



Poetry of WORLD WAR I



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‘WHEN I GO FROM HENCE, LET THIS BE MY PARTING WORD,
THAT WHAT I HAVE SEEN IS UNSURPASSABLE.’

- RABINDRANATH TAGORE *Gitanjali*

Poetry of WORLD WAR I



PENCILS & SIDEBARS

When you see the pencil (above) it means there is a specific written task on the page.

Sidebars, like this one, are used to give you extra information about the texts, or the background, or about the author.



THE UNIT

This study pack is designed to be teacher lead, but it includes many opportunities for individual study and group work.

There is a source list and brief biographical details on some of the poets at the end of the unit, and if you wish a fuller understanding of the *context* within which the poetry is set you are advised to participate in some independent study.

The pencil symbol means there is written work to undertake. This may take the form of questions to be tackled individually, or topics for group discussion which will require to be written up by *everyone* in the group when completed.

THE TEXTS

The choice of poems is, inevitably, restricted by space. There are numerous published collections of poetry from The Great War, as well as the published works of individual poets: these can be found in the library should you wish to do further study. (Suggested keywords for searching: ENGLISH LITERATURE, POETRY, WWI, THE GREAT WAR, WILFRED OWEN, SIEGFRIED SASSOON: — It might also be worth trying; ANZAC, BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, WAR GRAVES COMMISSION, SOMME, YPRES, FLANDERS, PASSCHENDAELE, NEUVE CHAPELLE, MENIN GATE.)

Similarly, although there are a limited number of poems in this unit, we will not be looking at all of them in depth. Some of them will not be looked at at all in class. It is up to *you* to read them in your *own time* and draw your own conclusions as to their relevance and contribution.

I have also included a couple of texts which are not directly concerned with the Great War: an extract from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and an extract from one of John Donne's Sermons. Both texts are widely quoted, and you will probably recognise phrases and expressions from both in every day life. In particular, Donne's sermon has had a direct influence on at least one of the poems in this unit.

The texts are arranged into three sections: 'Early Days'; 'A Hell of Noise & Darkness'; and 'Here Dead We Lie.' 'Early Days' takes the optimism of the opening months of the war as its theme; 'A Hell of Noise & Darkness' concentrates on the harsh realities of the fighting; 'Here Dead We Lie' is concerned with what Wilfred Owen described as "the pity of war".

Poetry of WORLD WAR I

What passing bells for those who die as cattle?

-WILFRED OWEN

Britain declared war on Germany on August 4th, 1914, after Germany had ignored Britain's appeal to refrain from violating Belgium's neutrality in her attack of France. Before the collapse of Germany, followed by the Armistice of November 11th, 1918, some 8,700,000 lives had been lost (including about 780,000 British) and the prolonged horrors of trench warfare had seared themselves into the minds of the survivors.

For three years the battle line — known as The Western Front — was stabilised between North West France and Switzerland, with both sides dug in and making repeated, costly, and often futile attempts to advance.

The German use of poison gas at the second battle of Ypres in 1915, the massive German attack at Verdun in 1916, and the British introduction of tanks on the Somme in 1916 all failed to produce the breakthrough each side desired.

The “fields of valour” were desolate, war-scarred landscapes with blasted trees and mud everywhere; riddled by trenches half-filled with water and infested with rats; criss-crossed with miles of protective barbed wire which had to be cut before any advance could begin, a task performed by individual ‘volunteers’ who had to crawl through machine-gun fire to reach it ; extensive, extended bombardments by heavy artillery which sapped the morale and sanity of many, and gave rise to the expression shell-shocked; also, a sense of permanent stalemate suggested to the soldiers involved that this living hell could go on forever. This was the truth of The Great War and it was for too long kept from the knowledge of the civilians at home, who continued to use the old patriotic slogans and write in old-fashioned romantic terms about the glories of war.



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

EARLY DAYS



The ink was barely dry on the Declaration of War before the first 'War Poems' started to appear in the British press.

Poets urged Britons to forget the problems of the previous years and instead concentrate on the days that lay ahead.

Many cried out about the 'justice' of the war on which Britain was embarking. Others saw it as something 'holy' or religious. All believed that God was on

The Fourth of August

Now in thy splendour go before us,
Spirit of England, ardent-eyed.
Enkindle this dear earth that bore us,
In the hour of peril purified.

The cares we hugged drop out of vision,
Our hearts with deeper thoughts dilate,
We step from days of sour division
Into the grandeur of our fate.

LAURENCE BINYON



Peace

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into clearness leaping.
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! We, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

RUPERT BROOKE



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the Eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given,
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

RUPERT BROOKE

The Kiss

To these I turn, in these I trust—
Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
To his blind power I make appeal,
I guard her beauty clean from rust.

He spins and burns and loves the air,
And splits a skull to win my praise;
But up the nobly marching days
She glitters naked, cold and fair.

Sweet Sister, grant your soldier this:
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward darting kiss.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON



'their side,' and so any soldier killed in action was assured of a place in Heaven for having 'done his bit'... Horace's words, *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (It is sweet and right to die for one's country) had yet to be challenged by the realities of Trench warfare.

The 'Bosche' were at the door and it was the duty of England and her Empire to sort out the dreaded 'Hun'.



Poetry of WORLD WAR I



In the early 1900s, all countries on the Continent were creating huge CONSCRIPT armies. Germany could move a force of three and a half million men into the field by 1910.

Britain did not have conscription. Her REGULAR ARMY was much smaller than Germany's, but, in 1907, R.B. Haldane, the Secretary of War created the 150,000 man British



England to Her Sons

Sons of mine, I hear you thrilling
To the trumpet call of war;
Gird ye then, I give you freely
As I gave your sires before,
All the noblest of the children I in love and anguish bore.

Free in service, wise in justice,
Fearing but dishonour's breath;
Steeled to suffer uncomplaining
Loss and failure, pain and death;
Strong in faith that sees the issue and in hope that triumpheth.

Go, and may the God of battles
You in His good guidance keep:
And if He in wisdom giveth
Unto His beloved sleep,
I accept it nothing asking, save a little space to weep.

