

Classic Poetry Series

Wilfred Owen
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Wilfred Owen(1893-1918)

Wilfred Owen was born near Oswestry, Shropshire, where his father worked on the railway. He was educated at the Birkenhead Institute, Liverpool and Shrewsbury Technical College. He worked as a pupil-teacher in a poor country parish before a shortage of money forced him to drop his hopes of studying at the University of London and take up a teaching post in Bordeaux (1913). He was tutoring in the Pyrenees when war was declared and enlisted as shortly afterwards.

In 1917 he suffered severe concussion and 'trench-fever' whilst fighting on the Somme and spent a period recuperating at Craiglockart War Hospital, near Edinburgh. It was here that he met Siegfried Sassoon who read his poems, suggested how they might be improved, and offered him much encouragement.

He was posted back to France in 1918 where he won the MC before being killed on the Sambre Canal a week before the Armistice was signed.

His poetry owes its beauty to a deep ingrained sense of compassion coupled with grim realism. Owen is also acknowledged as a technically accomplished poet and master of metrical variety.

Poems such as 'Dulce Decorum Est' and 'Anthem for doomed Youth' have done much to influence our attitudes towards war.

[i Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson]

[I saw his round mouth's crimson deepen as it fell],
Like a Sun, in his last deep hour;
Watched the magnificent recession of farewell,
Clouding, half gleam, half glower,
And a last splendour burn the heavens of his cheek.
And in his eyes
The cold stars lighting, very old and bleak,
In different skies.

Wilfred Owen

1914

War broke: and now the Winter of the world
With perishing great darkness closes in.
The foul tornado, centred at Berlin,
Is over all the width of Europe whirled,
Rending the sails of progress. Rent or furled
Are all Art's ensigns. Verse wails. Now begin
Famines of thought and feeling. Love's wine's thin.
The grain of human Autumn rots, down-hurled.

For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,
And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome,
An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home,
A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.
But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need
Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed.

Wilfred Owen

A New Heaven

Seeing we never found gay fairyland
(Though still we crouched by bluebells moon by moon)
And missed the tide of Lethe; yet are soon
For that new bridge that leaves old Styx half-spanned;
Nor ever unto Mecca caravanned;
Nor bugled Asgard, skilled in magic rune;
Nor yearned for far Nirvana, the sweet swoon,
And from high Paradise are cursed and banned;

-Let's die home, ferry across the Channel! Thus
Shall we live gods there. Death shall be no sev'rance.
Weary cathedrals light new shrines for us.
To us, rough knees of boys shall ache with rev'rence.
Are not girls' breasts a clear, strong Acropole?
-There our own mothers' tears shall heal us whole.

Wilfred Owen

A Palinode

Some little while ago, I had a mood
When what we know as 'Nature' seemed to me
So sympathetic, ample, sweet, and good
That I preferred it to Society.

Not for a season, be it understood,
But altogether and perpetually.
As far as feeling went, I thought I could
Be quit of men, live independently.

For men and minds, heart-humours and heart's-tease
Disturbed without exciting: whereas woods,
The seasonal changes, and the chanting seas
Were both soul-rousing and sense-lulling. Moods,

Such moods prolonged, became a mania.
I found the stark stretch of a bleak-blown moor
Least barren of all places. Mere extranca
Seemed populace and town: things to ignore.

But if the sovereign sun I might behold
With condescension coming down benign,
And blessing all the field and air with gold,
Then the contentment of the world was mine.

In secret deserts where the night was nude
And each excited star grew ardent-eyed,
I tasted more than this life's plenitude,
And far as farthest stars perceive, I spied.

Once, when the whiteness of the spectral moon
Had terrorized the creatures of the wold,
When that long staring of the glazed-eyed
Had stupefied the land and made it cold,

I fell seduced into a madness; for,
Forgetting in that night the life of days,
I said I had no need of fellows more,
I madly hated men and all their ways.

I hated, feeling hated; I supposed
That others did not need me any more.
The book of human knowledge I then closed;
Passion, art, science? Trifles to ignore.

But in my error, men ignored not me,
And did not let me in my moonbeams bask.
And I took antidotes; though what they be
Unless yourself be poisoned, do not ask.

For I am overdosed. The City now
Holds all my passion; these my soul most feels:
Crowds surging; racket of traffic; market row;
Bridges, sonorous under rapid wheels;

Pacific lamentations of a bell;
The smoking of the old men at their doors;
All attitudes of children; the farewell
And casting-off of ships for far-off shores.

Wilfred Owen

A Terre

(Being the philosophy of many Soldiers.)

Sit on the bed; I'm blind, and three parts shell,
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.
Both arms have mutinied against me -- brutes.
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.

I tried to peg out soldierly -- no use!
One dies of war like any old disease.
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.
I have my medals? -- Discs to make eyes close.
My glorious ribbons? -- Ripped from my own back
In scarlet shreds. (That's for your poetry book.)

A short life and a merry one, my brick!
We used to say we'd hate to live dead old, --
Yet now . . . I'd willingly be puffy, bald,
And patriotic. Buffers catch from boys
At least the jokes hurled at them. I suppose
Little I'd ever teach a son, but hitting,
Shooting, war, hunting, all the arts of hurting.
Well, that's what I learnt, -- that, and making money.
Your fifty years ahead seem none too many?
Tell me how long I've got? God! For one year
To help myself to nothing more than air!
One Spring! Is one too good to spare, too long?
Spring wind would work its own way to my lung,
And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.
My servant's lamed, but listen how he shouts!
When I'm lugged out, he'll still be good for that.
Here in this mummy-case, you know, I've thought
How well I might have swept his floors for ever,
I'd ask no night off when the bustle's over,
Enjoying so the dirt. Who's prejudiced
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn,
Less warm than dust that mixes with arms' tan?
I'd love to be a sweep, now, black as Town,

Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load?

O Life, Life, let me breathe, -- a dug-out rat!
Not worse than ours the existences rats lead --
Nosing along at night down some safe vat,
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
And subdivide, and never come to death,
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.
"I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone."
Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned;
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
"Pushing up daisies," is their creed, you know.
To grain, then, go my fat, to buds my sap,
For all the usefulness there is in soap.
D'you think the Boche will ever stew man-soup?
Some day, no doubt, if . . .

Friend, be very sure

I shall be better off with plants that share
More peaceably the meadow and the shower.
Soft rains will touch me, -- as they could touch once,
And nothing but the sun shall make me ware.
Your guns may crash around me. I'll not hear;
Or, if I wince, I shall not know I wince.
Don't take my soul's poor comfort for your jest.
Soldiers may grow a soul when turned to fronds,
But here the thing's best left at home with friends.

My soul's a little grief, grappling your chest,
To climb your throat on sobs; easily chased
On other sighs and wiped by fresher winds.

Carry my crying spirit till it's weaned
To do without what blood remained these wounds.

Wilfred Owen

A Terre (Being The Philosophy Of Many Soldiers)

Sit on the bed. I'm blind, and three parts shell.
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.
Both arms have mutinied against me,-brutes.
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.

I tried to peg out soldierly,-no use!
One dies of war like any old disease.
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.
I have my medals?-Discs to make eyes close.
My glorious ribbons?-Ripped from my own back
In scarlet shreds. (That's for your poetry book.)

A short life and a merry one, my buck!
We used to say we'd hate to live dead-old,-
Yet now...I'd willingly be puffy, bald,
And patriotic. Buffers catch from boys
At least the jokes hurled at them. I suppose
Little I'd ever teach a son, but hitting,
Shooting, war, hunting, all the arts of hurting.
Well, that's what I learnt,-that, and making money.

Your fifty years ahead seem none too many?
Tell me how long I've got? God! For one year
To help myself to nothing more than air!
One Spring! Is one too good to spare, too long?
Spring wind would work its own way to my lung,
And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.

