

**SOAR, FALL 2018, DOUG ROSE**  
**THE POETRY OF WILFRED OWEN AND SIEGFRIED SASSOON**  
**POEMS FOR WEEK 3, NOVEMBER 6**

"Arms and the Boy" – Wilfred Owen

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;  
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;  
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh. 4

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,  
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,  
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth  
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death. 8

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.  
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;  
And God will grow no talons at his heels,  
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls. 12

"The Chances" – Wilfred Owen

I mind as 'ow the night afore that show  
Us five got talkin', -- we was in the know,  
"Over the top to-morrer; boys, we're for it,  
First wave we are, first ruddy wave; that's tore it." 4  
"Ah well," says Jimmy, -- an' 'e's seen some scrappin' --  
"There ain't more nor five things as can 'appen;  
Ye get knocked out; else wounded -- bad or cushy;  
Scuppered; or nowt except yer feelin' mushy." 8

One of us got the knock-out, blown to chops.

["The Chances" continued]

T'other was 'urt, like, losin' both 'is props.  
 An' one, to use the word of 'ypocrites,  
 'Ad the misfortoon to be took by Fritz. 12  
 Now me, I wasn't scratched, praise God Almighty  
 (Though next time please I'll thank 'im for a blighty),  
 But poor young Jim, 'e's livin' an' 'e's not;  
 'E reckoned 'e'd five chances, an' 'e's 'ad; 16  
 'E's wounded, killed, and pris'ner, all the lot --  
 The ruddy lot all rolled in one. Jim's mad.

"Futility" - Wilfred Owen

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, 4  
 Until this morning and this snow.  
 If anything might rouse him now  
 The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds – 8  
 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? 12  
 – O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
 To break earth's sleep at all?

[Poems by Sassoon start on the next page.]

## "In the Pink" - Siegfried Sassoon

So Davies wrote: "This leaves me in the pink."  
Then scrawled his name: "Your loving sweetheart, Willie."  
With crosses for a hug. He'd had a drink  
Of rum and tea; and, though the barn was chilly,  
For once his blood ran warm; he had pay to spend. 5  
Winter was passing; soon the year would mend.

He couldn't sleep that night. Stiff in the dark  
He groaned and thought of Sundays at the farm,  
When he'd go out as cheerful as a lark  
In his best suit to wander arm-in-arm 10  
With brown-eyed Gwen, and whisper in her ear  
The simple, silly things she liked to hear.

And then he thought: to-morrow night we trudge  
Up to the trenches, and my boots are rotten.  
Five miles of stodgy clay and freezing sludge, 15  
And everything but wretchedness forgotten.  
To-night he's in the pink; but soon he'll die.  
And still the war goes on; *he* don't know why.

## "A Working Party" - Siegfried Sassoon

Three hours ago he blundered up the trench,  
Sliding and poising, groping with his boots;  
Sometimes he tripped and lurched against the walls  
With hands that pawed the sodden bags of chalk.  
He couldn't see the man who walked in front; 5  
Only he heard the drum and rattle of feet  
Stepping along barred trench boards, often splashing

["A Working Party" continued]

Wretchedly where the sludge was ankle-deep.  
Voices would grunt `Keep to your right -- make way!'  
When squeezing past some men from the front-line: 10  
White faces peered, puffing a point of red;  
Candles and braziers glinted through the chinks  
And curtain-flaps of dug-outs; then the gloom  
Swallowed his sense of sight; he stooped and swore  
Because a sagging wire had caught his neck. 15

A flare went up; the shining whiteness spread  
And flickered upward, showing nimble rats  
And mounds of glimmering sand-bags, bleached with rain;  
Then the slow silver moment died in dark.

The wind came posting by with chilly gusts 20  
And buffeting at the corners, piping thin.  
And dreary through the crannies; rifle-shots  
Would split and crack and sing along the night,  
And shells came calmly through the drizzling air  
To burst with hollow bang below the hill. 25

Three hours ago, he stumbled up the trench;  
Now he will never walk that road again:  
He must be carried back, a jolting lump  
Beyond all needs of tenderness and care.

He was a young man with a meagre wife 30  
And two small children in a Midland town,  
He showed their photographs to all his mates,  
And they considered him a decent chap

["A Working Party" continued]

Who did his work and hadn't much to say,  
And always laughed at other people's jokes  
Because he hadn't any of his own. 35

That night when he was busy at his job  
Of piling bags along the parapet,  
He thought how slow time went, stamping his feet  
And blowing on his fingers, pinched with cold. 40  
He thought of getting back by half-past twelve,  
And tot of rum to send him warm to sleep  
In draughty dug-out frowsty with the fumes  
Of coke, and full of snoring weary men.

He pushed another bag along the top, 45  
Craning his body outward; then a flare  
Gave one white glimpse of  
No Man's Land and wire;  
And as he dropped his head the instant split  
His startled life with lead, and all went out. 50

"Reconciliation" – Siegfried Sassoon

When you are standing at your hero's grave,  
Or near some homeless village where he died,  
Remember, through your heart's rekindling pride,  
The German soldiers who were loyal and brave. 4

Men fought like brutes; and hideous things were done;  
And you have nourished hatred, harsh and blind.  
But in that Golgotha perhaps you'll find  
The mothers of the men who killed your son. 8

## "MCMXIV" - Philip Larkin

Those long uneven lines  
Standing as patiently  
As if they were stretched outside  
The Oval or Villa Park,  
The crowns of hats, the sun 5  
On moustached archaic faces  
Grinning as if it were all  
An August Bank Holiday lark;

And the shut shops, the bleached  
Established names on the sunblinds, 10  
The farthings and sovereigns,  
And dark-clothed children at play  
Called after kings and queens,  
The tin advertisements  
For cocoa and twist, and the pubs 15  
Wide open all day;

And the countryside not caring  
The place-names all hazed over  
With flowering grasses, and fields  
Shadowing Domesday lines 20  
Under wheat's restless silence;  
The differently-dressed servants  
With tiny rooms in huge houses,  
The dust behind limousines;

Never such innocence, 25  
Never before or since,

["MCMXIV" continued]

As changed itself to past  
Without a word – the men  
Leaving the gardens tidy,  
The thousands of marriages  
Lasting a little while longer:  
Never such innocence again.

30

**For any or all of the poems, feel free to write down comments,  
observations, or questions you would like to share.**