W. N. HODGSON
August, 1914

Vitae Lampada *(The Torch of Life)*

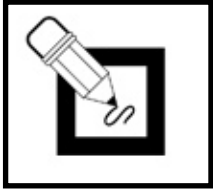
There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight-
Ten to make and the match to win-
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote:
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

The sand of the desert is sodden red,-
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;-
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke,
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England far and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'



This is the word that year by year,
While in her place the School is set,
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with a joyful mind
Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And falling fling to the host behind-
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

HENRY NEWBOLT



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

EARLY DAYS WORKSHEET

IN GROUPS:

1 - Read through *ALL* the poems on pp. 6-8 and identify as many similarities between the poems as you can.

+ Keywords to consider include:

- Honour
- Duty
- Sacrifice
- England
- Class
- Glory

2 - Look closely at the *LANGUAGE* of all of these poems. Identify words, phrases and/or expressions which your group consider to be particularly 'poetic.' Try to explain *WHY* you have singled them out.

3 - Can you identify any recurring or common images in the poems? What are they, and how are they used to support what the poet is saying?

4 - What is the *TONE* of the poems? (Use quotes to support your answer)

5 - Who is the intended *AUDIENCE* for the poems? (Use quotes to support your answer)

INDIVIDUALLY:

+ From the poems on pp. 6-8 select **one** favourite. Write a short (approx. 300 - 400 words) justification for your choice using textual references to support your choice.

OR

+ From the poems on pp. 6-8 select the **one** poem you like the least. Write a short (approx. 300 - 400 words) criticism of the poem using textual references to justify your decision.



Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) who could be speedily sent into action.

In order to increase the army, prior to CONSCRIPTION, posters and adverts were used to 'encourage' volunteers into the Army.

Kitchener's famous 'pointing finger' was one of the most successful of these, and has been adapted and modified many times since.



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

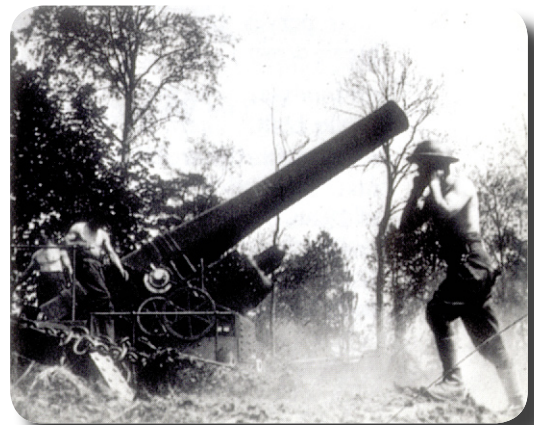
A HELL OF NOISE & DARKNESS...

Sunsets

The white body of the evening
Is torn into scarlet,
Slashed and gouged and seared
Into crimson,
And hung ironically
With garlands of mist.

And the wind
Blowing over London from
Flanders
Has a bitter taste.

RICHARD ALDINGTON



Died of Wounds

His wet white face and miserable eyes
Brought nurses to him more than groans and sighs:
But hoarse and low and rapid rose and fell
His troubled voice: he did the business well.

The ward grew dark, but he was still complaining
And calling out for 'Dickie'. 'Curse the Wood!
It's time to go. O Christ, and what's the good?
We'll never take it, and it's always raining.'

I wondered where he'd been; then heard him shout,
'They snipe like hell! O Dickie, don't go out'...
I fell asleep ... Next morning he was dead;
And some Slight Wound lay smiling on the bed.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

Poetry of WORLD WAR I

Tears

It seems I have no tears left. They should have fallen —
Their ghosts, if tears have ghosts, did fall — that day
When twenty hounds streamed by me, not yet combed out
But still all equals in their rage of gladness
Upon the scent, made one, like a great dragon
In Blooming Meadow that bends towards the sun
And once bore hops: and on that other day
When I stepped out from the double-shadowed Tower
Into an April morning, stirring and sweet
And warm. Strange solitude was there and silence.
A mightier charm than any in the Tower
Possessed the courtyard. They were changing guard,
Soldiers in line, young English countrymen,
Fair-haired and ruddy, in white tunics.
Drums And fifes were playing 'The British Grenadiers'.
The men, the music piercing that solitude
And silence, told me truths I had not dreamed,
And have forgotten since their beauty passed.

EDWARD THOMAS

Attack

At dawn the ridge emerges massed and dun
In the wild purple of the glow'ring sun,
Smouldering through spouts of drifting smoke that shroud
The menacing scarred slope; and, one by one,
Tanks creep and topple forward to the wire.
The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear,
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!

SIEGFRIED SASSOON



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

Everyone Sang

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on — on — and out of
sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun;
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will
never be done.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

From In Parenthesis: Part 7

The First Field Dressing is futile as frantic as seaman's shift
bunged to stoved bulwark, so soon the darkening flood percolates
and he dies in your arms.

And get back to that digging can't yer —
this ain't a bloody Wake

for these dead, who will soon have their dead
for burial clods heaped over.

Nor time for halsing
nor to clip green wounds
nor weeping Maries bringing anointments
neither any word spoken
nor no decent nor appropriate sowing of this seed
nor remembrance of the harvesting
of the renascent cycle
and return

nor shaving of the head nor ritual inching for these viriles
under each tree

No one sings: Lully lully
for the mate whose blood runs down.

DAVID JONES



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

In Memoriam

*Private D. Sutherland killed in action
in the German trench, May 16th,
1916, and the others who died.*

So you were David's father,
And he was your only son,
And the new-cut peats are rotting
And the work is left undone,
Because of an old man weeping,
Just an old man in pain,
For David, his son David,
That will not come again.

Oh, the letters he wrote you,
And I can see them still,
Not a word of the fighting
But just the sheep on the hill
And how you should get the crops in
Ere the year get stormier,
And the Bosches have got his body,
And I was his officer.

You were only David's father,
But I had fifty sons
When we went up in the evening

Under the arch of the guns,
And we came back at twilight –
O God! I heard them call
To me for help and pity
That could not help at all.

Oh, never will I forget you,
My men that trusted me,
More my sons than your fathers',
For they could only see
The little helpless babies
And the young men in their pride.
They could not see you dying,
And hold you while you died.

Happy and young and gallant,
They saw their first-born go,
But not the strong limbs broken
And the beautiful men brought low,
The piteous writhing bodies,
They screamed 'Don't leave me, sir,'
For they were only your fathers
But I was your officer.