My servant's lamed, but listen how he shouts!
When I'm lugged out, he'll still be good for that.
Here in this mummy-case, you know, I've thought
How well I might have swept his floors for ever.
I'd ask no nights off when the bustle's over,
Enjoying so the dirt. Who's prejudiced
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn,
Less warm than dust that mixes with arms' tan?
I'd love to be a sweep, now, black as Town,
Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load?

O Life, Life, let me breathe,-a dug-out rat!
Not worse than ours the lives rats lead-
Nosing along at night down some safe rut,
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
And subdivide, and never come to death.
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.
'I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone'
Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
'Pushing up daisies' is their creed, you know.

To grain, then, go my fat, to buds my sap,
For all the usefulness there is in soap.
D'you think the Boche will ever stew man-soup?
Some day, no doubt, if...Friend, be very sure
I shall be better off with plants that share
More peaceably the meadow and the shower.
Soft rains will touch me,-as they could touch once,
And nothing but the sun shall make me ware.
Your guns may crash around me. I'll not hear;
Or, if I wince, I shall not know I wince.

Don't take my soul's poor comfort for your jest.
Soldiers may grow a soul when turned to fronds,
But here's the thing's best left at home with friends.

My soul's a little grief, grappling your chest,
To climb your throat on sobs; easily chased
On other sighs and wiped by fresher winds.

Carry my crying spirit till it's weaned
To do without what blood remained these wounds.

Wilfred Owen

An Imperial Elegy

Not one corner of a foreign field
But a span as wide as Europe;
An appearance of a titan's grave,
And the length thereof a thousand miles,
It crossed all Europe like a mystic road,
Or as the Spirits' Pathway lieth on the night.
And I heard a voice crying
This is the Path of Glory.

Wilfred Owen

Antaeus: [a Fragment]

So neck to stubborn neck, and obstinate knee to knee,
Wrestled those two; and peerless Heracles
Could not prevail, nor get at any vantage...
So those huge hands that, small, had snapped great snakes,
Let slip the writhing of Antaeus' wrists:
Those hero's hands that wrenched the necks of bulls,
Now fumbled round the slim Antaeus' limbs,
Baffled. Then anger swelled in Heracles,
And terribly he grappled broader arms,
And yet more firmly fixed his grasped feet.
And up his back the muscles bulged and shone
Like climbing banks and domes of towering cloud.
And they who watched that wrestling say he laughed,
But no so loud as on Eurystheus of old.

Wilfred Owen

Anthem For 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 now for them; no prayers nor 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 good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Wilfred Owen

Apologia Pro Poemate Meo

I, too, saw God through mud--
The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled.
War brought more glory to their eyes than blood,
And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a child.

Merry it was to laugh there--
Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.
For power was on us as we slashed bones bare
Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder.

I, too, have dropped off fear--
Behind the barrage, dead as my platoon,
And sailed my spirit surging, light and clear,
Past the entanglement where hopes lie strewn;

And witnessed exultation--
Faces that used to curse me, scowl for scowl,
Shine and lift up with passion of oblation,
Seraphic for an hour, though they were foul.

I have made fellowships--
Untold of happy lovers in old song.
For love is not the binding of fair lips
With the soft silk of eyes that look and long.

By joy, whose ribbon slips,--
But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong;
Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;
Knit in the welding of the rifle-thong.

I have perceived much beauty
In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight;
Heard music in the silentness of duty;
Found peace where shell-storms spouted reddest spate.

Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but a trembling of a flare
And heaven but a highway for a shell,

You shall not hear their mirth:
You shall not come to think them well content
By any jest of mine. These men are worth
Your tears: You are not worth their merriment.

Wilfred Owen

Arms And The Boy

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

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

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

Wilfred Owen

As Bronze May Be Much Beautified

As bronze may be much beautified
By lying in the dark damp soil,
So men who fade in dust of warfare fade
Fairer, and sorrow blooms their soul.

Like pearls which noble women wear
And, tarnishing, awhile confide
Unto the old salt sea to feed,
Many return more lustrous than they were.

But what of them buried profound,
Buried where we can no more find.
Who ()
Lie dark for ever under abysmal war?

Wilfred Owen

Asleep

Under his helmet, up against his pack,
After so many days of work and waking,
Sleep took him by the brow and laid him back.

There, in the happy no-time of his sleeping,
Death took him by the heart. There heaved a quaking
Of the aborted life within him leaping,
Then chest and sleepy arms once more fell slack.

And soon the slow, stray blood came creeping
From the intruding lead, like ants on track.

Whether his deeper sleep lie shaded by the shaking
Of great wings, and the thoughts that hung the stars,
High-pillowed on calm pillows of God's making,
Above these clouds, these rains, these sleets of lead,
And these winds' scimitars,
-Or whether yet his thin and sodden head
Confuses more and more with the low mould,
His hair being one with the grey grass
Of finished fields, and wire-scraggs rusty-old,
Who knows? Who hopes? Who troubles? Let it pass!
He sleeps. He sleeps less tremulous, less cold,
Than we who wake, and waking say Alas!

Wilfred Owen

At A Calvary Near The Ancre

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
In this war He too lost a limb,
But His disciples hide apart;
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,
And in their faces there is pride
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast
By whom the gentle Christ's denied

The scribes on all the people shove
And bawl allegiance to the state,
But they who love the greater love
Lay down their life; they do not hate

Wilfred Owen

Beauty

The beautiful, the fair, the elegant,
Is that which pleases us, says Kant,
Without a thought of interest or advantage.

I used to watch men when they spoke of beauty
And measure their enthusiasm. One
An old man, seeing a () setting sun,
Praised it () a certain sense of duty
To the calm evening and his time of life.
I know another man that never says a Beauty
But of a horse; ()

Men seldom speak of beauty, beauty as such,
Not even lovers think about it much.
Women of course consider it for hours
In mirrors; ()

A shrapnel ball -
Just where the wet skin glistened when he swam -
Like a fully-opened sea-anemone.
We both said 'What a beauty! What a beauty, lad'
I knew that in that flower he saw a hope
Of living on, and seeing again the roses of his home.
Beauty is that which pleases and delights,
Not bringing personal advantage - Kant.
But later on I heard
A canker worked into that crimson flower
And that he sank with it
And laid it with the anemones off Dover.

Wilfred Owen

Beauty: [notes For An Unfinished Poem]

The beautiful, the fair, the elegant,
Is that which pleases us, says Kant,
Without a thought of interest or advantage.

I used to watch men when they spoke of beauty
And measure their enthusiasm. One
An old man, seeing a () setting sun,
Praised it () a certain sense of duty
To the calm evening and his time of life.
I know another man that never says a Beauty
But of a horse; ()

Men seldom speak of beauty, beauty as such,
Not even lovers think about it much.
Women of course consider it for hours
In mirrors; ()

A shrapnel ball -
Just where the wet skin glistened when he swam -
Like a fully-opened sea-anemone.
We both said 'What a beauty! What a beauty, lad'
I knew that in that flower he saw a hope
Of living on, and seeing again the roses of his home.
Beauty is that which pleases and delights,
Not bringing personal advantage - Kant.
But later on I heard
A canker worked into that crimson flower
And that he sank with it
And laid it with the anemones off Dover.

Wilfred Owen

But I Was Looking At The Permanent Stars

Bugles sang, saddening the evening air,
And bugles answered, sorrowful to hear.

Voices of boys were by the river-side.
Sleep mothered them; and left the twilight sad.
The shadow of the morrow weighed on men.

Voices of old despondency resigned,
Bowed by the shadow of the morrow, slept.

() dying tone
Of receding voices that will not return.
The wailing of the high far-travelling shells
And the deep cursing of the provoking ()

The monstrous anger of our taciturn guns.
The majesty of the insults of their mouths.

