

Ballad of the three spectres essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



“ As I went up by Ovilliers / In mud and water cold to the knee” : the poem begins with a realistic scene in the Somme, as a soldier tramps through the flooded British trenches. “ three jeering, fleering spectres”: The ghosts are laughing, mocking the soldier. “ Here’s a right brave soldier”: the first ghost speaks sarcastically and insultingly about the speaker’s bravery. “ he’ll come back on a fine stretcher, / Laughing for a nice Blighty”: the ghost suggests that the soldier will manage to get a ‘ Blighty wound’— a minor wound that would have him sent home to Britain for the rest of the war. He is insinuating that soldier is a clever coward. “ No kind of lucky chance I see... he’ll freeze into mud to the marrow”: another note of grim realism. The second ghost suggests that the soldier will end up dying of hypothermia— possibly stuck in one of the pond-sized craters in no-man’s-land, unable to scramble up the loose earth out of the freezing water. “ Picardie”: a French town, in which the most severe fighting took place during the Somme - a grim fate. “ Curses the third spat venomously”: the last of the spectres is the most malevolent, and curses the soldier. He perhaps has some grudge against the soldier, that he is still alive.

“ He’ll stay untouched...then live one hour of agony”: this ghost predicts many soldiers common dreaded fear: that he will be forced to live through the hell of the war in its entirety, only to be killed in “ agony” at its very end. “ at sloping arms by one- two- three”: the soldier is drilling. “ Sloping arms” was one way of ‘ presenting arms’ or holding his rifle. “ By one- two- three” describes the action of moving the rifle during drill. “ Waiting the time... Whether the third spoke verity”: ‘ Verity’ here means ‘ truthfully’. The fate of the soldier is to wait until the last day of the war to see whether the third

spectre's prophesy will come true or not. All three options are unpleasant to some degree, but the first two spectre's predictions have been proved false. The third prophesy is chilling, and sums up the uncertainty and anxiety the soldier must live with in war. The soldier must be resigned to his fate, and has no choice.