WAKING THE DEAD
VOICES OF TRUTH IN THE DARKNESS OF WAR

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, war has been pursued in a perpetual cycle, resulting in enormous disruption and devastation to both lands and people. The cost is great, however, this activity is pursued generation after generation for both just and unjust purposes. It is imperative to consult the voices of those who both participated in the action as well as those who cared deeply enough to write about the war that surrounded them. Writers have played an invaluable role filling that need by providing honest, first-hand assessments, some of which were among the highest quality writings of the time.

This study draws from some of the most significant poems and other writings from the canon of American Civil War and World War I literature. First, an introduction to the relevance of war literature as well as a brief history of the two respective wars is provided as a background. The writings are organized according to three primary themes: the horrific conditions of war, assessment of the personal costs, and the sources of hope sought by soldiers in recollection of home and the search for meaning in God.
Analysis of the works clarify the placement and relevance in the broader text of the paper. The chosen works of war literature, although a fraction of the existing corpus of war writings are among the most important of the era and provide indispensable insight into the minds of those who fought some of history’s most demanding and costly wars. They reveal the conflict and personal reflection about killing and mercy, between death and life of soldiers in the world of war.

War literature, as demonstrated through these representative poems, demonstrate that the cost of war is incalculable. The writing is often extraordinarily sad, thoughtful, and revealing as a result of pain, suffering and loss that exceeds the worst fears of those who have fought. They reveal a consciousness and value to life itself and its meaning in a civilized world that has broken down.
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CHAPTER 1

WORDS ON FIRE

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins where we lay
And broke the chancel window squares,
We thought it was the judgment day
and sat upright

Thomas Hardy, “Channel Firing.”

The dead have earned their rest. But it is not to be. The deafening roar of gunnery practice in Thomas Hardy’s “Channel Firing” violently interrupts their eternal slumber. In a tranquil English church graveyard, the massive guns of war startle the dead, who confuse the war games with God’s final judgment. As described in the New Testament Book of Revelation, this judgment ushers in the cataclysmic end of the world. In this Biblical account, God, on a white horse, decisively destroys Satan and permanently ends all evil. These souls have been anticipating this event where Heaven and Earth are renewed and perfected, and they, like all other humans, are to be divinely judged on their works during their lifetime. But God only wants the dead to understand that the world has not been improving since their passing and is actually getting worse in the most disturbing ways:

God called, ‘No; its gunnery practice out at sea,
just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be: All nations striving strong to make Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters They do no more for Christe’s sake than you who are helpless in such matters.

1

2

3
For one, men have succumbed to madness, consumed with creating massive bombs, flamethrowers, and submarines, in order to make war bloodier, devising ways to kill more people faster. The thundering roar is, however, a signal, preparation for World War I, the Great War, a worldwide conflict that will become one of the most brutally violent in history. To confuse the end of time with the terrifying roar of guns suggests that this war indeed would become the end of the world to the countless who perished, and would seem the same for those who lived through it. So profound is this disturbance that God confirms with clarity that the enormous guns of war rival the threats of Hell itself:

That this is not the judgment-hour
for some of them’s a blessed thing,
for if it were they’d have to scour
Hell’s floor for so much threatening.⁴

The comparative image of having to scour, roam, and search the floor of Hell to atone for such threatening is riveting: the human-made tools of destruction create a terrible force to rival the horror of the place of eternal condemnation. This war will prove to be a hell, exacting a nightmarish death toll on Europe that scorches the earth and leaves some of it unrecognizable.⁵

In this study, two specific wars, the American Civil War and World War I, will be considered through the voices of writers who wanted and needed to speak about them. Primarily through poetry, but including letters and diaries, these writers speak of how war violently disturbs their world. These two conflicts, just forty-nine years apart, could not have been more different. Society’s rapidly changing structure, attitudes, and values were
profound. So was the effect on all of those who considered the cost and uncertain future created by these wars.

Depictions of the deplorable conditions, questions about God, and patriotism, fundamental issues about the value of life and death are included in these selections. As revealed through these works, war is convulsive and world-changing. The disturbing alarm of the guns serves to awaken the writers’ spirit and conscience, reaching across miles and generations to teach us what we are willing to learn.

In the twenty-first century we have the benefit of hindsight, with countless wars over thousands of years to study. From early historical records, war and fighting have had a central place in the human experience. Even inspired by unspeakable acts of violence, the elevated words of prose and poetry have given their greatest expression to the dreams and visions of Homer to the heroic soldier-poets of World War I and beyond. The voices from the battlefield carry solid credibility because it is they that can tell us what governments and leaders have not always been willing to tell us, the truth about the purpose, conduct, and progress of war. Like us, the writers either in or observing armed conflicts seek to understand the nature and process of war, and through their eloquence, others may thoughtfully consider the consequences of what we are doing when we unleash this power on the world. Poems, letters, and diaries are all expressions of our human need to tell a story. French writer and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre found that need to be a fundamental human characteristic. He wrote that “a man is always teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a
Because total war leaves no one untouched, our collective stories are most important to share. Those writers on the front lines, who want to provide wisdom and warning from a direct confrontation with war, contribute a truly indispensible gift to society in helping us learn from our decisions and experiences. World War I English soldier-poet Wilfred Owen, who saw the worst of war, asserted, “All a poet can do today is warn…that is why the poet must be truthful.”

University of Virginia professor Mark Edmundson likewise says that “works that matter work differently. Such works, in history, philosophy, psychology, religious studies, and literature can do many things, but preeminent among them is their capacity to offer truth.” Thus when we read, we can find sublime pleasure, wisdom, and warning, among other benefits, and all are undergirded by the serious quest for truth. We also seek to understand ourselves and enlarge our existence through experiencing secondhand adventures. Here we can participate in experiences we might never have. At a most fundamental level, we find that we are intellectually and emotionally awakened by great writing.

The cyclical nature of war is likely to continue indefinitely for many reasons: greed, conquest, revenge and glory. Journalist Evan Thomas in a Newsweek essay, “Why Men Love War,” writes “War has been, for almost all peoples and all times, the purest test of manhood. It is a thrilling addiction and a wretched curse”-‘a force that gives us meaning,’ “as former New York Times war correspondent Chris Hedges has written-‘and the ruination of peoples and nations.’” It is because of war’s nature that all are shaken like those souls in the graveyard. And so writers must write. What they create with its
quality, sense of urgency, and ability to speak forcefully to current and future generations, make it potent and relevant. These are words with power. These are words on fire.
CHAPTER 2
WHY WE ARE HERE

In *Huckleberry Finn* Huck wants to know about the long-lived feud between his family, the Grangerfords, and another aristocratic family, the Shepherdsons:

Huck: “What was the trouble about, Buck?-land?”
Buck: “I reckon maybe-I don’t know.”
Huck: Well who done the shooting? –Was it a Grangerford or a Shepherdson?”
Buck: “Laws how do I know? It was so long ago.”
Huck: ‘Don’t anybody know?”
Buck: “Oh yes pa knows, I reckon, and some of the other old folks; but they don’t know now, what the row was about in the first place.”

Mark Twain, “Huckleberry Finn.”