Wilfred Owen

Conscious

His fingers wake, and flutter up the bed.
His eyes come open with a pull of will,
Helped by the yellow may-flowers by his head.
A blind-cord drawls across the window-sill . . .
How smooth the floor of the ward is! what a rug!
And who's that talking, somewhere out of sight?
Why are they laughing? What's inside that jug?
"Nurse! Doctor!" "Yes; all right, all right."

But sudden dusk bewilders all the air --
There seems no time to want a drink of water.
Nurse looks so far away. And everywhere
Music and roses burnt through crimson slaughter.
Cold; cold; he's cold; and yet so hot:
And there's no light to see the voices by --
No time to dream, and ask -- he knows not what.

Wilfred Owen

Cramped In That Funnelled Hole

Cramped in that funnelled hole, they watched the dawn
Open a jagged rim around; a yawn
Of death's jaws, which had all but swallowed them
Stuck in the bottom of his throat of phlegm.

They were in one of many mouths of Hell
Not seen of seers in visions, only felt
As teeth of traps; when bones and the dead are smelt
Under the mud where long ago they fell
Mixed with the sour sharp odour of the shell.

Wilfred Owen

Disabled

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,-
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join. - He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.

And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

Wilfred Owen

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 gas-shells dropping softly 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.

Wilfred Owen

Elegy In April And September

Hush, thrush! Hush, missen-thrush, I listen...
I heard the flush of footsteps through the loose leaves,
And a low whistle by the water's brim.

Still! Daffodil! Nay, hail me not so gaily,-
Your gay gold lily daunts me and deceives,
Who follow gleams more golden and more slim.

Look, brook! O run and look, O run!
The vain reeds shook? - Yet search till gray sea heaves,
And I will stray among these fields for him.

Gaze, daisy! Stare through haze and glare,
And mark the hazardous stars all dawns and eves,
For my eye withers, and his star wanes dim.

2

Close, rose, and droop, heliotrope,
And shudder, hope! The shattering winter blows.
Drop, heliotrope, and close, rose...

Mourn, corn, and sigh, rye.
Men garner you, but youth's head lies forlorn.
Sigh, rye, and mourn, corn...

Brood, wood, and muse, yews,
The ways gods use we have not understood.
Muse, yews, and brood, wood...

Wilfred Owen

Exposure

I

1 Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us ...
2 Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...
3 Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...
4 Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
5 But nothing happens.

6 Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire.
7 Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
8 Northward incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
9 Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
10 What are we doing here?

11 The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow ...
12 We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
13 Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
14 Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray,
15 But nothing happens.

16 Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
17 Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
18 With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause and renew,
19 We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
20 But nothing happens.

II

21 Pale flakes with lingering stealth come feeling for our faces--
22 We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
23 Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
24 Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
25 Is it that we are dying?

26 Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires glozed
27 With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
28 For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
29 Shutters and doors all closed: on us the doors are closed--
30 We turn back to our dying.

31 Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
32 Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
33 For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
34 Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
35 For love of God seems dying.

36 To-night, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
37 Shrivelling many hands and puckering foreheads crisp.
38 The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,
39 Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
40 But nothing happens.

Wilfred Owen

From My Diary, July 1914

Leaves

Murmuring by miriads in the shimmering trees.

Lives

Wakening with wonder in the Pyrenees.

Birds

Cheerily chirping in the early day.

Bards

Singing of summer, scything thro' the hay.

Bees

Shaking the heavy dewes from bloom and frond.

Boys

Bursting the surface of the ebony pond.

Flashes

Of swimmers carving thro' the sparkling cold.

Fleashes

Gleaming with wetness to the morning gold.

A mead

Bordered about with warbling water brooks.

A maid

Laughing the love-laugh with me; proud of looks.

The heat

Throbbing between the upland and the peak.

Her heart

Quivering with passion to my pressed cheek.

Braiding

Of floating flames across the mountain brow.

Brooding

Of stillness; and a sighing of the bough.

Stirs

Of leaflets in the gloom; soft petal-showers;

Stars

Expanding with the starr'd nocturnal flowers.

Wilfred Owen

Futility

1 Move him into the sun--
2 Gently its touch awoke him once,
3 At home, whispering of fields unsown.
4 Always it awoke him, even in France,
5 Until this morning and this snow.
6 If anything might rouse him now
7 The kind old sun will know.

8 Think how it wakes the seeds--
9 Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
10 Are limbs so dear-achieved, are sides
11 Full-nerved,--still warm,--too hard to stir?
12 Was it for this the clay grew tall?
13 --O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
14 To break earth's sleep at all?

Wilfred Owen

Greater Love

Red lips are not so red
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.
Kindness of wooed and wooer
Seems shame to their love pure.
O Love, your eyes lose lure
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

Your slender attitude
Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed,
Rolling and rolling there
Where God seems not to care;
Till the fierce love they bear
Cramps them in death's extreme decrepitude.

Your voice sings not so soft,-
Though even as wind murmuring through raftered loft,-
Your dear voice is not dear,
Gentle, and evening clear,
As theirs whom none now hear,
Now earth has stopped their piteous mouths that coughed.

Heart, you were never hot
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;
And though your hand be pale,
Paler are all which trail
Your cross through flame and hail:
Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.

Wilfred Owen

Happiness

Ever again to breathe pure happiness,
So happy that we gave away our toy?
We smiled at nothings, needing no caress?
Have we not laughed too often since with Joy?
Have we not stolen too strange and sorrowful wrongs
For her hands' pardoning? The sun may cleanse,
And time, and starlight. Life will sing great songs,
And gods will show us pleasures more than men's.

Yet heaven looks smaller than the old doll's-home,
No nestling place is left in bluebell bloom,
And the wide arms of trees have lost their scope.
The former happiness is unreturning:
Boys' griefs are not so grievous as our yearning,
Boys have no sadness sadder than our hope.

Wilfred Owen

Has Your Soul Sipped?

Has your soul sipped
Of the sweetness of all sweets?
Has it well supped
But yet hungers and sweats?

I have been witness
Of a strange sweetness,
All fancy surpassing
Past all supposing.

Passing the rays
Of the rubies of morning,
Or the soft rise
Of the moon; or the meaning
Known to the rose
Of her mystery and mourning.

Sweeter than nocturnes
Of the wild nightingale
Or than love's nectar
After life's gall.

Sweeter than odours
Of living leaves,
Sweeter than ardours
Of dying loves.

Sweeter than death
And dreams hereafter
To one in dearth
Or life and its laughter.

Or the proud wound
The victor wears
Or the last end
Of all wars.

Or the sweet murder
After long guard

Unto the martyr
Smiling at God;

To me was that smile,
Faint as a wan, worn myth,
Faint and exceeding small,
On a boy's murdered mouth.

Though from his throat
The life-tide leaps
There was no threat
On his lips.

But with the bitter blood
And the death-smell
All his life's sweetness bled
Into a smile.

Wilfred Owen

Hospital Barge

Budging the sluggish ripples of the Somme,
A barge round old C erisy slowly slewed.
Softly her engines down the current screwed,
And chuckled softly with contented hum,
Till fairy tinklings struck their croonings dumb.
The waters rumpling at the stern subdued;
The lock-gate took her bulging amplitude;
Gently from out the gurgling lock she swum.

One reading by that calm bank shaded eyes
To watch her lessening westward quietly.
Then, as she neared the bend, her funnel screamed.
And that long lamentation made him wise
How unto Avalon, in agony,
Kings passed in the dark barge, which Merlin dreamed.

Wilfred Owen

Hospital Barge At Cerisy

Budging the sluggard ripples of the Somme,
A barge round old C erisy slowly slewed.
Softly her engines down the current screwed,
And chuckled softly with contented hum,
Till fairy tinklings struck their croonings dumb.
The waters rumpling at the stern subdued;
The lock-gate took her bulging amplitude;
Gently from out the gurgling lock she swum.

One reading by that calm bank shaded eyes
To watch her lessening westward quietly.
Then, as she neared the bend, her funnel screamed.
And that long lamentation made him wise
How unto Avalon, in agony,
Kings passed in the dark barge, which Merlin dreamed.