E. A. MACKINTOSH
killed in action, 1916



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

GENERALS DIE IN BED

Charles Yale Harrison

We are lying out in front of our wire, waiting for the signal to leap up. It is quiet. Now and then a white Very Light¹ sizzles into the air and illuminates the field as though it were daytime. We lie perfectly still. Over in the German lines we hear voices - they are about fifty yards from where we now lie. I look at the luminous face of my watch. Two minutes to go. MacLeod, the officer in charge of the raiding party, crawls over to where we lie and gives us a last warning. "Remember," he whispers, "Red flares on our parapets² is the signal to come back."

In that instant the sky behind us is stabbed with a thousand flashes of flame. The earth shakes. The air hisses, whistles, screams over our heads. They are firing right into the trenches in front of us. Clouds of earth leap into the air. The barrage lasts a minute and then lifts to cut off the enemy's front line from his supports.

In that moment we spring up. We fire as we run. The enemy has not had time get back in his firing-steps. There is no reply to our fire. We race on. 50 yards - 40 yards - 30 yards! My brain is unnaturally cool, I think to myself. This is a raid, you ought to be excited and nervous. But I am calm. 20 yards! I can see the neatly piled sandbags on the enemy parapets. Our guns are still thundering behind us. Suddenly, yellow blinding bursts of flame shoot up from the ground in front of us. Above the howl of the artillery I hear a man scream as he is bit.

HAND GRENADES!

We race on. We fire our rifles from the hip as we run.

The grenades cease to bark. 10 yards! With a yell we plunge towards the parapets and jump, bayonets first, into the trench. Two men are in the bay into which we leap. Half a dozen of our men fall upon them and stab them down into a corner. I run down the trench looking for prisoners. Each man is for himself. I am alone.

I turn the corner of a bay. My bayonet points forward - on guard. I proceed cautiously, something moves in the corner of the bay. It is a German. I recognise the pot-shaped helmet. I lunge forward, aiming for his stomach. It is a lightning, instinctive movement. In that second he twists and reaches for his revolver. The thrust jerks my body. Something heavy collides with the point of my weapon. I become insane. I want to strike, and strike again. But I cannot. My bayonet does not come clear. I pull, tug, jerk. It does not come out. I have caught him between his ribs. The bones grip my blade. I cannot withdraw. Suddenly I



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

hear him shriek. It sounds far-off. I have a man at the end of my bayonet, I say to myself.

His shrieks become louder and louder. We are facing each other - four feet of space separates us. His eyes are puffed out. They seem all whites, and look as though they will leap out of their sockets. There is froth in the corners of his mouth which opens and shuts like that of a fish out of water. His hands grasp the barrel of my rifle and he joins me in the effort to withdraw. I do not know what to do. He looks at me piteously. I put my foot against his body and try to kick him off. He shrieks into my face. He will not come off. I kick him again and again. No use. His howling unnerves me. I feel I will go insane if I stay in this hole much longer.

It is too much for me. Suddenly I drop the butt of my rifle. He collapses into the corner of the bay. His hands still grip the barrel. I start to run down the bay. A few steps and I turn the corner. I am in the next bay. I am glad I cannot see him. I am bewildered. Out of the roar of the bombardment I think I hear voices. In a flash, I remember that I am unarmed. My rifle - it stands between me and death - and it is in the body of him who lies there trying to pull it out. I am terrified.

If they come here and find me they will stab me just as I stabbed him - and maybe in the ribs too. I run back a few paces but I cannot bring myself to turn the corner of the bay in which He lies. I hear his calls for help. The other voices sound nearer. I am back in the bay. The rifle is in such a position that he cannot move. His neck is limp and he rolls his head over his chest until he sees me. Behind our lines the guns light the sky with monster dull, red flashes. In this flickering light this German and I act out our tragedy. I move to seize the butt of my rifle. Once more we are face to face. He grabs the barrel with a childish movement which seems to say: You may not take it, it is mine. I push his hands away. I pull again. My tugging and pulling works the blade in his insides. Again those horrible shrieks! I place the butt of the rifle under my arm and turn away, trying to drag the blade out. It will not come out. I think I can get it out if I unfasten the bayonet from the rifle. But I cannot go through with the plan, for the blade is in up to the hilt and the wound which I have been clumsily mauling is now a gaping hole. I cannot put my hand there.

Suddenly, I remember what I must do.

I turn around and pull my breech-lock back. The click sounds sharp and clear.

He stops his screaming. He looks at me silently now. He knows what I am going to do. A white Very Light soars over our heads. His helmet has fallen from his head. I see his boyish face. He is fair, and under the light I see white down against green cheeks.

I pull my trigger. There is a loud shot. The blade at the end of my rifle snaps in two. He falls into the corner of the bay and rolls over. He lies still.

I am free.





Poetry of WORLD WAR I

USE A DICTIONARY!

The key to doing well in this task lies in your ability to use a dictionary! Do not assume you know the meaning of the



words used in the poem... the chances are the poet is using them for a particular reason.

Remember:
DENOTATION & CONNOTATION!
Denotation is the dictionary definition,
Connotations are the associations the word has... what it makes you think of.

Futility

Move him into the sun —
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds —
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides
Full-nerved - still warm - too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

WILFRED OWEN

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- Answer in sentences.

1. What is the meaning of the title “Futility”? (1)
2. In what way is the title a summary of the content of the poem? (2)
3. In what way did the sun once wake the dead soldier gently? (2)
4. Note how two words, “At home”(line 3) are isolated - why did the poet want this effect? (2)
5. What was the dead man’s occupation? (Support your answer by reference to the poem.) (2)
6. Comment on the use of “whispering” in line 3. (Think of connotations and apply them) (2)
7. Why does he think the sun is all that is required to revive the soldier on this particular morning? (2 reasons). (2)
8. What is the “cold star” to which the poet refers? (1)
9. Comment on the poet’s choice of “clays” and “cold”. What effect is he trying to create? (2)
10. “Dear” in “dear-achieved” could be understood in two ways. Explain. (2)
11. Can you see any link between “cold star” and “still warm” body in the light of what the poet is saying about the sun’s effect? (2)
12. Why are the sunbeams said to be “fatuous”?(line 13). (1)
13. What is Owen saying in the last two lines? (2)
14. What is his MOOD throughout the poem? (2)

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The Death-Bed

He drowsed and was aware of silence heaped
Round him, unshaken as the steadfast walls;
Aqueous like floating rays of amber light,
Soaring and quivering in the wings of sleep.
Silence and safety; and his mortal shore
Lipped by the inward, moonless waves of death.

