

## **Dulce Et Decorum Est**

*Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)*

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.  
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 disappointed shells that dropped behind.

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.

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,  
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,—  
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.*

## **The Soldier**

*Rupert Brooke (1915)*

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever 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.

## **The Rear-Guard**

*Siegfried Sassoon* (1886-1967)

Groping along the tunnel, step by step,  
He winked his prying torch with patching glare  
From side to side, and sniffed the unwholesome air.

Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know,  
A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed;  
And he, exploring fifty feet below  
The rosy gloom of battle overhead.  
Tripping, he grappled the wall; saw someone lie  
Humped at his feet, half-hidden by a rug,  
And stooped to give the sleeper's arm a tug.  
"I'm looking for headquarters." No reply.  
"God blast your neck!" (For days he'd had no sleep.)  
"Get up and guide me through this stinking place."  
Savage, he kicked a soft, unanswering heap,  
And flashed his beam across the livid face  
Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore  
Agony dying hard ten days before;  
And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound.  
Alone he staggered on until he found  
Dawn's ghost that filtered down a shafted stair  
To the dazed, muttering creatures underground  
Who hear the boom of shells in muffled sound.  
At last, with sweat of horror in his hair,  
He climbed through darkness to the twilight air,  
Unloading hell behind him step by step.

## **Anthem for Doomed Youth**

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

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 now for them; no prayers nor 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 goodbyes.  
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.

## **They**

*Siegfried Sassoon (1917)*

The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back  
'They will not be the same; for they'll have fought  
'In a just cause: they lead the last attack  
'On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought  
'New right to breed an honourable race,  
'They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.'

'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.  
'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;  
'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;  
'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find  
'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.  
' And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'

## **The Man He Killed**

*Thomas Hardy (1902)*

"Had he and I but met  
By some old ancient inn,  
We should have sat us down to wet  
Right many a nipperkin\*!

\*a container holding about  
half a pint of beer or ale

"But ranged as infantry,  
And staring face to face,  
I shot at him as he at me,  
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because--  
Because he was my foe,  
Just so: my foe of course he was;  
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list\*, perhaps,  
Off-hand like--just as I--  
Was out of work--had sold his traps\*--  
No other reason why.

\*enlist

\*personal belongings

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!  
You shoot a fellow down  
You'd treat if met where any bar is,  
Or help to half-a-crown."

\*an old British coin

## **Wirers**

*Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)*

'Pass it along, the wiring party's going out'—  
And yawning sentries mumble, 'Wirers going out.'  
Unravelling; twisting; hammering stakes with muffled thud,  
They toil with stealthy haste and anger in their blood.

The Boche sends up a flare. Black forms stand rigid there,  
Stock-still like posts; then darkness, and the clumsy ghosts  
Stride hither and thither, whispering, tripped by clutching snare  
Of snags and tangles.  
Ghastly dawn with vaporous coasts  
Gleams desolate along the sky, night's misery ended.

Young Hughes was badly hit; I heard him carried away,  
Moaning at every lurch; no doubt he'll die to-day.  
But we can say the front-line wire's been safely mended.

## **If We Must Die**

*Claude McKay (1919)*

*In 1919 there was a wave of race riots consisting mainly of white assaults on black neighborhoods in a dozen American cities. Jamaican-born American writer Claude McKay responded by writing this sonnet, urging his comrades to fight back.*

If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursed lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsmen we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!