Wilfred Owen

I Know The Music

All sounds have been as music to my listening:
Pacific lamentations of slow bells,
The crunch of boots on blue snow rosy-glistening,
Shuffle of autumn leaves; and all farewells:

Bugles that sadden all the evening air,
And country bells clamouring their last appeals
Before [the] music of the evening prayer;
Bridges, sonorous under carriage wheels.

Gurgle of sluicing surge through hollow rocks,
The gluttonous lapping of the waves on weeds,
Whisper of grass; the myriad-tinkling flocks,
The warbling drawl of flutes and shepherds' reeds.

The orchestral noises of October nights
Blowing () symphonetic storms
Of startled clarions ()
Drums, rumbling and rolling thunderous and ().

Thrilling of throstles in the keen blue dawn,
Bees fumbling and fuming over sainfoin-fields.

Wilfred Owen

I Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson

I saw his round mouth's crimson deepen as it fell,
Like a Sun, in his last deep hour;
Watched the magnificent recession of farewell,
Clouding, half gleam, half glower,
And a last splendour burn the heavens of his cheek.
And in his eyes
The cold stars lighting, very old and bleak,
In different skies.

Wilfred Owen

Insensibility

I

Happy are men who yet before they are killed
Can let their veins run cold.
Whom no compassion fleers
Or makes their feet
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.
The front line withers,
But they are troops who fade, not flowers
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling
Losses who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.

II

And some cease feeling
Even themselves or for themselves.
Dullness best solves
The tease and doubt of shelling,
And Chance's strange arithmetic
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.
They keep no check on Armies' decimation.

III

Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.
Their old wounds save with cold can not more ache.
Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
And terror's first constriction over,
Their hearts remain small drawn.
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
Now long since ironed,

Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

IV

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion
How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,
And many sighs are drained.
Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:
His days are worth forgetting more than not.
He sings along the march
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,
The long, forlorn, relentless trend
From larger day to huger night.

V

We wise, who with a thought besmirch
Blood over all our soul,
How should we see our task
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
Dying, not mortal overmuch;
Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

VI

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones.
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever mourns in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

Wilfred Owen

Inspection

'You! What d'you mean by this?' I rapped.
'You dare come on parade like this?'
'Please, sir, it's-' 'Old yer mouth,' the sergeant snapped.
'I takes 'is name, sir?'-'Please, and then dismiss.'

Some days 'confined to camp' he got,
For being 'dirty on parade'.
He told me, afterwards, the damnèd spot
Was blood, his own. 'Well, blood is dirt,' I said.

'Blood's dirt,' he laughed, looking away,
Far off to where his wound had bled
And almost merged for ever into clay.
'The world is washing out its stains,' he said.
'It doesn't like our cheeks so red:
Young blood's its great objection.
But when we're duly white-washed, being dead,
The race will bear Field-Marshal God's inspection.'

Wilfred Owen

Le Christianisme

So the church Christ was hit and buried
Under its rubbish and its rubble.
In cellars, packed-up saints long serried,
Well out of hearing of our trouble.

One Virgin still immaculate
Smiles on for war to flatter her.
She's halo'd with an old tin hat,
But a piece of hell will batter her.

Wilfred Owen

Maundy Thursday

Between the brown hands of a server-lad
The silver cross was offered to be kissed.
The men came up, lugubrious, but not sad,
And knelt reluctantly, half-prejudiced.
(And kissing, kissed the emblem of a creed.)
Then mourning women knelt; meek mouths they had,
(And kissed the Body of the Christ indeed.)
Young children came, with eager lips and glad.
(These kissed a silver doll, immensely bright.)
Then I, too, knelt before that acolyte.
Above the crucifix I bent my head:
The Christ was thin, and cold, and very dead:
And yet I bowed, yea, kissed - my lips did cling.
(I kissed the warm live hand that held the thing.)

Wilfred Owen

Mental Cases

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jays that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,- but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?

-These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
Always they must see these things and hear them,
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
Carnage incomparable, and human squander
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
Back into their brains, because on their sense
Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.

-Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.

-Thus their hands are plucking at each other;
Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.

Wilfred Owen

Miners

There was a whispering in my hearth,
A sigh of the coal.
Grown wistful of a former earth
It might recall.

I listened for a tale of leaves
And smothered ferns,
Fronde-forests; and the low, sly lives
Before the fawns.

My fire might show steam-phantoms simmer
From Time's old cauldron,
Before the birds made nests in summer,
Or men had children.

But the coals were murmuring of their mine,
And moans down there
Of boys that slept wry sleep, and men
Writhing for air.

And I saw white bones in the cinder-shard,
Bones without number.
For many hearts with coal are charred,
And few remember.

I thought of all that worked dark pits
Of war, and died
Digging the rock where Death reposes
Peace lies indeed.

Comforted years will sit soft-chaired
In rooms of amber;
The years will stretch their hands, well-cheered
By our lifes' ember.

The centuries will burn rich loads
With which we groaned,
Whose warmth shall lull their dreaming lids,
While songs are crooned.

But they will not dream of us poor lads
Left in the ground.

Wilfred Owen

Music

I have been urged by earnest violins
And drunk their mellow sorrows to the slake
Of all my sorrows and my thirsting sins.
My heart has beaten for a brave drum's sake.
Huge chords have wrought me mighty: I have hurled
Thuds of gods' thunder. And with old winds pondered
Over the curse of this chaotic world,-
With low lost winds that maundered as they wandered.

I have been gay with trivial fifes that laugh;
And songs more sweet than possible things are sweet;
And gongs, and oboes. Yet I guessed not half
Life's symphony till I had made hearts beat,
And touched Love's body into trembling cries,
And blown my love's lips into laughs and sighs.

Wilfred Owen

My Shy Hand

My shy hand shades a hermitage apart, -
O large enough for thee, and thy brief hours.
Life there is sweeter held than in God's heart,
Stillier than in the heavens of hollow flowers.

The wine is gladder there than in gold bowls.
And Time shall not drain thence, nor trouble spill.
Sources between my fingers feed all souls,
Where thou mayest cool thy lips, and draw thy fill.

Five cushions hath my hand, for reveries;
And one deep pillow for thy brow's fatigues;
Languor of June all winterlong, and ease
For ever from the vain untravelled leagues.

Thither your years may gather in from storm,
And Love, that sleepeth there, will keep thee warm.

Wilfred Owen

O World Of Many Worlds

O World of many worlds, O life of lives,
What centre hast thou? Where am I?
O whither is it thy fierce onrush drives?
Fight I, or drift; or stand; or fly?

The loud machinery spins, points work in touch;
Wheels whirl in systems, zone in zone.
Myself having sometime moved with such,
Would strike a centre of mine own.

Lend hand, O Fate, for I am down, am lost!
Fainting by violence of the Dance...
Ah thanks, I stand - the floor is crossed,
And I am where but few advance.

I see men far below me where they swarm...
(Haply above me - be it so!
Does space to compass-points conform,
And can we say a star stands high or low?)

Not more complex the millions of the stars
Than are the hearts of mortal brothers;
As far remote as Neptune from small Mars
Is one man's nature from another's.

But all hold course unalterably fixed;
They follow destinies foreplanned:
I envy not these lives in their faith unmixed,
I would not step with such a band.

To be a meteor, fast, eccentric, lone,
Lawless; in passage through all spheres,
Warning the earth of wider ways unknown
And rousing men with heavenly fears...

This is the track reserved for my endeavour;
Spanless the erring way I wend.
Blackness of darkness is my meed for ever?
And barren plunging without end?

O glorious fear! Those other wandering souls
High burning through that outer bourne
Are lights unto themselves. Fair aureoles
Self-radiated these are worn.

And when in after times those stars return
And strike once more earth's horizon,
They gather many satellites astern,
For they are greater than this system's Sun.