Someone was holding water to his mouth.
He swallowed, unresisting; moaned and dropped
Through crimson gloom to darkness; and forgot
The opiate throb and ache that was his wound.
Water — calm, sliding green above the weir
Water — a sky-lit alley for his boat,
Bird-voiced, and bordered with reflected flowers
And shaken hues of summer; drifting down,
He dipped contented oars, and sighed, and slept.

Night, with a gust of wind, was in the ward,
Blowing the curtain to a glimmering curve.
Night. He was blind; he could not see the stars
Glinting among the wraiths of wandering cloud;
Queer blots of colour, purple, scarlet, green,
Flickered and faded in his drowning eyes.

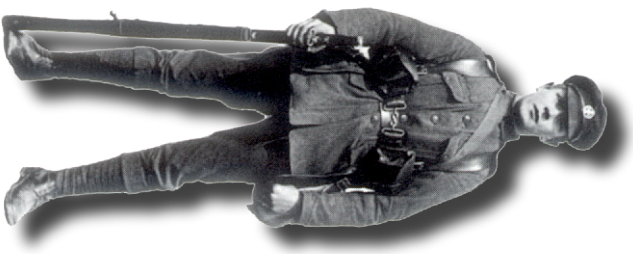
Rain — he could hear it rustling through the dark;
Fragrance and passionless music woven as one;
Warm rain on drooping roses; pattering showers
That soak the woods; not the harsh rain that sweeps
Behind the thunder, but a trickling peace,
Gently and slowly washing life away.

He stirred, shifting his body; then the pain
Leapt like a prowling beast, and gripped and tore
His groping dreams with grinding claws and fangs.
But someone was beside him; soon he lay
Shuddering because that evil thing had passed.
And death, who'd stepped toward him, paused and stared.

Light many lamps and gather round his bed.
Lend him your eyes, warm blood, and will to live.
Speak to him; rouse him; you may save him yet.
He's young; he hated War; how should he die
When cruel old campaigners win safe through?

But death replied: 'I choose him'. So he went,
And there was silence in the summer night;
Silence and safety; and the veils of sleep.
Then, far away, the thudding of the guns.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON



Poetry of WORLD WAR I



*Dulce et
decorum est
pro patria
mori:*

It is sweet and becoming to die on one's country's behalf, or to die for one's country (HORACE: III, *Odes*, ii, 13).

Dulce et Decorum Est

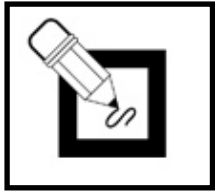
Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
5 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

10 Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! — An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And floundering like a man in fire or lime. —
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

15 In all my dreams before my helpless sight
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
20 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —
25 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.





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Dulce et Decorum Est

GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS

Consider the following points in your groups:

- What was Owen's PURPOSE in writing the poem?
- Who was his intended AUDIENCE?
- How successful is he in his intended aims?

UNDERSTANDING

- 1 a) What are the expectations of the title? (2)
- b) What happens to these expectations in lines 1 & 2? (2)
- 2 a) In what ways can the soldiers be compared to beggars? (2)
- b) In what ways can the soldiers be compared to hags? (2)
- 3 Bring out the *full* implications of "haunting" (l.3) (3)
- 4 Identify and comment on the irony of line 4. (3)
- 5 Characterise the rhythm of lines 5-8. (3)
- 6 Comment *fully* on "hoots" (l.8) (2)
- 7 From stanza 2 or 3, choose and comment on any *two* examples of language that make a direct appeal to the senses. (4)
- 8 Explain in full how the reader is more directly addressed in stanza 4. (2)
- 9 Comment on the poet's careful choice of : "pace" (l.17), "flung" (l.18), and "writhing" (l.19). (6)
- 10 Comment on the imagery of line 20. (3)
- 11 Clarify the aural imagery of line 22. (3)
- 12 Defend the poet from the charge of using distasteful imagery in lines 23-24. (3)
- 13 Comment on "zest"(l.25) and "ardent"(l.26). (4)
- 14 Explain in full why what the children are told is "The old Lie"(l.27). (4)



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

'As the Team's Head-Brass'

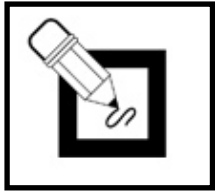
As the team's head-brass flashed out on the turn
The lovers disappeared into the wood.
I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
That strewed an angle of the fallow, and
5 Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
Of charlock. Every time the horses turned
Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
Upon the handles to say or ask a word
About the weather, next about the war.
10 Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,
And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.

The blizzard felled the elm whose crest
I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,
15 The ploughman said. 'When will they take it away?'
'When the war's over.' So the talk began-
One minute and an interval of ten,
A minute more and the same interval.
'Have you been out?' 'No.' 'And don't want to, perhaps?'
20 'If I could only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
A leg. If I should lose my head, why, so,
I should want nothing more ... Have many gone
From here?' 'Yes.' 'Many lost?' 'Yes: good few.
25 Only two teams work on the farm this year.
One of my mates is dead. The second day
In France they killed him. It was back in March,
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree.'
30 'And I should not have sat here. Everything
Would have been different. For it would have been
Another world.' 'Ay, and a better, though
If we could see all all might seem good.' Then
The lovers came out of the wood again:
35 The horses started and for the last time
I watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.



EDWARD THOMAS





Poetry of WORLD WAR I

Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing bells for those who die as cattle?
 Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them from prayers or bells,
 Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,-
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
 Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
 The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

WILFRED OWEN

TASKS

Individually:

- Find out the meanings of ALL the words you don't know.
- Identify as many poetic techniques as you can.
- Identify what you think to be the main theme(s).

In Groups:

- Consider Owen's use of imagery - is it effective, and if so, why?
 - Choose TWO images used by Owen and analyse them in depth. Consider their word choice, connotations, and effectiveness. Once you have done this, prepare a presentation of 7-10 minutes duration to be given to the rest of the class based on your findings.



(Refer to the Presentation Skills Guidelines for help and ideas during your preparation. You may wish to use visual and/or audio aids in your presentation. If so, ask your teacher for advice on the resources available.)



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

HERE DEAD WE LIE...

Aftermath

Have you forgotten yet? ...

For the world's events have rumbled on since those gagged days,
Like traffic checked while at the crossing of city-ways:
And the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow
Like clouds in the lit heaven of life; and you're a man reprieved to go,
Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.

But the past is just the same — and War's a bloody game...

Have you forgotten yet? ...

Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz —
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags on parapets?
Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench —
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to happen again?'