This question brings into sharp relief why it is helpful to know our history, what we are fighting over, and why. Besides carving out a living, exacting revenge appears to be the primary motivation in life for these prominent and proud families. This innocent dialogue, though, brings to the surface an essential question, “why?” Here two boys talk with their young minds full of adventure and dreams, and yet through them, Mark Twain draws us to consider the irrationality of conflict. Tragically and soon after, these families wipe each other out in a bloody shootout, and when Huck then comes across the senseless carnage of these people to whom he has become attached, he recognizes that it may have been an innocent action on his part that ignited this final fight. If he had known more of this intra-family history before, his question “why” may have been answered, and he could have tried in his own way to help stem that tide of destruction.
This chapter is concerned with some fundamentals of war, including a general history of how we arrived here, where we are today, as well as brief overviews of the American Civil War and World War I. The following chapters will explore some noteworthy differences in time and setting between both wars, as well as the strong similarities between the soldiers who experience extraordinary highs and lows in the most difficult of circumstances imaginable. Additionally, this study will include how the complex concepts of home and faith sustained and sometimes challenged those who fought.

War can be defined as “open armed conflict as between nations and any active hostility or struggle.” Brian Orend calls what qualifies as war, “actual, intentional, and widespread armed conflict between political communities.” According to Professor Andrew Fiala, “…wars are human activities in which groups of people are killed by other groups of people: and this killing has some political meaning, that is, it is about a struggle for power, legitimacy, and/or ideology.”

James Boswell, an eighteenth century jurist, commented in an essay, “On War,” on what he saw as the “horrid irrationality of war” after observing Venetian munitions workers at their craft. He was struck by the “shortsightedness…of human beings, who were thus soberly preparing the instruments of destruction of their own species.” He observes, “Were there any good produced by war which could in any way or any degree compensate its direful effects…but we find that war is followed by no general good whatever. The power, the glory, or wealth of a very few may be enlarged.” Boswell’s sobering observation, it could be argued, is applicable to any society in any era. Not
everyone, however, finds war repugnant. Some, in fact, delight in it like World War I British calvaryman and poet Julian Grenfell, who reveled in hand to hand combat. He gushed, “I adore war. It is like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I have never been so well or happy.”

Author T.S. Elliot, however, is more pragmatic, “War is not a life, it is a situation, one which may neither be ignored nor accepted, a problem to be met with ambush and stratagem, enveloped or scattered.”

The history of war appears to be almost as old as humankind, according to William Eckhard. There is a Mesolithic cave painting at Morela la Vella Spain that is believed to be the oldest depiction of men fighting, c 20,000 BC. The best estimate is that war began somewhere between seven and nine thousand years ago-although it could have been much earlier. The earliest military forces for which hard evidence is available are those of Mesopotamia, specifically the cluster of city states (Ur, Kish, Lagash, Erech, Suruppak, Larsa, and Umma) known collectively as Sumer. Most forms of development were significantly correlated with most forms of militarism. The more highly developed societies were generally the more militaristic: “The more primitive the people, the less warlike it appears to be.” Bands of gathering-hunters, numbering about 25-50 people each, could hardly have made much of a war. There were not enough people to fight, no arms with which to fight, and nothing to fight about.

The evidence is overwhelming that warfare did not come into its own until after the emergence of civilization. Civilizations, empires, and wars tended to grow together and share a number of key characteristics. The desire to dominate and exploit others, in order to benefit some at the expense of others, seemed to prevail. In these cases, there
seemed to be processes which obstructed their own progress. In short, they were all processes of self-destruction, the nature of which was hidden by self-deception in the form of some ideology or other.\textsuperscript{12}

Among the common reasons war has been pursued is the confidence grounded in the classic idea of excellence as portrayed by heroes from history or mythology. In fact, the love of honor in the opinion of Xenophon, fifth century Athenian officer and biographer of Socrates, is the defining characteristic of human beings as opposed to dumb animals.\textsuperscript{13} A word for excellence, generally rendered virtue, is \textit{arête}. This term, according to Aristotle, is relative. It meant being good at something, particularly a vocation or skill, which included fighting. Generals, shoemakers, and even slaves had a degree of \textit{arête}. It was understood to stand for the kind of excellence most prized by a particular community.\textsuperscript{14} In Pericles’s funeral oration over Athenian dead in the first year of the Peloponnesian war, the Athenian leader boasts that “we welcome talent to every arena of achievement, nor do we make our choices on the grounds of class but on the grounds of excellence alone…for we do not place our trust in secret weapons but in our own faithful courage.”\textsuperscript{15}

The activity of war reflects that timeless confidence in one’s ability, an excellence that one trusts will help them prevail over adversaries. This attitude still thrives today. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was sold as an exercise that would be decisive and, to ease any concerns of American citizens, the defeated country would greet them as victors, it was assured, and pay for its own reconstruction. The administration unfortunately had not
prepared for an occupation and met remarkable resistance that cost thousands of
American lives and nearly a trillion dollars.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the most destructive modern wars that left many cities ravaged was the
American Civil War that was fought from 1861-1865. It was unique in that it was a major
conflict dividing the country along northern and southern states in a still young nation.
The Civil War is remembered for many things, especially the tactic of charging the
enemy. To succeed could provide the element of surprise and overwhelm the enemy.
Unfortunately, many of the charges were met with marksmen rifle fire, slaughtering
divisions in masses. This war took more American lives than any war in history. The
number of Americans killed was approximately 620,000, almost as many killed in the
combined total from the American Revolutionary War to the 2003 War in Iraq. It so
divided the people of the United States that in some families, brother fought against
brother. The war’s terrible bloodshed left a heritage of grief and bitterness. Towns, farms,
industry and trade, and the lives of men, women, and children were ruined.\textsuperscript{17}

The war was a conflict between the U.S. Government and a group of states that
had seceded from the Union. The southern states had broken away to form the
Confederate States of America. The U.S. government sought to maintain the union,
insisting that states were not permitted to secede. The issue behind secession was slavery.
The South’s economy relied heavily on the labor of African-American slaves. Southern
farmers feared that the federal government would try to limit or end slavery. In 1861, 19
states were free states where slavery was prohibited and 15 were slaves states.\textsuperscript{18}
Most historians agree that the war had a number of causes. They note, for example, that northern and southern states had been drifting apart because of sectional differences, dissimilarities between the two areas in culture and economy. They also point to tensions between the federal government and the states over the extent of the federal government’s powers. In the south, there was a long growing season ideal for raising tobacco, and later cotton. These crops required intense labor to plant, maintain, and harvest. Because there was a shortage of people and need for labor, they turned to slaves. Most northerners farmed but enjoyed shorter growing seasons. They had no plantations and found that hiring immigrant workers was cheaper than acquiring slaves.¹⁹

The American Civil War was like no other in America’s history, perhaps like no other conflict in the history of mankind to that point. Waged on a scale hitherto unknown, employing horrible new technology that made widespread slaughter the new norm of combat, the war did not so much settle the differences between north and south as exhaust both sides. Year after murderous year, killing, maiming, and injuring an incomprehensible number of fellow citizens and devastating large portions of the nation, Americans on both sides were forced finally to confront the real price of their inability to settle their differences.²⁰

The uniqueness of Civil War era literature was inspired by the war. Poetry at the time of the civil war had an audience modern poets can only envy. Nineteenth-century Americans expected poetry to be served up on every occasion and devoured it when it was set before them. At that time, poetry was a public act, appended routinely to political oratory, to celebratory occasions, and to sermons, memorized in school, and recited by
children…it was expected to be didactic and uplifting and if it made an audience weep, so much the better.²¹

Only 49 years from the end of the Civil War, the major world powers found themselves caught in a whirlwind of war with huge human and environmental costs. The events that set the wheels in motion for World War I was the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand. An international outcry and calls for reprisal followed. The Great War, as it is often called, had its origins in developments from the 1800’s. Issues simmering under the surface caused tensions based on the rise of nationalism, the build-up of military might, the competition for colonies, and a system of military alliances. This unleashed hostility among tense European powers; Russia, France, England, Japan, and Italy clashed with Serbia, Austria, Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria. Throughout Europe jubilation greeted the outbreak of war. No general war had been fought since the time of Napoleon and the horrors of modern warfare were not yet understood.²²