Wilfred Owen

On My Songs

Though unseen Poets, many and many a time,
Have answered me as if they knew my woe,
And it might seem have fashioned so their rime
To be my own soul's cry; easing the flow
Of my dumb tears with language sweet as sobs,
Yet are there days when all these hoards of thought
Hold nothing for me. Not one verse that throbs
Throbs with my heart, or as my brain is fraught.
'Tis then I voice mine own weird reveries:
Low croonings of a motherless child, in gloom
Singing his frightened self to sleep, are these.
One night, if thou shouldst lie in this Sick Room,
Dreading the Dark thou darest not illumine,
Listen; my voice may haply lend thee ease.

Wilfred Owen

On Seeing A Piece Of Our Artillery Brought Into Action

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,
Great gun towering towards Heaven, about to curse;
Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse
Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!
Reach at that Arrogance which needs thy harm,
And beat it down before its sins grow worse;
Spend our resentment, cannon,--yea, disburse
Our gold in shapes of flame, our breaths in storm.

Yet, for men's sakes whom thy vast malison
Must wither innocent of enmity,
Be not withdrawn, dark arm, thy spoilure done,
Safe to the bosom of our prosperity.
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

Wilfred Owen

On Seeing A Piece Of Our Heavy Artillery Brought Into Action

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,
Great Gun towering towards Heaven, about to curse;
Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse
Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!
Reach at that Arrogance which needs thy harm,
And beat it down before its sins grow worse.
Spend our resentment, cannon, -- yea, disburse
Our gold in shapes of flame, our breaths in storm.

Yet, for men's sakes whom thy vast malison
Must wither innocent of enmity,
Be not withdrawn, dark arm, thy spoilure done,
Safe to the bosom of our prosperity.
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

Wilfred Owen

Preface

This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak
of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about glory, honour,
dominion or power,
except War.

Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry.
The subject of it is War, and the pity of War.
The Poetry is in the pity.
Yet these elegies are not to this generation,
This is in no sense consolatory.

They may be to the next.
All the poet can do to-day is to warn.
That is why the true Poets must be truthful.
If I thought the letter of this book would last,
I might have used proper names; but if the spirit of it survives Prussia, --
my ambition and those names will be content; for they will have
achieved themselves fresher fields than Flanders.

Wilfred Owen

Red Lips Are Not So Red

Red lips are not so red

As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.

Kindness of wooed and wooer

Seems shame to their love pure.

O Love, your eyes lose lure

When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

Your slender attitude

Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed,

Rolling and rolling there

Where God seems not to care;

Till the fierce Love they bear

Cramps them in death's extreme decrepitude.

Your voice sings not so soft, --

Though even as wind murmuring through rafters loft, --

Your dear voice is not dear,

Gentle, and evening clear,

As theirs whom none now hear

Now earth has stopped their piteous mouths that coughed.

Heart, you were never hot,

Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;

And though your hand be pale,

Paler are all which trail

Your cross through flame and hail:

Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.

Wilfred Owen

Roundel

In Shrewsbury Town e'en Hercules wox tired,
Tired of the streets that end not up nor down;
Tired of the Quarry, though seats may be hired
Of Shrewsbury Town.

Tired of the tongues that knew not his renown;
Tired of the Quarry Bye-Laws, so admired
By the Salopian, the somnambulant clown.

Weak as a babe, and in like wise attired,
He leaned upon his club; frowned a last frown,
And of ineffable boredom, so expired
In Shrewsbury Town.

Wilfred Owen

S.I.W.

*"I will to the King,
And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die,
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him."*

-- W. B. Yeats. *</i>*

Patting goodbye, doubtless they told the lad
He'd always show the Hun a brave man's face;
Father would sooner him dead than in disgrace, --
Was proud to see him going, aye, and glad.
Perhaps his Mother whimpered how she'd fret
Until he got a nice, safe wound to nurse.
Sisters would wish girls too could shoot, charge, curse, . . .
Brothers -- would send his favourite cigarette,
Each week, month after month, they wrote the same,
Thinking him sheltered in some Y.M. Hut,
Where once an hour a bullet missed its aim
And misses teased the hunger of his brain.
His eyes grew old with wincing, and his hand
Reckless with ague. Courage leaked, as sand
From the best sandbags after years of rain.
But never leave, wound, fever, trench-foot, shock,
Untrapped the wretch. And death seemed still withheld
For torture of lying machinally shelled,
At the pleasure of this world's Powers who'd run amok.

He'd seen men shoot their hands, on night patrol,
Their people never knew. Yet they were vile.
"Death sooner than dishonour, that's the style!"
So Father said.

One dawn, our wire patrol
Carried him. This time, Death had not missed.
We could do nothing, but wipe his bleeding cough.
Could it be accident? -- Rifles go off . . .
Not sniped? No. (Later they found the English ball.)

It was the reasoned crisis of his soul.
Against the fires that would not burn him whole
But kept him for death's perjury and scoff
And life's half-promising, and both their riling.

With him they buried the muzzle his teeth had kissed,
And truthfully wrote the Mother "Tim died smiling."

Wilfred Owen

Schoolmistress

Schoolmistress

Having, with bold Horatius, stamped her feet
And waved a final swashing arabesque
O'er the brave days of old, she ceased to bleat,
Slapped her Macaulay back upon the desk,
Resuned her calm gaze and her lofty seat.

There, while she heard the classic lines repeat,
Once more the teacher's face clenched stern;
For through the window, looking on the street,
Three soldiers hailed her. She made no return.
One was called 'Orace whom she would not greet.

Wilfred Owen

Shadwell Stair

I am the ghost of Shadwell Stair.
Along the wharves by the water-house,
And through the cavernous slaughter-house,
I am the shadow that walks there.

Yet I have flesh both firm and cool,
And eyes tumultuous as the gems
Of moons and lamps in the full Thames
When dusk sails wavering down the pool.

Shuddering the purple street-arc burns
Where I watch always; from the banks
Dolorously the shipping clanks
And after me a strange tide turns.

I walk till the stars of London wane
And dawn creeps up the Shadwell Stair.
But when the crowing syrens blare
I with another ghost am lain.

Wilfred Owen

Six O'Clock In Princes Street

In twos and threes, they have not far to roam,
Crowds that thread eastward, gay of eyes;
Those seek no further than their quiet home,
Wives, walking westward, slow and wise.

Neither should I go fooling over clouds,
Following gleams unsafe, untrue,
And tiring after beauty through star-crowds,
Dared I go side by side with you;

Or be you in the gutter where you stand,
Pale rain-flawed phantom of the place,
With news of all the nations in your hand,
And all their sorrows in your face.

Wilfred Owen

Smile, Smile, Smile

Head to limp head, the sunk-eyed wounded scanned
Yesterday's Mail; the casualties (typed small)
And (large) Vast Booty from our Latest Haul.
Also, they read of Cheap Homes, not yet planned;
For, said the paper, "When this war is done
The men's first instinct will be making homes.
Meanwhile their foremost need is aerodromes,
It being certain war has just begun.
Peace would do wrong to our undying dead, --
The sons we offered might regret they died
If we got nothing lasting in their stead.
We must be solidly indemnified.
Though all be worthy Victory which all bought,
We rulers sitting in this ancient spot
Would wrong our very selves if we forgot
The greatest glory will be theirs who fought,
Who kept this nation in integrity."
Nation? -- The half-limbed readers did not chafe
But smiled at one another curiously
Like secret men who know their secret safe.
This is the thing they know and never speak,
That England one by one had fled to France
(Not many elsewhere now save under France).
Pictures of these broad smiles appear each week,
And people in whose voice real feeling rings
Say: How they smile! They're happy now, poor things.

23rd September 1918.

Wilfred Owen

Soldier's Dream

I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears;
And caused a permanent stoppage in all bolts;
And buckled with a smile Mausers and Colts;
And rusted every bayonet with His tears.

