

War poetry

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Modern History Sourcebook: World War I Poetry: Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967): "How to Die" [Link to Collected Poems \[At Columbia\]](#) Wilfred Owen (1893-1918): "Anthem for a Doomed Youth" [Link to Collected Poems \[At Toronto\]](#) Wilfred Owen: "Dulce et Decorum Est" Herbert Read (1893-1968): "The Happy Warrior" W. N. Hodgson (1893-1916): "Before Action" Wilfred Gibson (1878-1962) "Back" [Link to Collected Poems \[At Columbia\]](#) Philip Larkin (1922-1985): "MCMXIV" [Link to Poems \[At Hooked.net\]](#) Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) "How to Die" Dark clouds are smouldering into red
While down the craters morning burns.

The dying soldier shifts his head To watch the glory that returns; He lifts his fingers toward the skies Where holy brightness breaks in flame; Radiance reflected in his eyes, And on his lips a whispered name. You'd think, to hear some people talk, That lads go West with sobs and curses, And sullen faces white as chalk, Hankering for wreaths and tombs and hearses. But they've been taught the way to do it Like Christian soldiers; not with haste And shuddering groans; but passing through it With due regard for decent taste. Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) "Anthem for a Doomed Youth" What passing-bells for these 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 for them from prayers or 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

silent minds, And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds. Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) " Dulce et Decorum Est "

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 tired, outstripped Five-Nines 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 flound'ring 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. Herbert Read (1893-1968) " The Happy Warrior" His wild heart beats with painful sobs, His strin'd hands clench an ice-cold rifle, His aching jaws 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 <https://assignbuster.com/war-poetry/>

he... W. N. Hodgson (1893-1916) " Before Action" By all the glories of the day
And the cool evening's benison, By that last sunset touch that lay Upon the
hills where day was done, By beauty lavishly outpoured And blessings
carelessly received,

By all the days that I have lived Make me a soldier, Lord. By all of man's
hopes and fears, And all the wonders poets sing, The laughter of unclouded
years, And every sad and lovely thing; By the romantic ages stored With high
endeavor that was his, By all his mad catastrophes Make me a man, O Lord.
I, that on my familiar hill Saw with uncomprehending eyes A hundred of Thy
sunsets spill Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice, Ere the sun swings his
noonday sword Must say goodbye to all of this;-- By all delights that I shall
miss, Help me to die, O Lord. Wilfred Gibson (1878-1962) " Back"

They ask me where I've been, And what I've done and seen. But what can I
reply Who know it wasn't I, But someone just like me, Who went across the
sea And with my head and hands Killed men in foreign lands... Though I must
bear the blame, Because he bore my name. Philip Larkin (1922-1985) "
MCMXIV" Those long uneven lines Standing as patiently As if they were
stretched outside The Oval or Villa Park, The crowns of hats, the sun 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,
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 Wide open all day; And the
countryside not caring The place-names all hazed over With flowering
grasses, and fields Shadowing Domesday lines Under wheats' restless

silence; The differently-dressed servants With tiny rooms in huge houses,
The dust behind limousines; Never such innocence, Never before or since, 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.