

# THIS MAN'S ARMY

## *A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets*

John Allan Wyeth

New Introduction by Dana Gioia

Annotations by B. J. Omanson

First published in 1928, *This Man's Army: A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets* is a gripping collection of narrative verse that represents the beginning and end of the promising literary career of John Allan Wyeth, a Princeton-educated French interpreter in the American Expeditionary Force's Thirty-third Division. Though it received strong reviews and enough sales to warrant a trade edition in 1929, the volume faced the insurmountable adversary of the Great Depression, and its author soon vanished from the literary scene. This new edition of *This Man's Army* restores to print a lost vantage point on the American experience in the Great War as valuable for its high literary merits as for its historical accuracy. The new introduction by Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, chronicles the life of the elusive author and maps the book's critical reception and place in World War I poetry, while new annotations by military historian B. J. Omanson establish the historical context of individual poems.

Wyeth (1894–1981), the son of a prominent New York medical family, had just completed a master's degree in French at Princeton when the United States entered World War I in 1917 and he was motivated into service. His fluency in French garnered him a position in the Interpreters Corps as a second lieutenant in the Thirty-third Division deployed to France and Belgium, and he served in this capacity until his discharge in October 1919. *This Man's Army* is an autobiographical account of Wyeth's service years, detailing his duties as interpreter, messenger, and occasionally sentry while traveling town by town toward the German Hindenburg line. With an unwavering eye for singular details, Wyeth recounts the devastating effects of modern warfare, the cultural interactions of American and French forces, and the lighthearted camaraderie of soldiers on leave. Although he is keenly aware of the brutality of combat, Wyeth's narrator never doubts the eventual American victory.

The term *fifty-odd* in the subtitle describes the sonnets both quantitatively—in that there are fifty-five in total—and qualitatively—as Wyeth stretched the traditional form through incorporation of American and British military jargon and Jazz Age slang as well as a new rhyme scheme unprecedented in the seven-century history of the form.

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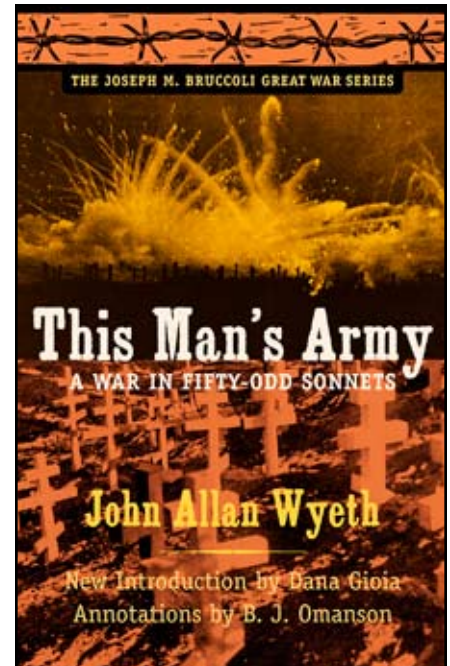
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One of America's leading contemporary men of letters, **Dana Gioia** is an internationally renowned poet and critic. His most recent volume of poetry, *Interrogations at Noon*, won the American Book Award.

**B. J. Omanson** is a military historian and poet who works as a historical interpreter at Pricketts Fort in Fairmont, West Virginia.

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