And there were no more bombs, of ours or Theirs,
Not even an old flint-lock, not even a pikel.
But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;
And when I woke he'd seen to our repairs.

Wilfred Owen

Song Of Songs

Sing me at morn but only with your laugh;
Even as Spring that laugheth into leaf;
Even as Love that laugheth after Life.

Sing me but only with your speech all day,
As voluble leaflets do; let viols die;
The least word of your lips is melody!

Sing me at eve but only your sigh!
Like lifting seas it solaceth; breathe so,
Slowly and low, the sense that no songs say.

Sing me at midnight with your murmurous heart!
Let youth's immortal-moaning chord be heard
Throbbing through you, and sobbing, unsubdued.

Wilfred Owen

Sonnet To My Friend - With An Identity Disc

If ever I had dreamed of my dead name
High in the heart of London, unsurpassed
By Time for ever, and the Fugitive, Fame,
There seeking a long sanctuary at last, -

Or if I onetime hoped to hide its shame,
- Shame of success, and sorrow of defeats, -
Under those holy cypresses, the same
That shade always the quiet place of Keats,

Now rather thank I God there is no risk
Of gravers scoring it with florid screech.
Let my inscription be this soldier's disc.
Wear it, sweet friend. Inscribe no date nor deed.
But may thy heart-beat kiss it, night and day,
Until the name grow blurred and fade away.

Wilfred Owen

Sonnet: On Seeing A Piece Of Our Heavy Artillery Brought Into Action

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,
Great Gun towering towards Heaven, about to curse;
Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse
Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!
Reach at that Arrogance which needs thy harm,
And beat it down before its sins grow worse.
Spend our resentment, cannon, - yea, disburse
Our gold in shapes of flame, our breaths in storm.

Yet, for men's sakes whom thy vast malison
Must wither innocent of enmity,
Be not withdrawn, dark arm, thy spoilure done,
Safe to the bosom of our prosperity.
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

Wilfred Owen

Spells And Incantations

A vague pearl, a wan pearl
You showed me once; I peered through far-gone winters
Until my mind was fog-bound in that gem.

Blue diamonds, cold diamonds
You shook before me, so that out of them
Glittered and glowed vast diamond dawns of spring.

Tiger-eyed rubies, wrathful rubies
You rolled. I watched their hot hearts fling
Flames from each glaring summer of my life.

Quiet amber, mellow amber
You lifted; and behold the whole air rife
With evening, and the auburn autumn cloud.

But pale skin, your pearl skin
Show this to me, and I shall have surprise
Of every snow-lit dawn before it break.

But clear eyes, your fresh eyes
Open; that I may laugh, and lightly take
All air of early April in one hour.

But brown curls, O shadow me with curls,
Full of September mist, half-gleam, half-glower,
And I shall roam warm nights in lands far south.

Wilfred Owen

Spring Offensive

1 Halted against the shade of a last hill,
2 They fed, and, lying easy, were at ease
3 And, finding comfortable chests and knees
4 Carelessly slept. But many there stood still
5 To face the stark, blank sky beyond the ridge,
6 Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.

7 Marvelling they stood, and watched the long grass swirled
8 By the May breeze, murmurous with wasp and midge,
9 For though the summer oozed into their veins
10 Like the injected drug for their bones' pains,
11 Sharp on their souls hung the imminent line of grass,
12 Fearfully flashed the sky's mysterious glass.

13 Hour after hour they ponder the warm field--
14 And the far valley behind, where the buttercups
15 Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up,
16 Where even the little brambles would not yield,
17 But clutched and clung to them like sorrowing hands;
18 They breathe like trees unstirred.

19 Till like a cold gust thrilled the little word
20 At which each body and its soul begird
21 And tighten them for battle. No alarms
22 Of bugles, no high flags, no clamorous haste--
23 Only a lift and flare of eyes that faced
24 The sun, like a friend with whom their love is done.
25 O larger shone that smile against the sun,--
26 Mightier than his whose bounty these have spurned.

27 So, soon they topped the hill, and raced together
28 Over an open stretch of herb and heather
29 Exposed. And instantly the whole sky burned
30 With fury against them; and soft sudden cups
31 Opened in thousands for their blood; and the green slopes
32 Chasmed and steepened sheer to infinite space.

33 Of them who running on that last high place
34 Leapt to swift unseen bullets, or went up

35 On the hot blast and fury of hell's upsurge,
36 Or plunged and fell away past this world's verge,
37 Some say God caught them even before they fell.

38 But what say such as from existence' brink
39 Ventured but drave too swift to sink.
40 The few who rushed in the body to enter hell,
41 And there out-fiending all its fiends and flames
42 With superhuman inhumanities,
43 Long-famous glories, immemorial shames--
44 And crawling slowly back, have by degrees
45 Regained cool peaceful air in wonder--
46 Why speak they not of comrades that went under?

Wilfred Owen

Storm

His face was charged with beauty as a cloud
With glimmering lightning. When it shadowed me
I shook, and was uneasy as a tree
That draws the brilliant danger, tremulous, bowed.

So must I tempt that face to loose its lightning.
Great gods, whose beauty is death, will laugh above,
Who made his beauty lovelier than love.
I shall be bright with their unearthly brightening.

And happier were it if my sap consume;
Glorious will shine the opening of my heart;
The land shall freshen that was under gloom;
What matter if all men cry aloud and start,
And women hide bleak faces in their shawl,
At those hilarious thunders of my fall?

Wilfred Owen

Strange Meeting

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.
With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
'Strange, friend,' I said, 'Here is no cause to mourn.'
'None,' said the other, 'Save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something has been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now ...

Wilfred Owen

The Calls

A dismal fog-hoarse siren howls at dawn.
I watch the man it calls for, pushed and drawn
Backwards and forwards, helpless as a pawn.
But I'm lazy, and his work's crazy.

Quick treble bells begin at nine o'clock,
Scuttling the schoolboy pulling up his sock,
Scaring the late girl in the inky frock.
I must be crazy; I learn from the daisy.

Stern bells annoy the rooks and doves at ten.
I watch the verger close the doors, and when
I hear the organ moan the first amen,
Sing my religion's-same as pigeons'.

A blatant bugle tears my afternoons.
Out clump the clumsy Tommies by platoons,
Trying to keep in step with rag-time tunes,
But I sit still; I've done my drill.

Gongs hum and buzz like saucepan-lids at dusk,
I see a food-hog whet his gold-filled tusk
To eat less bread, and more luxurious rusk.

Then sometimes late at night my window bumps
From gunnery-practice, till my small heart thumps
And listens for the shell-shrieks and the crumps,
But that's not all.

For leaning out last midnight on my sill
I heard the sighs of men, that have no skill
To speak of their distress, no, nor the will!
A voice I know. And this time I must go.

Wilfred Owen

The Calls [unfinished]

A dismal fog-hoarse siren howls at dawn.
I watch the man it calls for, pushed and drawn
Backwards and forwards, helpless as a pawn.
But I'm lazy, and his work's crazy.

Quick treble bells begin at nine o'clock,
Scuttling the schoolboy pulling up his sock,
Scaring the late girl in the inky frock.
I must be crazy; I learn from the daisy.

Stern bells annoy the rooks and doves at ten.
I watch the verger close the doors, and when
I hear the organ moan the first amen,
Sing my religion's-same as pigeons'.

A blatant bugle tears my afternoons.
Out clump the clumsy Tommies by platoons,
Trying to keep in step with rag-time tunes,
But I sit still; I've done my drill.

Gongs hum and buzz like saucepan-lids at dusk,
I see a food-hog whet his gold-filled tusk
To eat less bread, and more luxurious rusk.

Then sometimes late at night my window bumps
From gunnery-practice, till my small heart thumps
And listens for the shell-shrieks and the crumps,
But that's not all.

For leaning out last midnight on my sill
I heard the sighs of men, that have no skill
To speak of their distress, no, nor the will!
A voice I know. And this time I must go.