Do you remember that hour of din before the attack —
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you then
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads — those ashen-grey
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?

Have you forgotten yet? ...

Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you'll never forget.





Poetry of WORLD WAR I

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

JOHN McRAE
died in Base Hospital, 1918



'When You see Millions of the Mouthless Dead'

When you see millions of the mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,
That you'll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.
Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.
Say only this, 'They are dead.' Then add thereto,
Yet many a better one has died before.'
Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass, should you
Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,
It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.
Great death has made all his for evermore.

CHARLES SORLEY

On Passing the New Menin Gate

Who will remember, passing through this Gate,
The unheroic Dead who fed the guns?
Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate –
Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?
Crudely renewed, the Salient holds its own.
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;
Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone,
The armies who endured that sullen swamp.

Here was the world's worst wound. And here with pride
'Their name liveth for ever' the Gateway claims.
Was ever an immolation so belied
As these intolerably nameless names?
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime
Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON





Poetry of WORLD WAR I

Here Dead we Lie

Here dead we lie because we did not choose
To live and shame the land from which we
sprung. Life, to be sure, is nothing much to
lose;
But young men think it is, and we were
young.

A. E. HOUSMAN

A Dead Statesman

I could not dig; I dared not rob:
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall serve me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young?

RUDYARD KIPLING

From *How Shall we Rise to Greet the Dawn?*

Continually they cackle thus,
new venerable birds,
Crying, 'Those whom the Gods love
Die young'
Or something of that sort.

OSBERT SITWELL

Common Form

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

RUDYARD KIPLING



Memorial Tablet
(Great War)

Squire nagged and bullied till I went to fight,
(Under Lord Derby's Scheme). I died in hell –
(They called it Passchendaele). My wound was slight,
And I was hobbling back; and then a shell
Burst slick upon the duck-boards: so I fell
Into the bottomless mud, and lost the light.

At sermon-time, while Squire is in his pew,
He gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare;
For, though low down upon the list, I'm there;
'In proud and glorious memory' ... that's my due.
Two bleeding years I fought in France, for Squire:
I suffered anguish that he's never guessed.
Once I came home on leave: and then went west ...
What greater glory could a man desire?

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

Poetry of WORLD WAR I

The Next War

TO SACHEVERELL

(NOVEMBER 1918)

The long war had ended.
Its miseries had grown faded.
Deaf men became difficult to talk to,
Heroes became bores.
Those alchemists
Who had converted blood into gold
Had grown elderly.
But they held a meeting,
Saying,
'We think perhaps we ought
To put up tombs
Or erect altars
To those brave lads
Who were so willingly burnt,
Or blinded,
Or maimed,
Who lost all likeness to a living thing,
Or were blown to bleeding patches of flesh
For our sakes.
It would look well.
Or we might even educate the children.'
But the richest of these wizards
Coughed gently;
And he said:

'I have always been to the front
—In private enterprise—,
I yield in public spirit
To no man.
I think yours is a very good idea
—A capital idea—
And not too costly ...
But it seems to me
That the cause for which we fought
Is again endangered.
What more fitting memorial for the fallen
Than that their children
Should fall for the same cause?'

Rushing eagerly into the street,
The kindly old gentlemen cried
To the young:

'Will you sacrifice
Through your lethargy
What your fathers died to gain?
The world *must* be made safe for the young!'

And the children
Went....



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

Sebastian Faulks worked as a journalist for 14 years before turning to writing books full time in 1991. He has set a number of his novels during the First World War.

One of these, *Birdsong*, received the following review in *The Times*:

'The First World War is not exactly unvisited territory in fiction but Faulks's possession of it is so passionate, so total, that it must surely rank as a *tour de force*, engrossing, moving, and unforgettable.

[The hero], lonely and brooding, is both charismatic and enigmatic. Some aspects of his character prove to be false trails, but he exercises fascination throughout, both on the reader and on his companions in the stinking claustrophobia of the trenches...

So powerful is this recreated past that you long to call *Bird-song* perfect' Sue Gee, *The Times*

Europe's peace found its roots in Flanders mud



SEBASTIAN FAULKS



"THE NAMES of boys who gave their lives for their country in two world wars." A treble voice used to incant this preliminary line before reading a list of all the names with their initials. Even at our little school the head boy's reading seemed to go on for hours. "They may only be names to you," the headmaster used to say beforehand, "but to me they are all faces and voices." Anderson MR, Arkwright PW ... the names took on shapes as you tried to imagine the boys who owned them (you never thought of the young men in khaki uniforms they had become at the time of their death). The most chilling moments came when there were two names from the same family. You thought of a still-young mother at home receiving the second telegram, turning in anguish to her husband. You hoped there had been daughters.

To a 10-year-old boy the First World War seemed unimaginably long ago. 1914 was obviously more recent than 1588, but in the sense that they were both History there was little to choose between them. After 15 minutes or so the vision of slaughter reached its peak and the mind was no longer able to concentrate on the steady pulse of names. I would look around and see the solemn little

faces in black ties and Sunday suits, staring downwards, trying to imagine themselves a part of this war, this school, this terrible sacrifice.

One year a small boy began to snigger. The tension of the occasion had proved too much. Jaws were clenched in embarrassment and in a pre-emptive effort at self-control in case the giggles should prove catching. The headmaster looked down watery-eyed from the dais as the little boy was led out spluttering and gagging. There was a communal sense of shame, of having betrayed some adult trust, but also a sympathy for the poor afflicted boy. It could have been any of us.

One of the good things about getting older is that you find a truer perspective on age and history. Photographs of Dickens and the world he described show that he was no more than a handshake away. My grandfather, who died when Mr Heath was Prime Minister, was born only a few years after *Edwin Drood* came out; he was actually too old to fight in 1914. Similarly, since I have met veterans of the trenches the events of those years seem more recent. The drawback to this clearer perspective is that it also makes the sacrifices of 1914-18 correspondingly more poignant.

Two years ago I went to Flanders with a group of veterans. One had fought in the battle of High Wood on the Somme. Of 232 men who went up in the attack only 11 came back and he was ninth in. Another had seen his best friend blown to pieces beside him at Aubers Ridge in Flanders, each piece "about the size of a leg of lamb". He had put the pieces in a sandbag and buried them in a hole behind the trench and moved on, believing that was the only burial his friend had had. In the course of our visit he was brought face to face with a grave. Many years before, someone had found the sandbag

Poetry of WORLD WAR I

and buried it with a proper headstone in the military cemetery. The look on his old friend's face when confronted with his comrade for the first time in 73 years is something I will never forget.