At the war’s inception, many young men were excited about joining the infantry, optimistically believing the official prediction of a short and decisive conflict. World War I, which lasted from 1914-1918, was the first truly total war that pitted entire societies against one another, and it left Europe decimated and on the brink of utter collapse. An entire generation of European youth were slaughtered; centuries of political, social, and economic traditions were all but eroded and destroyed.²³

World War I is often referred to as the Great War; for despite the greater magnitude of its more truly global successor, it represented a far more radical crisis in
Western Civilization. In particular, it meant that the traditional mythology of heroism and the hero had ceased to be viable, even though heroic deeds could be and were performed in abundance.\textsuperscript{24} Paul Fussell in \textit{The Great War and Modern Memory} observes, “Every war is ironic because every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends.”\textsuperscript{25} When the British entered the Great War, Henry James sounded a grave warning, referring to it as “the plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness.”\textsuperscript{26}

One significant difference between the Civil War and World War I is how close the best writers were to the battlefield. In Civil War America, no great literature, “no one great, sweeping poem-no American \textit{Iliad}-ever emerged from this momentous event in the lives and imaginations of Americans,” according to professor J.D. McClatchy. “All the arts, in fact, shied away. The most talented novelists of the day-from Henry James to Mark Twain to William Dean Howells-avoided the subject.” He continues, “Our leading painters were doing Hudson Valley scenes. Our strongest composers were studying in Europe. Many of the best poets were writing moralistic meditations on nature. Explanations have been advanced. Chief among them is that the war, with its mechanized brutality and enormity, simply overwhelmed the talents of contemporary artists to portray what was happening.”\textsuperscript{27}

In World War I, however, some of the best writers of the time were officers or infantrymen serving on the battlefield. British Officer Wilfred Owen was thoughtful and gifted, developing rapidly into a major poet. He died leading his troops.\textsuperscript{28} Other English writers, Julian Grenfell and Rupert Brooke, for example, died before the flower of their
potential could bloom. Grenfell was celebrated as a Renaissance man who excelled at
everything. He was a scholar, sportsman, and outstanding athlete. Both Grenfell and
Brooke were young Oxford trained scholars and maturing writers. Grenfell was an
aristocrat, and an exceptional athlete. Brooke, a popular and magnetic young scholar, was
celebrated in part for his for his good looks and promise. Grenfell died in combat and
Brooke from blood poisoning en route to battle.29

Generally, Civil War poetry, as will be shown, is more patriotic, rhythmical, and
melodic than World War I poetry. To some critics, it is considered second rate. In
contrast, a harsh realism at the dawn of the 20th century was expressed by those literally
in the trenches where the reader is not spared the gruesome detail of suffering and death.
In a span of just over two generations, expressions of loss and suffering commingled with
hope, were replaced by the sound of bombs crashing down in trenches. Then darkness set
in.
CHAPTER 3

IN THE TRENCHES

AFTER EACH WAR

SOMEONE HAS TO CLEAR UP

PUT THINGS IN ORDER

BY ITSELF WON’T HAPPEN

Wislawa Szymborska, “End and Beginning.”

In the poem, “End and Beginning” Wislawa Szymborska uses spare language with concrete imagery to scan a town that war has blown to pieces. One’s eyes are led as by a movie director, allowing first observation and then contemplation about what has happened there, and then moves again. In this place, war has arrived, passed on, and it is now up to survivors to repair the devastation. A quietness is central to the sense of shock still prevalent following the force of this malevolent aggression:

Somebody’s got to push rubble to te highway shoulder making wayfor the carts filled up with corpses.

The most pressing need for survivors is to clean up the carnage that is so widespread that it impedes the local transportation routes. This is necessary before any healing or rebuilding can commence:

Someone might trudge through muck and ashes, sofa springs, splintered glass and blood soaked rugs.

As described here, the impress of war is spread out like a blanket so that one can easily walk upon a remnant of something shattered or destroyed. These remnants are part of an individual’s belongings that are now simply debris to be discarded. Following additional
descriptions of needed help in this town of despair, the message shifts to the nature of war and its ability to draw attention away, as well as to a place in time:

This is not photogenic
and takes years.
All the cameras have left already
for another war.⁴

The poet does not need to explain that war disproportionately affects civilians and the innocent. She does not need to remind readers that casualties can soon be forgotten. In a few words she has credibly accomplished that. What she accomplishes is the telling of a desperate story, as that of earlier Civil War and World War I soldiers did, whose trauma and pain needed to be expressed.

The previous chapter featured a brief look at war, its history, and the conflict within those who experience and others who contemplate war. The purpose of this chapter is not to pronounce judgment on those who cause or participate in war but, by offering examples of great writing from the Civil War and World War I, to show how the great force and consequences of war are enormous. While Szymborska’s poem effectively and necessarily delineates the aftermath of war, this chapter’s writings speak of the fighting conditions of each respective war. These writings also include the search for meaning amid the huge personal costs in lives and injury, and they show how the result often mirrors that of the waste land scene described in “End and Beginning.” This is relevant because many civilians cannot understand the difficulty or costliness of war if someone is not reporting it truthfully. Poetry is the primary vehicle employed in telling these stories, although there are also personal letters and diaries of veterans. The following entries provide valuable insight into the war.
A surgeon with the Army of the Potomac, Dr. John Gardner Perry, wrote to his wife, “The heat is intolerable, and the roads are covered with dust six or eight inches deep, which with every gust of wind sweeps up, covering everything with a dirty, white coating.” Just days later he wrote, “I am up to my neck in work. It is slaughter, slaughter, slaughter…Horses and mules die by the hundreds from continued hard labor and scant feed. The roads are strewn with them, and the decay of these, with that of human bodies in the trenches, causes malaria of the worst kind.”

“It was not only battle itself that produced the remarkable death toll,” according to A Survey of American History. “It was disease, to which the miserable conditions in which both armies had to live made soldiers highly vulnerable, and for which only the most primitive medical knowledge or facilities were available. Even minor battle injuries, moreover, could lead to death through infection or other complications because of the inadequate health care. Despite the efforts of such volunteer organizations as the American Sanitary Commission, which provided crucial assistance to the Union armies in nursing and other health needs, military medicine on both sides remained primitive.

The combat itself in the Civil War was of incredible intensity. After the Battle of Antietam, according to some observers, one could have walked all the way across the vast battlefield atop the bodies of the fallen soldiers; the bare ground was almost entirely covered with the dead.

Pennsylvania Volunteer member, Private Oliver W. Norton describes in a letter, his experiences of a retreat from Robert E. Lee’s army in 1862 at Gaines Mill, Virginia, “Then came the retreat across the river; rebels on three sides of us left no choice but to
run or be killed or be taken prisoners…Sunday night we lay in a cornfield in the rain, without tent or blanket.” Then hiding along the James River, “Tuesday the same-six days exposed to a constant fire of shot and shell, till almost night….”

New Hampshire Infantry Captain Thomas Livermore describes the 1862 battle of White Oak Swamp: “The enemy’s fire was unremitting, and from noon until dark we endured the slow torture of seeing our comrades killed, mangled, and torn around us, while we could not fire a shot, as our business was to lie and wait to repel attacks and protect our batteries. With every discharge of the enemy’s guns, the shells would scream over our heads and bury themselves in the woods beyond, burst over us and deal death in the ranks, or ricochet over the plain, killing whenever they struck a line….”