Wilfred Owen

The Chances

I mind as 'ow the night afore that show
Us five got talking, -- 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."
"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 feeling mushy."

One of us got the knock-out, blown to chops.
T'other was hurt, like, losin' both 'is props.
An' one, to use the word of 'ypocrites,
'Ad the misfortoon to be took by Fritz.
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;
'E's wounded, killed, and pris'ner, all the lot --
The ruddy lot all rolled in one. Jim's mad.

Wilfred Owen

The Dead-Beat

He dropped, - more sullenly than wearily,
Lay stupid like a cod, heavy like meat,
And none of us could kick him to his feet;
-just blinked at my revolver, blearily;
- Didn't appear to know a war was on,
Or see the blasted trench at which he stared.
'I'll do 'em in,' he whined. 'If this hand's spared,
I'll murder them, I will.'

A low voice said,
'It's Blighty, p'raps, he sees; his pluck's all gone,
Dreaming of all the valiant, that aren't dead:
Bold uncles, smiling ministerially;
Maybe his brave young wife, getting her fun
In some new home, improved materially.
It's not these stiffs have crazed him; nor the Hun.'

We sent him down at last, out of the way.
Unwounded; - stout lad, too, before that strafe.
Malingering? Stretcher-bearers winked, 'Not half!'

Next day I heard the Doc's well-whiskied laugh:
'That scum you sent last night soon died. Hooray!'

Wilfred Owen

The End

After the blast of lightning from the east,
The flourish of loud clouds, the Chariot throne,
After the drums of time have rolled and ceased
And from the bronze west long retreat is blown,

Shall Life renew these bodies? Of a truth
All death will he annul, all tears assuage?
Or fill these void veins full again with youth
And wash with an immortal water age?

When I do ask white Age, he saith not so, --
"My head hangs weighed with snow."
And when I hearken to the Earth she saith
My fiery heart sinks aching. It is death.
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified
Nor my titanic tears the seas be dried."

Wilfred Owen

The Kind Ghosts

She sleeps on soft, last breaths; but no ghost looms
Out of the stillness of her palace wall,
Her wall of boys on boys and dooms on dooms.

She dreams of golden gardens and sweet glooms,
Not marvelling why her roses never fall
Nor what red mouths were torn to make their blooms.

The shades keep down which well might roam her hall.
Quiet their blood lies in her crimson rooms
And she is not afraid of their footfall.

They move not from her tapestries, their pall,
Nor pace her terraces, their hecatombs,
Lest aught she be disturbed, or grieved at all.

Wilfred Owen

The Last Laugh

'Oh! Jesus Christ! I'm hit,' he said; and died.
Whether he vainly cursed or prayed indeed,
The Bullets chirped-In vain, vain, vain!
Machine-guns chuckled,-Tut-tut! Tut-tut!
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed,-'O Mother, -Mother, - Dad!'
Then smiled at nothing, childlike, being dead.
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud
Leisurely gestured,-Fool!
And the splinters spat, and tittered.

'My Love!' one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,
Till slowly lowered, his whole faced kissed the mud.
And the Bayonets' long teeth grinned;
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;
And the Gas hissed.

Wilfred Owen

The Letter

With B.E.F. Jun 10. Dear Wife,
(Oh blast this pencil. 'Ere, Bill, lend's a knife.)
I'm in the pink at present, dear.
I think the war will end this year.
We don't see much of them square-'eaded 'Uns.
We're out of harm's way, not bad fed.
I'm longing for a taste of your old buns.
(Say, Jimmie, spare's a bite of bread.)
There don't seem much to say just now.
(Yer what? Then don't, yer ruddy cow!
And give us back me cigarette!)
I'll soon be 'ome. You mustn't fret.
My feet's improvin', as I told you of.
We're out in the rest now. Never fear.
(VRACH! By crumbs, but that was near.)
Mother might spare you half a sov.
Kiss Nell and Bert. When me and you-
(Eh? What the 'ell! Stand to? Stand to!
Jim, give's a hand with pack on, lad.
Guh! Christ! I'm hit. Take 'old. Aye, bad.
No, damn your iodine. Jim? 'Ere!
Write my old girl, Jim, there's a dear.)

Wilfred Owen

The Next War

War's a joke for me and you,
Wile we know such dreams are true.
- Siegfried Sassoon

Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death,-
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,-
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.
We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,-
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe.
He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed
Shrapnel. We chorussed when he sang aloft,
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.

Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.
No soldier's paid to kick against His powers.
We laughed, -knowing that better men would come,
And greater wars: when each proud fighter brags
He wars on Death, for lives; not men, for flags.

Wilfred Owen

The Parable Of The Old Man And The Young

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and strops,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Wilfred Owen

The Parable Of The Young Man And The Old

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned, both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake, and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets the trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Wilfred Owen

The Roads Also

The roads also have their wistful rest,
When the weathercocks perch still and roost,
And the looks of men turn kind to clocks
And the trams go empty to their drome.
The streets also dream their dream.

The old houses muse of the old days
And their fond trees leaning on them doze.
On their steps chatter and clatter stops
For the cries of other times hold men
And they hear the unknown moan.

They remember alien ardours and far futures
And the smiles not seen in happy features.
Their begetters call them from the gutters;
In the gardens unborn child-souls wail,
And the dead scribble on walls.

Though their own child cry for them in tears,
Women weep but hear no sound upstairs.
They believe in love they had not lived
And passion past the reach of stairs
To the world's towers or stars.

Wilfred Owen

The Send-Off

Down the close, darkening lanes they sang their way
To the siding-shed,
And lined the train with faces grimly gay.

Their breasts were stuck all white with wreath and spray
As men's are, dead.

Dull porters watched them, and a casual tramp
Stood staring hard,
Sorry to miss them from the upland camp.
Then, unmoved, signals nodded, and a lamp
Winked to the guard.

So secretly, like wrongs hushed-up, they went.
They were not ours:
We never heard to which front these were sent.

Nor there if they yet mock what women meant
Who gave them flowers.

Shall they return to beatings of great bells
In wild trainloads?
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,
May creep back, silent, to still village wells
Up half-known roads.

Wilfred Owen

The Show

My soul looked down from a vague height with Death,
As unremembering how I rose or why,
And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,
Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,
And fitted with great pocks and scabs of plaques.

Across its beard, that horror of harsh wire,
There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled.
It seemed they pushed themselves to be as plugs
Of ditches, where they writhed and shrivelled, killed.

By them had slimy paths been trailed and scraped
Round myriad warts that might be little hills.

From gloom's last dregs these long-strung creatures crept,
And vanished out of dawn down hidden holes.

(And smell came up from those foul openings
As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening.)

On dithering feet upgathered, more and more,
Brown strings towards strings of gray, with bristling spines,
All migrants from green fields, intent on mire.

Those that were gray, of more abundant spawns,
Ramped on the rest and ate them and were eaten.

I saw their bitten backs curve, loop, and straighten,
I watched those agonies curl, lift, and flatten.

Whereat, in terror what that sight might mean,
I reeled and shivered earthward like a feather.

And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan.
And He, picking a manner of worm, which half had hid
Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further,
Showed me its feet, the feet of many men,
And the fresh-severed head of it, my head.

The Unreturning

Suddenly night crushed out the day and hurled
Her remnants over cloud-peaks, thunder-walled.
Then fell a stillness such as harks appalled
When far-gone dead return upon the world.

There watched I for the Dead; but no ghost woke.
Each one whom Life exiled I named and called.
But they were all too far, or dumbbed, or thralled,
And never one fared back to me or spoke.

Then peered the indefinite unshapen dawn
With vacant gloaming, sad as half-lit minds,
The weak-limned hour when sick men's sighs are drained.
And while I wondered on their being withdrawn,
Gagged by the smothering Wing which none unbinds,
I dreaded even a heaven with doors so chained.

