

Poetry of the First World War



Peace

by Rupert Brooke

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release
there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

(1914)

1. List some of the negative words in this poem. How are they intended to make the reader feel? Does it work?
2. What does the last line of the poem mean? Rewrite it to mean the same thing using different words.

Who's for the Game?

by **Jessie Pope**

Who's for the game, the biggest that's played,
The red crashing game of a fight?
Who'll grip and tackle the job unafraid?
And who thinks he'd rather sit tight?

Who'll toe the line for the signal to 'Go!'
Who'll give his country a hand?
Who wants a turn to himself in the show?
And who wants a seat in the stand?

Who knows it won't be a picnic - not much -
Yet eagerly shoulders a gun?
Who would much rather come back with a crutch
Than lie low and be out of the fun?

Come along, lads -
But you'll come on all right -
For there's only one course to pursue,
Your country is up to her neck in a fight,
And she's looking and calling for you.

(1914)

1. Give examples of the poet using metaphor. What does the author compare war to? Is war actually like these things?
2. Think about propaganda posters. Do you think that they, along with poems like this, encourage people to sign up for war?

DULCE ET DECORUM EST

By Wilfred Owen

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*.

(1917)

**it is both noble and fitting to die for one's
country*

1. *What is a simile? Where can you find similes in this poem? What is being compared?*
2. *Look at the first stanza. What details can you find about men returning back to their 'distant rest'? What does 'distant rest' mean?*