Maine Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain recalls that on December 13, 1862: “…out of that silence from the battle’s crash and roar rose new sounds more appalling still; rose or fell, you knew not which, or whether from the earth or air; a strange ventriloquism, of which you could not locate the source, a smothered moan that seemed to come from distances beyond…cries for help, pierced by shrieks of paroxysm; some begging for a drop of water; some calling on God for pity…delirious, dreamy voices murmuring loved names….”

Chamberlain then describes his night of fleeting sleep after that exhausting day: “Except the few sentries along the front, the men had fallen asleep-the living with the dead. At last, out-wearied and depressed with the desolate scene, my own strength sunk, and I moved two dead men a little and lay down between them, making a pillow of the
breast of a third. The deepening chill drove many forth to take the garments of those who could no longer need them, that they might keep themselves alive.”

Major Abner R. Small, on July 3, 1863 recalls: “…a rebel cannon flashed, and a puff of smoke blew and hung on the still summer air; then another; and then from all the rebel line there was one vast roar, and a storm of screaming metal swept across the valley. Our guns blazed and thundered in reply. The earth groaned and trembled. The air, thick with smoke and sulphurous vapor, almost suffocated the troops in support of the batteries. Through the murk we heard hoarse commands, the bursting of shells, cries of agony. We saw caissons hit and blown up, splinters flying, men flung to the ground, horses torn and shrieking. Solid shot hit the ground in our front, sprayed battalions with fountains of dirt, and went plunging into the ranks, crushing flesh and bone.”

Hunger and privation were widespread during the war. War correspondent W. F. G. Shanks with the Union troops recorded the following: “Famine became a familiar friend… The men were put on quarter rations…Men cannot dig fortifications and fight very long on such rations; and the whole army was half famished. I have often seen hundreds of soldiers following behind the wagon trains which had just arrived, picking out of the mud the crumbs of bread, coffee, rice, etc., which were wasted from the boxes and sacks by the rattling of the wagons over the stones.”

George W. Pepper saw the destruction of Columbia, South Carolina, February, 1865: “The next morning at two o’clock, every street was burning, and the whole city was awfully and solemnly illuminated…. Old men pronounced it the most terrible scene they had ever beheld…scores who rose that morning with their thousands are now
penniless, homeless! Refined and cultivated ladies are seen, in beseeching attitudes, calling for help.\textsuperscript{13}

Civil War poetry often addressed the larger issues of patriotism, God’s justice and longing for the lost. A few poems, however, confronted the horrors and messiness of war as do the next two poems of the period.

Severn Teackle Wallace, a Maryland Quaker who was arrested and imprisoned for opposing slavery, dreaded the human cost of the looming Civil War as expressed in his poem, “A Prayer for Peace:”

\begin{quote}
From the lonely homes, where widowed beggary
and orphaned woe Fill their poor with urns
with tears; from trampled plains,
where the bright harvest
Thou has sent us rots-
The blood of them who should have garnered it
Calling to thee-from fields of carnage
where the foul-beaked vultures, sated,
flap their wings O’er crowded corpses\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Homes, urns, plains, bright harvest, and vibrant humanity, all that define a meaningful life have been reduced to carnage and sorrow. The only thing that prospers are the ‘foul beaked vultures.’ As the prayer is to God, he addresses the root of this evil:

\begin{quote}
The curse of war is on us. Greed and hate
Hungering for gold and blood; Ambition, bred
Of passionate vanity and sordid lusts,
Mad with the base desire of tyrannous sway
Over men’s souls and thoughts\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Wallace goes on to ask for God’s peace for all, not only for the sinful mentioned here, but also for the victims.
In “Balls Bluff,” American novelist, short story writer, and poet, Herman Melville, provides a compelling portrait of young soldiers’ march from home to war with great fanfare. There is a tension, however, between the pageantry and a sense of foreboding about what is likely to be lost:

One noonday, at my window in the town,
I saw a sight-saddest that eyes can see-
Young soldiers marching lustily
Unto the wars,
With fifes, and flags in mottoed pageantry;
While all the porches, walks, and doors
Were rich with ladies cheering royally.

Then a pang of reality hits the observer:
How should they dream that Death in rosy clime
Would come and thin their shining throng?
Youth feels immortal, like the gods sublime

Wakeful I mused, while in the street
Far footfalls died away till none were left.16

A common theme in Civil War poetry is the celebrated heroism of youth going to war. All of the incentives to fight and prevail are there: the love and appreciation of the town. Although the scene in Ball’s Bluff is celebratory, there is a pang of sorrow and premonition. Slowly, Melville quiets the honorable crowd, and the footsteps that fade become the eventual slaughter of those young men at Ball’s Bluff.

John W. De Forest, a Union Army Captain and novelist wrote a poem, “Campaigning” which is an unusually realistic poem for the Civil War period. Violent images of deadly bullets and explosive mortar shells are more threatening with human qualities of hissing, screeching, yelling, and tearing with iron claws:

I heard the bullet’s hiss,
Incessant, sharp and fell,
The keenest, deadliest note
That bursts from battle’s throat;
The piercing screech and jarring whirr
Of grape and canister;
And flying from afar, the shell
With changeful, throbbing, husky yell,
A demon tiger, leaping miles
To spread his iron claws
And tear the bleeding files;
While oft rose the charging cry
Of men who battled for a glorious cause
And died when it was beautiful to die.¹⁷

Deforest “wrote with precision and an eerie modernity,” according to Professor McClatchy.¹⁸ Deforest establishes first the threatening power of war weapons and their human characteristics and then, in contrast, the human spirit that at times resists, and at others dies honorably at their behest.

Some 50 years later another war, even more destructive than the Civil War, would create the horrors of the modern battlefield and the extraordinary poetry through which its participants tried to describe. Poets of World War I were highly literate. According to Bernard Bergonzi, who writes:

“In 1914 the English people were at a high pitch of literacy. The young officers had received a classical education and were very well read in English poetry, so that Shakespeare and Milton, Wordsworth and Keats, would be constantly quoted or alluded to when they wrote about the war. English poetry provided a sense of identity and continuity, a means of accommodating to life in a bizarre world as well as a source of consolation.”¹⁹

Paul Fussell quotes Theodor Ropp, who posited that the American Civil War was the first war, in which really large numbers of literate men fought as common soldiers.” Fussell adds, “by 1914 it was possible for soldiers to be not merely literate but vigorously literary, for the Great War occurred at a special historical moment when two ‘liberal’ forces were powerfully coinciding in England. On the one hand, the belief in the educative powers of classical and English literature was still extremely strong. On the other, the appeal of popular education and ‘self improvement’ was at its peak….
He continues:

There were few of any rank who had not been assured that the greatest of modern literatures was the English and who did not feel an appropriate pleasure in that assurance.” For that reason English literature stands out and is a central focus in understanding the lives of those who fought in the Great War.20

The conditions in the Great War ranged from tolerable to hideous. One of the most familiar images of this war is trenches. Dug deeply in wide segments into the ground, these protective barriers were the source of much of the war’s misery, and provide some of the famous imagery for poets who described them in chilling detail. While some German trenches were found to be safe and complete with home comforts, French and British trenches were sometimes indescribably horrific. Paul Fussell said that “filth, damp, infestations of lice and rats, and the odor of human waste and rotting bodies were constant companions.” It was estimated that there were about 25,000 miles of trenches, equal to a trench sufficient to circle the earth…designed to protect soldiers as they sought to secure their lines and advance on their enemies.21

Trenches were normally protected from surprise attack by razor sharp barbed wire. These wire entanglements were nearly impenetrable, and if one fell into them, they would effortlessly rip open one’s body, if not kill them quickly. One of the worst jobs was to install or neutralize them in the line of enemy fire. Soldiers called “volunteers” crawled through machine gun fire under the canopy of night, and with great care cut the wire so an advance on the enemy could begin.22 Writers had much to say about the trenches and the inhumanity found there.