Wilfred Owen

The Young Soldier

It is not death
Without hereafter
To one in dearth
Of life and its laughter,

Nor the sweet murder
Dealt slow and even
Unto the martyr
Smiling at heaven:

It is the smile
Faint as a (waning) myth,
Faint, and exceeding small
On a boy's murdered mouth.

Wilfred Owen

Training

Not this week nor this month dare I lie down
In languour under lime trees or smooth smile.
Love must not kiss my face pale that is brown.

My lips, parting, shall drink space, mile by mile;
Strong meats be all my hunger; my renown
Be the clean beauty of speed and pride of style.

Cold winds encountered on the racing Down
Shall thrill my heated bareness; but awhile
None else may meet me till I wear my crown.

Wilfred Owen

Uriconium: An Ode

It lieth low near merry England's heart
Like a long-buried sin; and Englishmen
Forget that in its death their sires had part.
And, like a sin, Time lays it bare again
To tell of races wronged,
And ancient glories suddenly overcast,
And treasures flung to fire and rabble wrath.
If thou hast ever longed
To lift the gloomy curtain of Time Past,
And spy the secret things that Hades hath,
Here through this riven ground take such a view.
The dust, that fell unnoted as a dew,
Wrapped the dead city's face like mummy-cloth:
All is as was: except for worm and moth.

Since Jove was worshipped under Wrekin's shade
Or Latin phrase was writ in Shropshire stone,
Since Druid chaunts desponded in this glade
Or Tuscan general called that field his own,
How long ago? How long?
How long since wanderers in the Stretton Hills
Met men of shaggy hair and savage jaw,
With flint and copper prong,
Aiming behind their dikes and thorny grilles?
Ah! those were days before the axe and saw,
Then were the nights when this mid-forest town
Held breath to hear the wolves come yelping down,
And ponderous bears 'long Severn lifted paw,
And nuzzling boars ran grunting through the shaw.

Ah me! full fifteen hundred times the wheat
Hath risen, and bowed, and fallen to human hunger
Since those imperial days were made complete.
The weary moon hath waxen old and younger
These eighteen thousand times
Without a shrine to greet her gentle ray.
And other temples rose; to Power and Pelf,
And chimed centurial chimes
Until their very bells are worn away.

While King by King lay cold on vaulted shelf
And wars closed wars, and many a Marmion fell,
And dearths and plagues help sire and son to hell;
And old age stiffened many a lively elf
And many a poet's heart outdrained itself.

I had forgot that so remote an age
Beyond the horizon of our little sight,
Is far from us by no more spanless gauge
Than day and night, succeeding day and night,
Until I looked on Thee,
Thou ghost of a dead city, or its husk!
But even as we could walk by field and hedge
Hence to the distant sea
So, by the rote of common dawn and dusk,
We travel back to history's utmost edge.
Yea, when through thy old streets I took my way,
And recked a thousand years as yesterday,
Methought sage fancy wrought a sacrilege
To steal for me such godly privilege!

For here lie remnants from a banquet table -
Oysters and marrow-bones, and seeds of grape -
The statement of whose age must sound a fable;
And Samian jars, whose sheen and flawless shape
Look fresh from potter's mould.
Plasters with Roman finger-marks impressed;
Bracelets that from the warm Italian arm
Might seem to be scarce cold;
And spears - the same that pushed the Cymry west-
Unblunted yet; with tools of forge and farm
Abandoned, as a man in sudden fear
Drops what he holds to help his swift career:
For sudden was Rome's flight, and wild the alarm.
The Saxon shock was like Vesuvius' qualm.

O ye who prate of modern art and craft .
Mark well that Gaulish brooch, and test that screw!
Art's fairest buds on antique stem are graft.
Under the sun is nothing wholly new!
At Viricon today
The village anvil rests on Roman base

And in a garden, may be seen a bower
With pillars for its stay
That anciently in basilic had place.
The church's font is but a pagan dower:
A Temple's column, hollowed into this.
So is the glory of our artifice,
Our pleasure and our worship, but the flower
Of Roman custom and of Roman power.

O ye who laugh and, living as if Time
Meant but the twelve hours ticking round your dial,
Find it too short for thee, watch the sublime,
Slow, epochal time-registers awhile,
Which are Antiquities.

O ye who weep and call all your life too long
And moan: Was ever sorrow like to mine?
Muse on the memories
That sad sepulchral stones and ruins prolong.
Here might men drink of wonder like strong wine
And feel ephemeral troubles soothed and curbed.
Yet farmers, wroth to have their laws disturbed,
Are sooner roused for little loss to pine
Than we are moved by mighty woes long syne.

Above this reverend ground, what traveller checks?
Yet cities such as these one time would breed
Apocalyptic visions of world-wrecks.
Let Saxon men return to them, and heed!
They slew and burnt,
But after, prized what Rome had given away
Out of her strength and her prosperity.
Have they yet learnt
The precious truth distilled from Rome's decay?
Ruins! On England's heart press heavily!
For Rome hath left us more than walls and words
And better yet shall leave; and more than herds
Or land or gold gave the Celts to us in fee;
E'en Blood, which makes poets sing and prophets see.

Wilfred Owen

Wild With All Regrets

(Another version of "A Terre".)

To Siegfried Sassoon

My arms have mutinied against me -- brutes!
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats,
My back's been stiff for hours, damned hours.
Death never gives his squad a Stand-at-ease.
I can't read. There: it's no use. Take your book.
A short life and a merry one, my buck!
We said we'd hate to grow dead old. But now,
Not to live old seems awful: not to renew
My boyhood with my boys, and teach 'em hitting,
Shooting and hunting, -- all the arts of hurting!
-- Well, that's what I learnt. That, and making money.
Your fifty years in store seem none too many;
But I've five minutes. God! For just two years
To help myself to this good air of yours!
One Spring! Is one too hard to spare? Too long?
Spring air would find its own way to my lung,
And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.

Yes, there's the orderly. He'll change the sheets
When I'm lugged out, oh, couldn't I do that?
Here in this coffin of a bed, I've thought
I'd like to kneel and sweep his floors for ever, --
And ask no nights off when the bustle's over,
For I'd enjoy the dirt; who's prejudiced
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust, --
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn?
Dear dust, -- in rooms, on roads, on faces' tan!
I'd love to be a sweep's boy, black as Town;
Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load?
A flea would do. If one chap wasn't bloody,
Or went stone-cold, I'd find another body.

Which I shan't manage now. Unless it's yours.
I shall stay in you, friend, for some few hours.

You'll feel my heavy spirit chill your chest,
And climb your throat on sobs, until it's chased
On sighs, and wiped from off your lips by wind.

I think on your rich breathing, brother, I'll be weaned
To do without what blood remained me from my wound.

5th December 1917.

Wilfred Owen

Winter Song

The browns, the olives, and the yellows died,
And were swept up to heaven; where they glowed
Each dawn and set of sun till Christmastide,
And when the land lay pale for them, pale-snowed,
Fell back, and down the snow-drifts flamed and flowed.

From off your face, into the winds of winter,
The sun-brown and the summer-gold are blowing;
But they shall gleam with spiritual glinter,
When paler beauty on your brows falls snowing,
And through those snows my looks shall be soft-going.

Wilfred Owen

With An Identity Disc

If ever I dreamed of my dead name
High in the heart of London, unsurpassed
By Time for ever, and the Fugitive, Fame,
There seeking a long sanctuary at last,

I better that; and recollect with shame
How once I longed to hide it from life's heats
Under those holy cypresses, the same
That shade always the quiet place of Keats,

Now rather thank I God there is no risk
Of gravers scoring it with florid screed,
But let my death be memoried on this disc.
Wear it, sweet friend. Inscribe no date nor deed.
But may thy heart-beat kiss it night and day,
Until the name grow vague and wear away.

Wilfred Owen