

World War I Poetry

English Literature V

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What Made World War I Different?

Soldiers lived in muddy trenches for months

- Movement meant death
- Constant artillery bombardment
- Gas attacks
- Disease and rats

First industrial war – machines built for destruction





Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

- Poet, critic, and biographer
- Enlisting actually inspired him to become a poet
- Poetic Style: Georgian poetry, with cultured meditations of the English countryside and a love of natural beauty
- Enlisted in 1915 for patriotic motives and was killed in 1917



Adlestrop¹

Yes, I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

5 The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

10 And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

15 And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Jan. 1915

1917

ADLESTROP

Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)

- Known for his idealistic war sonnets
- Most popular of the Georgian poets — pastoral writers who wove nature together with a deep sense of national pride
- His early death came to symbolize the loss of a whole generation of patriotic young Englishmen



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;

5 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,
10 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.

1914

1915



**IT IS FAR BETTER
TO FACE THE BULLETS
THAN TO BE KILLED
AT HOME BY A BOMB**

**JOIN THE ARMY AT ONCE
& HELP TO STOP AN AIR RAID**

COD SAVE THE KING

BRITAIN·NEEDS



YOU·AT·ONCE

Brooke's Idealism	Actual Experience
for ever England	Muddy trenches in France
richer dust	Mass graves
Noble sacrifice	Mechanized slaughter
Flowers and nature	Barbed wire and shell holes



BRITONS



"WANTS
YOU"

JOIN YOUR COUNTRY'S ARMY!
GOD SAVE THE KING

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Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?

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Jessie Pope, "The Call" (1915)

Who's for the trench—
Are you, my laddie?
Who'll follow French—
Will you, my laddie?
Who's fretting to begin,
Who's going out to win?
And who wants to save his skin—
Do you, my laddie?

[...]

Who'll earn the Empire's thanks—
Will you, my laddie?
Who'll swell the victor's ranks—
Will you, my laddie?
When that procession comes,
Banners and rolling drums—
Who'll stand and bite his thumbs—
Will you, my laddie?

Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

- Fought with such courage he won the Military Cross and the nickname "Mad Jack"
- April 1917: returns to England after being wounded and changes
- The army declares him "shell shocked" and sends him to a hospital where he meets Wilfred Owen
- Returns to the front in 1918, is wounded again



Glory of Women

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
5 You make us shells.¹ You listen with delight,
By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.
You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
And mourn our laurelled² memories when we're killed.
You can't believe that British troops 'retire'
10 When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.
O German mother dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.

1917

1918



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Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

- In 1917 he fights as an officer in the Battle of the Somme
- Shell shocked, is sent to hospital with Sassoon
- Sassoon's fierce realism tempers Owen's earlier Romantic style
- Famous for his use of sound — alliteration, assonance, half-rhyme, and *pararhyme*
- Dies only a week before the war ended, in November 1918



Dulce Et Decorum Est¹

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-Nines² 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 flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .
Dim, through the misty panes³ 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,⁴ 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.

Oct. 1917—Mar. 1918

1920



"Dulce et Decorum Est" - Structure

Double Sonnet: Two sonnets linked together

Three Sections:

1. Exhausted march
2. Gas attack
3. Direct address to reader





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,—

