

## REPRESENTATION OF HORRORS OF WAR THROUGH POETRY

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The First World War was declared in 1914 and ended four years later in 1918. The conflict amidst the Central Empires and the Allied powers ended in the favor of the Allied powers which resulted in the death of 16 million people-soldiers and civilians alike. The rising military technology as well as the tribulation of First World War resulted in carnage and destruction at unprecedented levels. The aftermath of the War changed the world as well as the lives of people for decades, many poets took it upon themselves to respond to the brutal War and its losses. The War poetry does not address a particular War event.

The poems of 1914 and 1915 hold the virtues of duty, heroism, glory and honor. The poetry after 1915 questioned the abstractions of War with greater skepticism through bitter irony and realism. The later War poetry changed the view of War and sacrifice. The First World War inspired profound poetry – words in which the atmosphere and landscape of battle were evoked perhaps more vividly than ever before (The poetry of the First World War). The poets through their collective voices depicted the War's tragedies and irreparable effects as well as the hopes and disappointments of millions involved in the War.

First World War stirred up some of the most powerful and poignant works of history. The War poetry of World War 1 talks about the apprehension of life in the War trenches; mourns the lost life and provides us a detailed account of the pain and agony of those involved in the War. The demise of millions of people destabilized European economy; and shift of power on the international level established the grounds for World War 2. The poets were the best documentarians of the War who not only witnessed the War closely but also responded to the aftermath of the War with their personal accounts in their poems. Over the last hundred years, the image of the First World War soldier as damaged but resilient has remained etched on British cultural consciousness, partly formed and periodically reinforced by the reading of a handful of soldier-poets, particularly Owen and Sassoon (Das).

Poetry of First World War is dominated by description of War trenches by anti-War soldier poets. Since the scope of trench lyric was considerably smaller than that of War Poetry, many male civilian poets including Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, and D.H. Lawrence wrote many famous War poetries. World War 1 poetry is often observed as being 'English', however a lot of soldier poets presented a disaccord to 'Englishness': Rosenberg and Sassoon were Jewish, Ludwig was Irish, Sorely was Anglo-Scottish, and Owen, Jones and Thomas had their traces

back to Wales. Warpoetry is one of the most renowned literary genres. War poetry has been tightly clanged around a single occurrence and invoked the archetypal images of trenches, barbed wire, gas, rats, mud etc. First World War poetry represents one of those primal moments when poetic form bears most fully the weight of historical trauma(Das). Pro-War and anti-War poetry as well as Combatant, non-combatant and women's poetry functioned within a huge poetical sphere sharing similar literary base.

First world War poetry looks before and after the War, joining past and future, and Competent and civilian zones; it speaks in varying cadences not just of combat, but also life at large dash of beauty, longing, religion, nature, animals, intimacy, historical change, poetic responsibility Europe and English 10, race, democracy and Empire, what it is for women to have years and years in which we shall still be young – or touched directly or indirectly by the War. (Das)

Some of the influential British writers whose being and work worshipped by the conflict are:

### Hedd Wyn

Ellis Humphrey Evans, also known as Hedd Wyn, was brought up in Gwynedd, North Wales, on a sheep farm. Wyn became a well respected Welsh Language poet even before he enrolled with the Royal Welsh fusiliers. At a rather young age Wyn had already earned some bardic chairs. Wyn was killed on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1917 in one of the initial attacks of Battle of Passchendaele. Soon after enlisting for the War, Wyn began 'Yr Arwr', his award-winning poem, also known as 'The Hero'. One of his famous poems 'War' was also composed shortly before his death. 6 weeks after Wyn's death he was awarded another bardic chair in a poetry competition. Since Wyn had already been killed in the War his bardic chair was covered in black cloth which later came to be known as the 'black chair'. It now serves as a memoir of those lost in the War by Wales.

### Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Sassoon came to be known as 'Mad Jack' for his fearlessness in the War. However he soon turned pacifist from a model Soldier. He is famously known for his Anti-War writings, which reflect disillusion about the glory and honor of Warfare. Sassoon enlisted in the army in May 1915 at the second lieutenant. He soon gained inexplicable military record. In the army he was twice adorned and embellished with the Military cross for saving fellow soldiers. Sassoon's disenchantment towards the War grew when he confronted the terrors of trench Warfare and the death of dear ones. Sassoon's poetry was deeply influenced by this and it soon turned harsh, mocking, and cynical. In April 1917 Sassoon's antagonism grew towards Britain's military leaders. Sassoon formed one of his most vehement indictments towards the ill-suited military high class – a poem known as 'The General'.

'The General's' black humor made matters worse for Sassoon among his superiors. Sassoon published a letter in The Time saying "I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it"(Sassoon). This statement led Sassoon closer to being Court-Marshaled. He was sent to Edinburgh's Craiglockhart hospital to be administered for shellshock. Sassoon and Owen formed a close relationship in the hospital and Owen became deeply influenced by Sassoon's works. Sassoon survived the War after being posted in France and Palestine. Sassoon died in 1967 after making a successful career in writing. His works were deeply influenced by his initial War experiences.