One English soldier who wrote many poems on the nightmarish conditions of the trenches was Siegfried Sassoon, educated at Marlborough and Clare Colleges. Following
serious injury, he became harshly critical of the war and was hospitalized by military authorities for what they claimed was shell shock. 23

In “The Redeemer,” Sassoon provides a grim glimpse of hard trench life for the soldiers:

Darkness: the rain sluiced down;  
the mire was deep;  
It was past twelve on a mid-winters night,  
When peaceful folk in beds lay snug asleep;  
There with much work to do before the light,  
We lugged our clay-sucked boots  
as best we might  
Along the trench…We were soaked, chilled,  
and wretched every one. 24

The imagery is powerful and effective. Soldiers are vulnerable in the darkness that can shroud danger, and the normal act of walking becomes an exhausting and difficult lugging of burdensome boots. The water that sluices suggests the soft rain heard by those peaceful folk, but the speaker’s curse is to endure water vigorously channeled water down the trench walls, unmanageable, and filthy. Wilfred Owen, another English officer and poet, in a letter home, recounted an experience in the trenches, “We came to where the trenches had been blown flat out and had to go over the top. It was of course dark, too dark, and the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, 3, 4, and 5 feet deep, relieved only by craters full of water. Men have been known to drown in them. Many stuck in the mud and only got on by leaving their waders, equipment, and in some cases their clothes.” 25
The first section in Owen’s “The Sentry” builds with the intensity of rain accelerating, deteriorating conditions in a former German trench, and since the enemy has discovered that they are in that location, a relentless attack commences:

Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime,
Kept slush waist-high and rising hour by hour,
And choked the steps too thick with clay to climb.
What murk of air remained stank old, and sour….

The second part shows the helplessness of those fighting against both their enemies and also against the forces of nature that threaten to swallow them. The helpless falling of a sentry in the treacherous mud that will trap him at the bottom is hastened by the falling water. This scene’s power comes from the desperation and heroics to save a comrade under the canopy of raging battle and deafening attacks:

Down the steep steps came thumping and sploshing
In the flood, deluging muck—the sentry’s body…

And then,

Sending a scout to beg a stretcher somewhere,
And flound’ring about To other posts under the shrieking air:

The sentry has been shot, blinded, and swallowed up by the earth, but retrieved through some great acts of bravery. The poet concludes, however, that:

Through the dense din, I say, we heard him shout ‘I see your Lights!’ But ours had long died out.

In “Cramped in that Funneled Hole,” Wilfred Owen’s image of the trenches is described as a nightmarish, abstract hell:

“…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
...and the dead are smelt
Under the mud where long ago they fell...“28

Although the description is a generalized abstraction, in contrast with his accounts of trench warfare, it has chilling and rich imagery: jaws with a jagged row of dangerous teeth, suffocating and sticky phlegm, and a smelting, a melting down in the pit by those whom Hell conquered. This is a most hopeless scene where men have no chance for reprieve and with no mention of redemption: they are the nameless, lost forever.

In “A Working Party,” Sassoon relates a story of a casualty of the trenches made especially poignant when describing his family:

Three hours ago he blundered up the trench,
Sliding and poising, groping with his boots;
Sometimes he tripped and lurched against the walls…
stepping along barred trench-boards, often splashing
Wretchedly where the sludge was ankle-deep.

He was a young man with a meagre wife
And two small children in a Midland town;
He showed their photographs to all his mates,
And they considered him a decent chap.

That night when he was busy at his job
Of piling bags along the parapet…
He pushed another bag along the top,
Craning his body outward; then a flare
Gave one white glimpse of No Man’s Land and wire;
And as he dropped his head the instant split
His startled life with lead, and all went out.29

Sassooon’s choice of words reinforces the sense of insignificance and isolation of individuals: “blundered,” “young,” “meager,” and “decent,” the soldier is identified only by characteristics. He blunders in the poor working conditions, is young, has a poor and gaunt wife, and is considered decent. There is nothing exceptional about him, even his
town in the English Midlands is not significant enough for mention. When hit by enemy fire, he dies as quietly as he lived, and is then forgotten.

Another work by Sassoon, “The Distant Song,” includes introspection by a soldier who is becoming numb from the endless privation and misery. He is awakened to hope and comfort by the simple music of a scavenging bird, although he feels separated from it:

He stood in the gray trench and longed for home:
Chilled with the dreary morning and the rain,
He shivered, wondering if they’d soon stand down;
For he’d been getting wire out half the night,
And crawling round the craters on patrol.

There seemed no sort of comfort left in life;
Only a stupid greed for food and sleep,
And angry grudge against the filth and noise.

He listened to the tinkling drops of rain
On his steel helmet; then he thought of roofs,
And soldiers snug in billets, warm and clean.
...a blackbird sang; And suddenly he was aware of spring-
So he stood staring from his ghastly ditch,
While paradise was in the distant song. 30

In this poem, day brings gray skies, not much better than the night when the soldier performs his dangerous work with the barbed wire. Sassoon uses related and concrete words that intensify, including “chilled,” “shivered,” “crawling,” and then “no comfort.” Then, from these conditions, he shifts to consciousness of his mood that includes a “stupid greed” and “an angry grudge.” These are effective turns of phrases since his human needs include a desperate “greed” “for food and sleep, and his “grudge” is really an understatement regarding his current deprivation. By isolating his “staring” from his ghastly ditch, there is no sense of pleasure. Staring at something glorious can
bring a corresponding sense of pleasure. But that is absent here. His awareness of the
distant singing of the blackbird does not negate or change his feeling that there is no
comfort. In fact, he does not say that there is no comfort, but that there seems to be no
comfort. The blackbird’s singing reminds him that paradise is in a song, “a distant song.”

Richard Aldington was a British writer most popular for his imagist works that
“show a feeling for the beauty of natural objects, the human body, or physical passions
which he found best expressed through the art and mythology of classical Greece.”

“In The Trenches” he writes:

…each rush and crash
Of mortar and shell,
Each bitter shriek of bullet
That tears the wind like a blade,
Each wound in the breast of earth,
Of Demeter, our Mother,
Wound us also,
Sever and rend the fine fabric
Of the wings of our frail souls

Aldington’s “In the Trenches” removes itself from the details of the trenches but provides
a general impression of wars’ immeasurable cost to humankind as well as the earth. The
three transitive verbs, “rush” and “crash,” and “shriek,” are clearly defined by the
corresponding three images: “mortar,” “bullet,” and “blade.” Then moving from literal to
figurative language, the interrelatedness of humankind and of “mother earth” both are
harmed by the violence of war. And yet in his poem, “Bombardment,” Aldington
provides an example “of the way in which nature provided constant solace to the poet:32

The fifth day there came a hush;
We left our holes
And looked above the wreckage of the earth
To where the white clouds moved in silent lines
Across the untroubled blue.  

In “Limbo,” Robert Graves, an English soldier-poet and novelist, paints a familiar scene of trench life:

After a week spent under raining skies,
In horror, mud and sleeplessness, a week
Of bursting shells, of blood and hideous cries
And the ever watchful sniper: where the reek
Of death offends the living…
And then one night relief comes, and we go
Miles back into the sunny cornland where
Babies like tickling, and where tall white horses
Draw the plough leisurely in quiet courses

In “Limbo,” the poem provides a great tension and release: it could be read as two poems. The familiar horrors of war, the incessant rain, treacherous mud, deafening shells, and cries all rob one of sleep. The smell of death permeates the area and is offensive. It reminds the living of those who have been taken by the enemy. Then there is a dramatic shift as the rotation from trench duty and battle sends them to happier places and provides a complete reversal of living. Returning home, one finds sunny cornland instead of rain, and instead of shrill desperate cries of the wounded, tickled babies giggling angelically. In one of the most dramatic contrasts, the tense vigil of sniping is balanced by the quiet, methodical pulling of the plow “leisurely in quiet courses.”