As we drove through the churned and muddied fields (how peaceful, dull and unremarkable they looked) an old man with a woolly scarf and a bird-like head held tightly on to my hand as he described what it felt like to be wheeled on a wagon with solid tyres over rutted ground with the exposed bones in your arm rubbing together. The return visit brought no bitterness to him. "You remember the boys you were with," he said, "and you're young again. It's as though you've not grown old."

It was not always so. Most of the veterans dismissed the events of the war from their minds for 50 or more years. They never returned, they never thought about it. Many of them never even spoke about it, not even to their nearest relations, until the 1970s or 1980s. Such willingness, such innocence, such obedience in the face of the unendurable will never, historians mercifully agree, be possible again.

When I returned from Flanders a colleague expressed surprise that I had wanted to go. He thought only old buffers were interested in these things. But, with

due respect, I think he was wrong. You can't appreciate the pleasure of living in a peaceful Europe unless you understand how it was made. To walk through the damp tunnels of the underground fortress of Douaumont at Verdun is a very sobering experience, even 74 years afterwards; to stand at the Menin Gate at Ypres, as they are standing this morning, with its furlongs of names of the dead - hundreds, thousands of yards of neatly carved names - brings home the truth of who we are with almost overpowering force.

I have met people in their thirties who don't know when either world war was fought. They were not taught at school and they think it doesn't concern them; it's just history, and boys' history at that. To forget is the privilege of peace; but it was a luxury that was hard won for them. In the cemetery of Le Touret near Neuve Chapelle are memorials to the missing of 1915. On the grave of 21-year-old Rifleman S Leeder are the words paid for at a shilling a time by his parents: "We would have kept him, but God knew best." Along the line is the grave of a 16-year-old boy and the inscription: "I have fought the good fight. I have kept the faith."

from

*THE
INDEPENDENT
ON SUNDAY -
11/11/1990*



THE ALLIED CEMETERY AT NEUVE CHAPELLE



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

LAWRENCE BINYON

APPENDICES

*Selected Biographies
Henry V : Act III, Scene i
Meditation 17
Selected Notes*

INDEX OF POEMS

SELECTED BIOGRAPHIES

* *Died on Active Service*

RICHARD ALDINGTON. Born in 1892, and educated at Dover College and London University. He served on the Western Front, 1916-1918; was badly gassed, the after-effects of which never left him. After the War he wrote the famous, indignant war book *Death of a Hero*. Novelist, poet, and controversial biographer, he died at his home in the South of France in 1962. *Collected Poems* (Allen & Unwin, 1929).

***RUPERT BROOKE.** Born in 1887, and educated at Rugby (his father was a master there), and at King's College, Cambridge, where he was a close friend of Hugh Dalton and joined the Fabians. Influenced by F. H. Keeling, one of the leading Fabians of the day (killed at the Somme in 1916). A brilliant undergraduate career; made a Fellow of his college. Travelled widely around the world before the war. Sent to Canada and the United States by the *Westminster Gazette* to write a series of articles. His poems had a tremendous impact on his slightly younger contemporaries, such as W. N. Hodgson; a first collection was published in 1911. Suffused with patriotism, he was happy, almost anxious, to die for his country in battle. A friend of Masfield, Gibson, Abercrombie, Drinkwater, and the young Asquiths (he sometimes stayed at 10 Downing Street when on leave). Given a commission (sub-lieutenant) in the Royal Naval Division by Winston Churchill (First Lord of the Admiralty). Saw some action at Antwerp in 1914. Died on St George's Day, 1915, on the way to Gallipoli, not in battle but of acute blood poisoning. He was buried on the Greek island of Scyros, associated with Achilles. He was surrounded by his friends, including Arthur Asquith (the Prime Minister's third son, who was a Brigadier-General by 1918 at the age of 35 - the second youngest in the Army - with a D.S.O. and two bars), Bernard Freyberg, V.C. (later Governor-General of New Zealand), and W. D. Browne, a young musician of exceptional promise

who had been one of his best friends at Rugby. (The fact that so many young friends of Edward Marsh were in the same unit was no coincidence; Marsh was Private Secretary to Churchill.) Browne was killed at Gallipoli a few weeks later. These four buried Brooke on top of a high hill on the island. The long procession was led by a sailor carrying an enormous white cross with Brooke's name written on it in black. The procession took two hours to reach the peak of the hill. The burial took place. The Last Post was sounded, and the grave was marked with slabs of marble that were lying about. The lamp-lit column made the long march down again - and a legend was born. A naval party landed at Scyros in 1960 and found the grave in an overgrown and dilapidated condition. *Collected Poems* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1979); *Poetical Works*, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Faber, 1970).

DAVID JONES. Born 1895 in Kent. An art student before the war, he served with the 15th Royal Welch Fusiliers, 1915-18, in France and Flanders. His book *In Parenthesis* (Faber, 1937) was one of the most famous of all the 1914-18 war books and one of the last to be published. It received the Hawthornden Prize in 1938. Jones became a leading water-colourist, and his work is exhibited at the Tate Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, etc. C.B.E. Died in 1974.

RUDYARD KIPLING. Born in Bombay, 1865. Related to Stanley Baldwin. Educated at United Services College (now Haileybury and I.S.C.); worked for seven years as a journalist. Awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, 1907. His many verses in praise of the ordinary soldier were not fashionable among the young poets of the time, although they were practically the only verse known to the ordinary soldiers themselves. His early poems of the war were suitably stirring, but already contained undertones of doubt and uncertainty as to what it was going to demand. In 1915 his only son, a Lieutenant in the Irish Guards, was killed in action at Loos and the body was never recovered. His war verse became bitter. He devoted much of his time after the war to writing the history of the Irish Guards; one of the finest of

regimental histories. He refused the Poet Laureateship on three occasions. *Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1940). By endowment he contributed for many years to the Last Post being sounded every night at the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres. He died in 1936.

***JOHN McCRAE.** Born in 1872. A Canadian doctor, who started to write verse at McGill University. Wrote an important book on pathology. He became well-known as a doctor and socialite. Went to Europe in 1914 as a gunner, but transferred to the Medical Service. *In Flanders Fields* first appeared anonymously in Punch, on December 8, 1915. It became the most famous poem of the war. It was written during the second Battle of Ypres. McCrae had his dressing-station during the battle in a hole in the bank of the Ypres Canal, 'into which men literally rolled when shot'. He was put in charge of No. 3 General Hospital at Boulogne. In January, 1918, he was appointed consultant to all the British Armies in France, but died of pneumonia before he could take up the appointment. *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*, by Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, M.D. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1919).