### Rupert Brooke

Rupert Brooke has been deemed the “poster boy” for the idolism of Britain’s initial War effort. Since Brooke never had the firsthand experience of horrors on the front line, his writing differs from that of Owen and Sassoon and is filled with Patriotism and romanticism of War. Brooke was once considered as “the handsomest young man in England” and was a socialite in the true sense. Well before the outbreak of war in Europe Brooke established his reputation as a poet. Brooke signed up for the army as soon as the War was declared. On Christmas leave in 1914 Brooke wrote one of the most acclaimed War poems ‘The Soldier’. It soon became popular in Britain for its Patriotism and sentimentality. Brooke died at sea at the age of 27 after contracting septic from mosquito bite.

### Wilfred Owen

Wilfred Owen wrote some of the most iconic War poetry of First World War. He enlisted for War in 1915 and was sent to the front line in 1917 where he experienced the grim reality of War life. Owen suffered a lot on the battle front and he composed a letter to his mother mentioning all the hardships he endured. Owen suffered crippling headaches as a result of living in the Shell holes for uncountable days. Owen was admitted in Craiglockhart hospital, after being diagnosed with shell shock, where he met secret Sassoon and befriended him. The time he spent at the hospital imprinted a lasting impact on both his personality and creativity.

Sassoon and Owen exchanged creative ideas and criticism about War during that time in the hospital. Owen was highly influenced by Sassoon, which ignited a fire of creativity within him. Owen’s works of this time are one of those which evoked his firsthand intimacy of War life in the trenches. ‘The Sentry’ was driven by the case of blinding of a comrade whereas ‘Dulce et Decorum est’ took inspiration from a gas attack Owen witnessed in January 1917.

Owen was murdered on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1918, by a machine gun, at the age of 25. Most of his works got published posthumously, only 5 of his poems were released when he was still alive however Sassoon revised and published a volume of Owen’s work in 1920. Owen’s poetry had a great impact on the way one looks at trench Warfare.

### Rudyard Kipling

Rudyard Kipling is known as a jingoistic patriot who won over Britain’s Imperial conflict. Although he is not well known as a poet of First World War but War had a deep imprint upon his works as well as devastating effect on his own life. Although Kipling did not sign up in the War due to his old age he still made use of his writings to fulfill Britain’s indoctrination for War. The utopian image of Britain’s armed forces coined by him deemed German forces as demonic.

Kipling’s flag waving writing became exceedingly popular particularly among the soldiers. Although Kipling himself was unable to join the army he forcibly enlisted his short-sighted son John through various connections. At the young age of 18 John went missing in machine gun crossfire and Kipling was never able to recover his son’s body nor did he find out what happened to him. Kipling composed a heart rending poem ‘My Boy Jack’ for his lost son John. Although this poem was formulated as a response to a 16 year old sailor Jack’s death but it can be interpreted that he wrote the poem keeping his son John’s disappearance in mind.

Throughout the course of First World War many War poets emerged. These poets were divided by their pro-War or anti-War views but the common base for these poets was the subject War. Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were amongst the most famous anti-War poets and their works show the harsh realities of War as well as the evil facade of the trenches. Death, loss, trenches, pain etc. are amongst the most common themes used by both of these poets. The theme of 'futility of War' and 'futility of political system' is also inculcated deeply in Owen and Sassoon's poems.

### Thomas Hardy

A major Victorian novelist and short story writer, Thomas Hardy, was also famous as a twentieth-century poet. He was a builder's son who grew up near Dorchester and never attended university, but worked as an architect for many years. After discovering that no one would publish his poetry, he started writing novels set in his home county, 'Wessex,' and achieved success with "Far from the Madding Crowd" (1874).

In the course of the second Boer War (1899-1902) and the Great War (1914-1918), Hardy wrote many poems. Some of these poems (for example, The Darkling Thrush and Channel Firing) clearly represent those conflicts. Others, such as "The Man He Killed" and "In Time of The Breaking of Nations," were published during the same time but have a broader appeal. This isn't by chance; Hardy made a deliberate attempt to tie individual historical disputes to a broader historical scheme.

Thomas Hardy describes soldiers' deaths in his anti-war poetry. Since the majority of the poems were written about the time of the Boer War, it's possible that they're about that conflict (Morgan). This can be seen in the language he used in his war poems, like the poem called Drummer Hodge. The repetition of sentences, the disjointed punctuation that slows the flow, and the juxtaposition of certain words in the poems give the idea that death in battle is quite meaningless. The jaunty rhythm of the meter, as well as the standard rhyme, gave rise to elevation in war poems.

He was disturbed when the news of the First World War broke out. Even though he was in his mid-seventies, he did his part to support the war effort. His excellent poem, "People Who March Away," was published in 1914 and has been in favor ever since. Hardy's most profound feelings about war were most likely reflected in his famous poem "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'" (1915). He sympathized with ordinary Germans, and in 1920, he wrote a poem known as "And There Was a Great Calm," which painfully questioned if all the misery could have been prevented.

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