In his sketch, “The Immortals,” Isaac Rosenberg, an English soldier-poet who died in battle, describes how lice made the lives of trench duty soldiers miserable:

I killed them, but they would not die.
Yea! All the day and all the night
For them I could not rest nor sleep,
Nor guard from them nor hide in flight.
Then in my agony I turned
And made my hands red in their gore.
In vain-for faster than I slew
They rose more cruel than before

I killed and killed with slaughter mad;
I killed till all my strength was gone.
And still they rose to torture me.
For Devils only die for fun. 35

In “The Immortals” Rosenberg isolates just one of countless miseries that were part of trench life. The syntax is parallel to any battle story. He fights the lice on the same terms, passion, and even desperation as he would against any enemies on the field of battle. The image of lice returning in greater numbers with every slaughter is especially effective.

This vision is reminiscent of the ancient Hydra in Greek mythology that grows two heads back for every one that is cut off.

These trench poems by different writers recount the horror and dismay at being trapped in treacherous, confining, and disgusting holes. Many other poems illuminate the general misery of fighting in wretched conditions in a war that never seems to end.

In Owen’s “Exposure,” soldiers endure the unbearable:

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east wind
that knives us
Watching, we hear the mad gusts
tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men
among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly,
the flickering gunnery rumbles

He continues,

We only know war lasts, rain soaks,
and clouds sag stormy,
Deep into grassier ditches
to-night, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands,
puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels
in their shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces.
All their eyes are ice….

Owen’s exposure features some concrete images, including icy wind that “knives,” gusts that with impunity tug on barbed wire, gunnery that flickers like a fire, and guns that rumble like an earthquake. The following sequence of lines brings one to a quiet place. Soldiers face the freezing night after a day of deafening battle but there is no relief. Even the grave diggers shake from the cold. The eyes that are ice are not identified just as those of the dead. They may also belong to the living that are preparing the dead for burial and certainly for anyone in the party who must suffer through a bitter night.

In “A Life” Richard Aldington narrates a poignant story about a poor artist-boy with great talent and promise who leaves his beloved work and heads off to war:

He was a peasant boy
With sharp eyes and beaked nose;
His hair was too long, ragged
And a little greasy.
He was generous, indifferent to comforts,
Lived on bread, onions and apples-
Worked in a shed under a railway arch…
His hands were mostly filthy
With marble-dust and clay.
In all his sketches and statues
He made you see something fresh…

Then the war came.
He went off with a joke:
“I’ll be back safe in three months:
I’ll steal the Picassos from Dusseldorf!”
He went to war, was injured, promoted, and returned to combat.
Then:
A few more weeks-
He was shot in the head.
Quenched that keen, bright wit,
Horribly crushed the wide forehead,
Limp and useless the able hands
Of our one young sculptor.
I wish he were not dead;
He was wholesome, his dirt and his genius.

I sit here, cursing over my Greek-
Anacreon says: “War spares the bad, not the good.”
I believe him.  

Here Aldington narrates a sense of great loss through a defined comparison between the character’s inward and outward qualities. Eccentric as he was poor, this generous boy could produce art that was genuinely fine. Aldington focuses on specific features that indicate that he was not particularly attractive. What is emphasized is the unkempt appearance, greasy, ragged hair and filthy hands, that, with a minimal diet, are an undesirable combination. What was so right about him was the way he could make you “see something fresh.” And now that he is gone, the memories are fond: the keen kind wit, wholesomeness, strong spirit and eagerness to answer his country’s call to arms. Now, in retrospect, his dirt as much as his genius is remembered as “wholesome.”

Aldington’s “Escape” is a call for release from a world of war that has ruined all in its path:

Escape, let the soul escape from this
insanity, this insult to God, from this
ruined landscape, these murdered
fields, this bitterness, this agony,
from this harsh death and disastrous
mutilation, from this filth and labour,
this stench of dead bodies and
unwashed living bodies-escape, let the soul escape!
He concludes,

There, perhaps, among flowers,
at twilight, under the glimmer of
the first stars, it will find a
sensation of a quiet almost kindly
universe, indifferent to this
festering activity.38

As before in his poem “In the Trenches” Aldington takes a step back from the action, looking in. A direct statement, “insult to God,” carries the weight of the “insanity” that is the source of all the calamity. Sandwiched between the first and last parallel lines in the stanza, there is a cry for the souls’ escape from the toxicity of war. The pronoun “this” anchors “insanity,” “insult,” “ruined landscape,” “bitterness,” “harsh death,” “filth,” “stench,” and includes one deviation, “these murdered fields.” For all these reasons, the soul seeks release from the body. In the last stanza, the mood quiets and becomes hopeful. Away from the bright glare of the day’s carnage, twilight brings in resting “flowers,” “stars,” and “quiet.” Aldington reminds one that the universe still contains pockets of respite and escape that the burdened soul seeks.

Charles Hamilton Sorley was born in Scotland but lived most of his life in England though he never completely identified himself with England. On both sides of his family were serious writers and religious thinkers. In his poem “Deus Loquitur,” Sorley imagines looking at man through God’s eyes, surveying wayward mankind. It seems to suggest in wartime God criticizes men because they return to Him in desperation rather than love:

That’s what I am: a thing of no desire,
With no path to discover and no plea
To offer up, so be my altar fire
May burn before the hearth continuously,  
To be  
For wayward men a steadfast light to see.

They know me in the morning of their days,  
But ere noontide forsake me, to discern  
New lore and hear new riddles, But moonrays  
Bring them back footsore, humble, bent, a-burn  
To turn  
And warm them by my fire which they did spurn.  

Sorley’s simple images of warmth, light, and darkness serve as metaphors for the complex relationship between humankind and their Creator. Life affirming warmth of a hearth is an eternal gift for men if they recognize it as such. It is also light and wisdom. The mid-life distractions of success and other temptations draw one away. It is the feet that carry one away and the “moonrays” bring the same feet, now sore, back to recognition of the Creator.

It is evident that there is a continuity in the writings of those who suffered through trench life as well as the bloody World War I battles. Each participant experienced a war that was as brutal as it was exhausting. The battle at Verdun, France, in 1916, for example, was the longest battle of all time. For ten months millions of shells rained down on the city and surrounding battlefield, as the French and Germans stayed locked in the most terrible endurance test of the war. In other battles, assaults that cost hundreds of thousands of lives produced advances of only hundreds of yards.

Another theme is the futility of war, costing the lives of countless youth and providing no distinguishable benefit. Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth” gives voice to that despair:
What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns…
Nor any voice for 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 glimmer 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.\(^{41}\)

Owen was compelled to write specifically of the soldiers and their honor. His anger reveals itself in the recognition that the sounds of celebration and honor for the dead soldiers come only from the awful thunder of great weapons. The promise and exuberance of youth are lost and the drawing of blinds recalls the Biblical image from King Solomon about the inevitable dimming the windows of the eyes.