***E. A. MACKINTOSH.** Born in 1893, and educated at St Paul's and Christ Church, Oxford. Left Oxford to join 5th Seaford Highlanders, and was sent to France where he was awarded the Military Cross. Wounded and gassed at High Wood during the Somme battle. Trained the cadet corps at Cambridge for eight months, during which time he became engaged. He returned to the Front in 1917, and was killed at Cambrai in October. *A Highland Regiment* (John Lane, 1917); *War, The Liberator* (1918).

***WILFRED OWEN.** Born at Oswestry, 1893, and educated at Birkenhead Institute and University of London. Worked as a private tutor near Bordeaux, 1913-15, and during this time is reputed to have been influenced by modern French poetry. Despite delicate health, he enlisted in the Artist's Rifles in 1915, and was later commissioned in the Manchester Regt.; served in

trenches in France from January, 1917, to June, 1917, when he was invalided home. His nerves shattered, he was sent to the same hospital in Scotland as Sassoon, who discovered the new poet, and who soon afterwards introduced him to Graves and Nichols. After Sassoon's advice and encouragement, Owen became filled with confidence about his own powers.

Owen returned to the same battalion at the Front, and was Company Commander. He wrote to his mother: 'I came out in order to help these boys; directly, by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can.' Towards the end, he wrote: 'My senses are charred; I don't take the cigarette out of my mouth when I write DECEASED over their letters.' In October, he was awarded the Military Cross for exceptional bravery in the field. He was killed by machine-gun fire on November 4, 1918, while endeavouring to get his company across the Sambre Canal. By most critics he is considered to be the outstanding poet of the war. His use of the half-rhyme was well-suited to his sombre subject and mood; it was widely copied by poets in the inter-war years. Sir Osbert Sitwell has written of 'Strange Meeting': 'as great a poem as exists in our tongue'. John Wain has written: 'Is there a finer war poem in world literature than "Anthem For Doomed Youth"?' *Poems* with an Introduction by Siegfried Sassoon (Chatto & Windus, 1920); *Collected Poems* with an Introduction by Edmund Blunden (Chatto & Windus, 1931); *Collected Poems*, edited by C. Day Lewis (Chatto & Windus, 1963); *Wilfred Owen: A Critical Study* by D. S. R. Welland (Chatto & Windus, 1960); *Journey From Obscurity* by Harold Owen (Oxford, 1963); *Complete Poems* (Hogarth Press, 1983).

* **ISAAC ROSENBERG**. Born in Bristol, 1890; but his family moved to the East End of London when he was still a child. Educated at the Stepney Board School, where his gifts for drawing and writing were so remarkable that he was allowed to devote all his time to them. He left school at fourteen, but he had already written his first poems - at the age of twelve. He took up art, and

friends provided the means to send him to the Slade School for two and a half years. He exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery. Rosenberg was first encouraged in his poetry by Laurence Binyon, to whom he wrote, and then by Marsh, who took him under his capacious wing. He went on a trip to South Africa, to try to improve his suspect lungs. He enlisted in the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment in 1915, partly in the hope that his mother would benefit from the separation allowance. No one could have been less-fitted for military service. As well as having weak lungs, Rosenberg was extremely short; he was also acutely absent-minded, which caused him many fatigues and punishments. He fought in the trenches on the Western Front, and was killed in action on April 1, 1918. Some critics consider him the best of the war poets after Wilfred Owen. *Collected Poems* (Heinemann, 1922); *Collected Works* (Chatto & Windus, 1979).

SIEGFRIED SASSOON. Born in 1886, and educated at Marlborough and Clare College, Cambridge. His early idyllic life of hunting, cricket and country pursuits was disturbed by the war. He served with the Sussex Yeomanry, and then with the Royal Welch Fusiliers (in a different battalion to his close friend of the time, Robert Graves). By all accounts an officer of exceptional courage, he was known as 'Kangers' and 'Mad Jack'. Won the Military Cross just before the Battle of the Somme. Later was in hospital at Craiglockhart where he befriended Wilfred Owen (*q.v.*) and encouraged his poetry. He was the first to write sustained poetry critical of the progress of the war; he described its horrors unsparingly. By the end of the war acknowledged leader and hero of all the younger poets. After the war he was Literary Editor of the Daily Herald, and started on his great autobiography. The first part, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, gained both the Hawthornden and James Tait Black Memorial Prizes. The second part, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, were unsurpassed as memoirs of the war. C.B.E., 1951. *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (Heinemann, 1919); *Collected Poems 1908-56* (Faber, 1961); *War Poems*, ed. Sir R. Hart-Davis (Faber,

1983); *Selected Poems* (Faber, 1968). Died in 1967.

* **C. H. SORLEY**. Born in Aberdeen, 1895, and educated at Marlborough. He won a scholarship to University College, Oxford, but enlisted in the Suffolk Regiment in August, 1914. He was soon in the trenches, and by the following August held the rank of captain. He was killed in action, aged 20, at Loos on October 13, 1915. His *Marlborough and Other Poems* (Cambridge University Press, 1916) quickly ran into four editions. His *Song of the Ungirt Runners* has been widely anthologised, and learnt by many a schoolboy. Sorley had an extraordinarily well-developed gift for rhyming. John Masfield considered him the most promising of the war poets. Sorley wrote in a letter home, enclosing some poems: 'You will notice that most of what I have written is as hurried and angular as the handwriting: written out at different times and dirty with my pocket: but I have had no time for the final touch nor seem likely to have for some time.'

* **EDWARD THOMAS**. Born in 1878; educated at St Paul's School, and Lincoln College, Oxford. He was encouraged to write poetry by his friend Robert Frost, who was living at the time in England, and he became a member of the Georgian group of poets. Worked for the Daily Chronicle. His friends included Lascelles Abercrombie and Rupert Brooke. joined the Artists' Rifles, and served in the trenches; transferred to the Royal Garrison Artillery. He continued to write his favourite poems of nature and the countryside, and he wrote few war poems. He was killed in action at Arras, April 9, 1917. *Collected Poems* (Ingpen & Grant, 1922.); *Collected Poems* (Faber, 1945); *Collected Poems*, ed. R. G. Thomas (O.U.P., 1978); *Selected Poems* (Faber, 1964); *Selected Poems and Prose* (Penguin, 1981); *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (Oxford, 1958) by Eleanor Farjeon.

