

## Lesson #75 U.S. History Poetry of the Great War

The first year of the Great War saw a new warfare style of Mass Slaughter with a personal detachment with new technology. The leadership and troops were slow to realize the change that was taking place. By looking on the impact on individuals one can try to understand the cost of the Great War by reading the poetry.

Everyone believed the war would be over by Christmas. That did not happen. On Christmas Day German troops place Christmas Trees in their trenches and sang Carols. Both side began to sing and in time men walked out into "No Man's Land" and the fraternized was ruled by the high command as a break down in discipline and any further such acts would be subject to execution.

### The First Year 1914 - over by Christmas

#### **Mad**

*Neck-deep in mud  
He moved and raved-  
He who had braved  
The field of blood-  
And as a lad  
Just out of school  
YELLED \_APRIL FOOLS!  
And laughed like mad.*

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

Charles Peguy	Died 1914
Georg Traki.	Died 1914

### Second Year of the War 1915 - prepare for long war

#### **In Memoriam Easter, 1915**

*The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood  
This Eastertide call into mind the men,  
Now far from home, who with their sweethearts, should  
Have gathered them and will do never again.*

Edward Thomas

#### **Some of the War Poets who survived the War**

Lt. Colonel Rowland Feilding  
Captain Siegfried Sassoon  
Private Frank Richards  
Private David Jones  
Robert Graves  
Alan Seeger

### **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 from 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 rivers, blest by sons 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; dream happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under English heaven.*

Robert Brooke (1887-1915)

### **Left untitled in 1915**

*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 (1895-1915)

Lt. Rupert Brooke	Died April 23, 1915
Captain Julian Grenfell	Died May 26, 1915
Captain Charles Hamilton Sorley	Died October 13, 1915
Agust Stramm	Died September 1, 1915
Louis Pergaud	April 8, 1915 by friendly Artillery fire

Third Year of the War 1916 - a time to kill

**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 love 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

Alan Seeger

Died July 4, 1916

The Fourth year of the War 1917 – Will it ever end?

**The Happy Warrior**

*His wild heart beats with painful sobs  
His strain's hands clench and ice-cold rifle  
His aching jaw grip a hot parch'd tongue  
His wide eyes search unconsciously*

*He cannot shriek  
Bloody saliva  
Dribbles down his shapeless jacket  
I saw him stab  
And stab again  
A well-killed **Boche***

*This is the Happy Warrior,  
This is he...*

Herbert Reed

Captain Arthur Graeme West	Died April 3, 1917
Corporal Edward Thomas	April 9, 1917
Lance Corporal Francis Ledwidge	July 31, 1917
Battalion Commander Patrick Shaw-Stewart	December 30, 1917
Hedd Wyn	July 31, 1917
Walter Flex	October 16, 1917
Yann-Ber Kalloch	April 10, 1917
Franz Janowitz	November 4, 1917

The Fifth year of the War 1918 – Victory

**The Dug-out**

*Why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled,  
 And one arm bent across your sullen cold  
 Exhausted face? It hurts my heart to watch you.  
 Deep-shadow's from the candle's guttering gold;  
 And you wonder why I shake you by the shoulder;  
 Drowsy, you mumble and sigh and shift your head...  
 You are too young to fall asleep forever;  
 And when you sleep you remind me of the Dead.*

Siegfried Sassoon

**Suicide in the Trenches**

*I knew a simple soldier boy  
 Who grinned at life in empty joy,  
 Slept soundly through the lonesome dark  
 And whistled early with the lark*

*In winter trenches, cowed and glum,  
 With cramps and lice and lack of rum,  
 He put a bullet through his brain.  
 No one spoke of him again.*

*You smug faced crowds with kindling eyes,  
 Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
 Sneak home and pray you'll never know.  
 The HELL where youth and laughter go.*

Siegfried Sassoon

Lt. Wilfred Owen.	Died November 4, 1918
Thomas Hardy	Died October 3, 1918
Private Isaac Rosenberg	Died April 1, 1918

Memories of the War 1919

**Grass**

*Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo  
Shovel them under and let me work  
I am the grass; I cover all.*

*And pile them high at Gettysburg  
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.  
Shovel them under and let me work*

*Two years, ten years, and the passengers ask the conductor:  
What place is this?  
Where are we now?  
I am the grass.  
Let me work.*

Carl Sandburg

John McCrae

Died of pneumonia 1918

**In Flanders Fields**

*In the 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, through poppies grow  
In Flanders field*

John McCrae (1872-1918 Pneumonia)