Like the corrosive sense of disillusionment, the feeling of dread can overtake one’s soul as the storm of war approaches. Owen’s “1914” is a premonition of doom similar to “Channel Firing” where just the preparation for war is shattering:

    War broke: and now the winter of the world
    with perishing great darkness closes in.
    The foul tornado, centred in Berlin
    Over all the width of Europe whirled,
    Rending the sails of progress.
    Now begin famines of thought and feeling.\(^ {42}\)

Owen in “1914” effectively uses imagery to portray the curse of war beginning to envelope the world. The winter brings in the darkness where vision and mobility are restricted. The “foul tornado” tears the “sails of progress” that were the hope of making the world better. Now thought and feeling are the casualties, as in Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” where ignorance has primacy over those who fight.
When dread and disillusionment overtake those under great stress, there are at times tragic results. Sassoon’s “Suicide in the Trenches” is among the darkest visions of how young lives are wasted in war and reveals bitter resentment towards those who claim to appreciate them:

I knew a simple soldier boy  
Who grinned at life in empty joy,  
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,  
And whistled early with the lark  
In winter trenches, cowed and glum,  
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,  
He put a bullet through his brain.  
No one spoke of him again.  
You smug faced crowds with kindling eye  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by  
Sneak home and pray you’ll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.  

Near the time this poem was written Sassoon said, “War is a scourge; yet war has made us wise, and fighting for freedom we are free.” From his perspective as an officer he expresses the conflicting feelings toward war that caused so much carnage, yet was found necessary and irresistible. Henri Gaudier Brzeska states, “I have been fighting for two months and I can now gauge the intensity of life. Human masses move, are destroyed and crop up again. This war is a great remedy. In the individual it kills arrogance, self-esteem, pride.”

This “remedy” is also illuminated by Julian Grenfell, a English soldier and budding poet who, although adventurous and outwardly fearless, nonetheless was not immune from doubts and fears. In his diary on February 6, 1915, he wrote, “Funny how tired the war feeling and the sound of guns makes one. Nerves? No, just the strain of excitement.” A few days later, however, he records: “Night when I heard noise of bomb
dropping on top of dug-out. Petrified. Lost self control-lay still, clenching my hands for 20 secs. Asked what it was. ‘Rum jar thrown away.’”

Robert Graves, like Julian Grenfell, wrote poignantly of the anxious moments in anticipation of battle. In “The Morning before the Battle,” he feels the chill of death even as he prepares:

To-day, the fight: my end is very soon,
And sealed the warrant limiting my hours:
I knew it walking yesterday at noon.
Down a deserted garden full of flowers.
...Carelessly sang, pinned roses on my breast,
Reached for a cherry-bunch-and then, then, Death
Blew through the garden from the north and east
And blighted every beauty with chill breath.

Here, natural Beauty is recognized and nature still moves, but it harnesses that nature, negating every pleasure, creating the fear and uncertainty of the future.

In “Into Battle,” Grenfell feels the tension and boredom prior to the commencing of battle, and for a moment, immerses himself freely in the world he finds luminous and serene:

The woodland trees that stand together
They stand to him each one a friend;
They gently speak in the windy weather,
They guide to valley and ridge's end.
Then, as if awakened from a daydream,
he shifts from ideal to specific concerns:
In dreary doubtful waiting hours,
Before the brazen frenzy starts,
The horses show him nobler powers;
O patient eyes, courageous hearts!

Through joy and blindness he shall know,
Not caring much to know, that still
Nor lead nor steel shall reach him so
That it be not the Destined will.
The agreeable word choices “together,” “friend,” “gently speak,” and “guide,” in peaceful woods are abruptly interrupted by the “concerns” of his day. Awakened from daydreaming, Grenfell’s horses personify the necessary courage and nobility for battle, and when clear thinking prevails, the warrior reminds himself that no harm will come to him if it is not willed in the cosmic universe.

In Graves’s “To Lucasta On Going To the Wars-For the Fourth Time,” a fusilier returns to war for honors sake, not in obedience:

It doesn’t matter what’s the cause,  
What the wrong we’re righting,  
A curse for treaties, bonds and laws,  
when we’re to do the fighting!  
And since we lads are proud and true,  
What else remains to do?  
Lucasta, when to France your man  
Returns his fourth time, hating war,  
Yet laughs as calmly as he can.  

Although the speaker is an honorable soldier, there is an ambivalence in his attitude towards his country’s propensity for war. His general hate of war does not keep him from fighting. Like W. B. Yeats’s “An Irish Airman Forsees His Death,” he is not moved by blind patriotism but serves simply because he wishes to, regardless of his country’s motives and reasons.

Graves’ “The Next War” shares a title with a poem by Wilfred Owen, and both acknowledge the ongoing cycle of war, Graves through the eyes of innocent boys who play war, and Owen, through who personification of death. Graves’ poem warns boys of their fates as they innocently imitate soldiers in battle:

You young friskies who to-day  
Jump and fight in Father’s hay
With bows and arrows and wooden spears,
Playing at Royal Welch Fusiliers,
Happy though these hours you spend,
Have they warned you how games end?
From the first time you tear and slash…
you’re bound as champions of this stony ground,
To serve your Army and your King
Prepared to starve and sweat and die
Under some fierce foreign sky

Then comes the warning,

Wars don’t change except in name;
The next one must go just the same,
And new found tricks unguessed before
Will win and justify this war.

Once more with pomp and greed and rage;
Courtly ministers will stop
At home and fight to the last drop;
By the millions men will die
In some new horrible agony.

The natural inclination for boys to enjoy the excitement and adventure of playing war games is transformed into a serious warning. In a child’s world, this game is truth, and is as glorious and exciting as they can imagine it. The warning, however, is explicit: the “happy hours” they so enjoy are a world separated from their future allegiance to a king, and the reality that was includes “horrible agony.”

In Owen’s “The Next War” death is personified as an old friend:

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 chorused when he sang aloft;
We whistled when he shaved us with is 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....

In “The Next War” Owen brings close the familiarity between both life and death, and how they “live” precariously together. Death and the violence visited upon the fighters is understood as if it had occurred at the hands of a fellow serviceman. Owen notes that the soldiers walked, sat down and had eaten with, “pardoned,” “sniffed,” “sang, and “wept” with death. In return death “spilled,” “spat,” “coughed,” and swung his lethal scythe. While the soldiers performed their duties in close quarters, death sought to snuff them out, but was not feared or loathed by those who harbored a healthy understanding that death would eventually prevail and that they would be replaced.

Graves’s “Died of Wounds” speaks of innocence and beating war at its game of making him a man, a killing man:

And so they marked me dead, the day
That I turned twenty-one?
They counted me as dead, did they,
The day my childhood slipped away
And manhood was begun?
Oh, that was fit and that was right!
Now Daddy time, with all your spite,
Buffet me how you can,
For I lie dead in Picardy,
Rather than grow to man.
Oh that was the right day to die
The twenty-fourth of July!
God smiled
Beguiled
By a wish so wild,
And let me always stay a child.
The poet here emphasizes that just at the adulthood transition when he has been “marked,” and “counted,” like a parcel to be shipped, he escapes any more of life’s pain. But he misses out on the joy and good that also would have graced his life’s journey, which catches even a smiling and “surprised” God.

Robert Graves’s “Trench Life” warns about fear and the harm of not facing it honestly:

Fear never dies, much as we laugh at fear
For pride’s sake and for other cowards’ sakes,
And when we see some new death bursting near,
Rip those that laugh in pieces, God! It shakes
Sham fortitude that went so proud at first,
And stops the clack of mocking tongues awhile
Until (o pride o pride) at the next shell burst
Cowards dare not mock again and twist a smile.52

“Trench Life” is not so much about the trenches as it is about the world and mentality they promote. With “clacking tongues and smirks that “twist a smile,” his point is clear: face fear honestly without pretense since all are subject to it and never escape its reach. His anger is evident when calling on God to “rip those that laugh in pieces.” The severe trauma experienced by those fighting was no joke and, to release one from fear’s debilitating power, one must acknowledge and accept fear respectfully.

