath:
From many has been forced even the spirit’s treasure.

Source of English translation: George Schoolfield, “A Sonnet of Andreas Gryphius: Tears of the Fatherland, Anno 1636.” *The German Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1952), p. 110.

Source of original German poem: *Andreae Gryphii Deutscher Gedichte/ Erster Theil. (Sonnette, Das Erste Buch)*. Breßlaw: Lischke, 1657, pp. 14–15 (Scans 636–37). Available online at:
<http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000D85200000000>

Recommended Citation: Andreas Gryphius, "Tears of the Fatherland" (1636), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-292>> [July 09, 2025].