Poetry of WORLD WAR I

This speech comes from one of Shakespeare's 'historical plays'. These plays are mostly concerned with various Kings from England's past.

In this famous speech from *Henry V*, the King is boosting the morale of his troops on the eve of Agincourt, one of the most famous victories in English warfare.

Henry V, Act III.i:

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

France. Before Harfleur.

Alarums. Enter *KING HENRY, EXETER, BEDFORD, GLOUCESTER*, and soldiers, with scaling ladders.

KING HENRY: Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead!

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man

As modest stillness and humility:

But when the blast of war blows in our ears,

Then imitate the action of the tiger;

Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,

Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;

Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;

Let it pry through the portage of the head

Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it

As fearfully as doth a galled rock

O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,

Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.

Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,

Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit

To his full height! On, on, you noblest

English!

Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof;

Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought,

And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument.

Dishonour not your mothers; now attest

That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.

Be copy now to men of grosser blood.

And teach them how to war. And you, good yeomen,

Whose limbs were made in England, show us here

The mettle of your pasture; let us swear

That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;

For there is none of you so mean and base

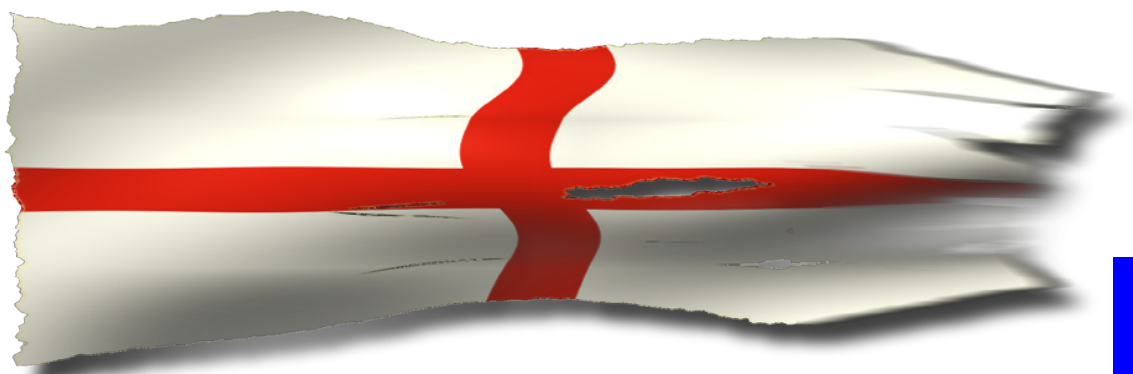
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.

I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips.

Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:

Follow your spirit: and, upon this charge

Cry 'God for Harry! England and Saint George!'



Poetry of WORLD WAR I

MEDITATION 17

Nunc lento sonitu dicunt, morieris
(Now this bell tolling softly for another, says to me,
Thou must die)

Perchance he for whom this bell¹ tolls may be so ill as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me and see my state may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptises a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body² whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author and is one volume. When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated³ into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated. God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another. As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness.

There was a contention as far as a suit⁴ (in which piety and dignity, religion and estimation⁵, were mingled) which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning, and it was determined that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him that thinks it doth; and though it intermit again, yet from that minute that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? but who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? **No man is an island**, entire of itself - every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main⁶. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore **never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.**

JOHN DONNE
(1572-1631)

Donne was many things; a poet, a scholar, a spy, a member of parliament, the royal chaplain, and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

He was friend to the rich and famous, and a favourite of the King, yet he never lost the human touch.

Meditation 17 is from one of the sermons he preached while Dean of St. Paul's. In it he meditates on the fact that all must die, and that in this dying so all humanity is lessened.

1. The "passing bell" for the dying.

2. The church.

3. Punning on the literal sense, "carried across."

4. Controversy which went as far as a lawsuit.

5. "Estimation": self-esteem.

6. Mainland.

THE SOLDIER

This sonnet assumes that the typical Englishman is a flower-loving countryman. In a letter written soon after Brooke's death, Charles Sorley wrote:

That last sonnet-sequence of his ... which has been so praised, I find (with the exception of that beginning 'These hearts were woven of human joys and cares, washed marvellously with sorrow' which is not about himself) overpraised. He is far too obsessed with his own sacrifice, regarding the going to war of himself (and others) as a highly intense, remarkable and sacrificial exploit, whereas it is merely the conduct demanded of him (and others) by the turn of circumstances. It was not that they gave up anything of that list he gives in one sonnet: but that the essence of these things had been endangered by circumstances over which he had no control, and he must fight to recapture them. He has clothed his attitude in fine words : but he has taken the sentimental attitude.

ATTACK

Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear (line 9): compared with Owen, Sassoon tends to put more stress on the psychological effects on men of waiting to go over the top, and less on the physical effects of wounds. Sassoon stresses the terrible anxieties that war brings.

FUTILITY

fields half-sown (line 3): they are symbolic of the promise of youth that the dead soldier has not been able to fulfil; also, more literally, the dead man worked on a farm.

—*O what made fatuous sunbeams toil* (line 13): nothing could express deeper disillusionment than these two last lines. Owen protests against the power of evil, and arraigns the Creator. In a century which has given far too much power to governments and seen far too many wars, Owen asserts that the individual matters; and so he asks why such tragedies as this man's death should occur.

MEMORIAL TABLET

Passchendaele (line 3): from July to November 1917 the British lost a disastrous number of men in frontal attacks in south-west Belgium in the area of Ypres and Passchendaele. Among the reasons for the failure of the attacks was the incredibly wet weather.

ON PASSING THE NEW MENIN GATE

One of the beautiful old buildings destroyed in Ypres was the medieval gate by which the road to Menin left the town. After the war this was rebuilt as a large memorial to the many British dead who died in the Ypres sector. On it are inscribed the 55,884 names of British soldiers who were killed at Ypres, and whose bodies were never recovered.

'The Last Post' is played at the Menin Gate each evening as a tribute and remembrance from the people of Belgium and Ypres to the British soldiers who gave their lives, an action in part funded by the writer Rudyard Kipling whose only son is one of the missing corpses.

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Henry V, Act III.i:
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