Continuing the theme of respect, Sasson in “Blighters” makes a serious statement regarding the need for all to treat each other respectfully:

I’d like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to ragtime tunes or “Home, Sweet Home,”
And there be no more jokes in Music-halls
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.53
Sassoon was furious with the English public’s lack of understanding about the war. After watching a revue in Liverpool he observed in dismay the mockery and false patriotism he saw in his fellow countrymen.\textsuperscript{54}

Robert Graves’s poem “The Leveller” is a study in contrasts between two soldiers mortally wounded from the same exploding shell:

\begin{quote}
One was a pale eighteen year-old,  
Blue-eyed and thin and not too bold,  
Pressed for the war ten years too soon,  
The shame and pity of his platoon,
\end{quote}

The other, a seasoned and rough professional soldier who “had seen death and hell before,

\begin{quote}
Yet in his death this cut throat wild  
Groaned ‘Mother! Mother!’ like a child,  
While that poor innocent in man’s clothes  
Died cursing God with brutal oaths.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

The surviving families were provided the same funeral speech treating them as equals, even though they might have been shocked to know the state in which those they loved had died. This hints of Carl Sandburg’s “Cool Tombs” where all, both great and small, are now equal.

In Robert Graves’s “Peace,” one is safe and content at home yet haunted by the memory and ever-present ghost of war:

\begin{quote}
When peace time comes and horror’s over,  
Despair and darkness like a dream,  
When fields are ripe with corn and clover,  
The cool white dairy full of cream,  
Shall we work happily in the sun,  
And think ‘it’s over now and done,’  
Or suddenly shall we seem  
To watch a second bristling shadow  
Of armed men move across the meadow?
\end{quote}
Shall we be safe from terrors thrall…
Or will the young of that vile brood,
The young ones also, suck up blood
Unconquered, unashamed,
Rising again with lust and thirst?
Better we all had died at first….56

In this poem the mental anguish of war tortures the writer. In the middle of corn, clover, ripe fields and cream, this idyllic setting is nonetheless haunted by memories of war that razed and scorched the landscape. The speaker expresses a genuine fear and suspicion of what could happen again; especially he fears that the young and impressionable are also capable of committing great evil. If pure and promising youth are caught up in this cycle of war, they would prefer an early death. Sassoon’s “Aftermath” is equally as haunting. There, one is asked to swear to never forget the enormous number of war slain. The survivors are asked if they remember all the horror, all the pain, all the prematurely aged and haggard faces of youth. They are never to forget. The question is as much one of respect for the lost as it is of future vigilance. Now, ‘taking your peaceful share of time with joy to spare” there should always be a time for reflection.

“The Spires of Oxford,” written by English novelist, playwright, and poet Winifred M. Letts, is a work both inspiring and tragic:

I saw the spires of Oxford
as I was passing by,
The grey spires of Oxford
Against a pearl-grey sky;
My heart was with the Oxford men
Who went abroad to die.
The years go fast in Oxford,
The golden years and gay;
The hoary colleges look down
On careless boys at play,
But when the bugles sounded-War!
They put their games away.  
They left the peaceful river,  
The cricket field, the quad,  
The shaven lawns of Oxford,  
To seek a bloody sod.  
They gave their merry youth away  
For country and for God  
God rest you, happy gentlemen,  
Who laid your good lives down,  
Who took the khaki and the gun  
Instead of cap and gown.  
God bring you to a fairer place  
Than even Oxford town

In this poem, the observer is not directly involved in war itself, nor does she seem to know anyone lost personally, but as one who passes by the university and is aware of those who have been lost, she feels that loss deeply. These young men gave their lives at their most promising times. These were the years of their lives when they were the sharpest, strongest, and most able to survive in difficult circumstances. Even though they are not recognized by name, they are deemed worthy of remembrance because they sacrificed the most. Hardscrabble kids they were not: these favored and privileged kids belonged at one of the world’s finest schools and are seen to make the most courageous sacrifice.

In Sassoon’s “One Legged Man,” a man in happy retirement immerses himself in his inheritance of peace and plenty. We are to learn, however, that this man gives the credit to none other than a disfiguring amputation, and therein lies the irrationality. The irrationality of this thinking parallels the shock and absurdity of war and the immense human cost that the World War I writers are exploring and expressing:

Propped on a stick he viewed the August weald;  
Squat Orchard trees and oasts with painted cowls;
A homely, tangled hedge, a corn-stalked field,  
And sound of barking dogs and farmyard fowls.  
And he’d come home again to find it more  
Desirable than ever it was before.  
How right it seemed that he should reach the span  
of comfortable years allowed to man!  
Splendid to eat and sleep and chose a wife,  
safe with his wound, a citizen of life.  
He hobbled blithely through the garden gate,  
And thought: Thank God they had to amputate!  

Throughout Sassoon’s “One Legged Man” the sense of contentment and pleasure is everywhere. Every image in this rural delight, from the balmy and productive growing season to the comforting sounds of free-roaming animals: all appears to be a dream homecoming for this individual. The surprise comes in the last line as the amputation is revealed as the reason for the inheritance of this ideal retirement. The writer leaves the reader to grapple with the irrationality and lack of necessary connection between these two separate events. The ultimate reason is the damage war has brought to even our understanding.

In Sassoon’s, ‘Does it Matter,’” the writer expresses his dismay at the insensitivity of civilians regarding the Great War that was slaughtering so many young men:

Does it matter? Losing your leg?  
For people will always be kind.  
And you need not show that you mind  
When the others come in after hunting  
To gobble their muffins and eggs.

Does it matter? Losing your sight?  
There’s such splendid work for the blind;  
And people will always be kind,  
As you sit on the terrace remembering  
And turning your face to the light.

Do they matter? Those dreams from the pit?
You can drink and forget And be glad,
for people won’t say that you’re mad;
For they’ll know that you’ve fought for your country,
And no one will worry a bit. \(^{59}\)

Sassoon answers his question in “Does it Matter?” with a strong degree of sarcasm and criticism. Each party, the disabled and able must play roles: the disabled must not complain but enjoy the benefits that he has, and the able must not only be kind, but act as normally and unaffectedly as possible. The harshest condemnation is reserved for those who piously “won’t say that you’re mad” as one suffers through horrific nightmares and debilitating mental anguish.

Sassoon’s “Survivors,” like his poem, “Aftermath,” recalls the severe and profound damage to the minds and bodies of soldiers in the theater of battle:

No doubt they’ll soon get well; the shock and strain
have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they’re “longing to go out again,”
These boys with old, scarred faces, learning to walk.
They’ll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died,
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they’ll be proud
Of glorious war that shatter’d all their pride…
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad. \(^{60}\)

Sassoon’s “Survivors” focuses on the post trench warfare costs for soldiers. Sassoon again uses sarcasm to reinforce his antipathy towards those who would generalize or minimize the great damage many soldiers have suffered. Here, both physical and mental damage are evident. The “shock and strain” are clarified by the symptoms, “stammering, disconnected talk.” Also, “glorious war,” fought by the young and eager, has “shatter’d” them, and in such a short time are now “old, scarred faces, learning to walk.”
Owen’s “Disabled” is one of the poems that speaks from the voice of the war’s casualties:

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,
One moment he recalls showing off the fresh blood on his leg
Following a game of football, a sign of manliness:
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.

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….
To-night he noticed how the women’s eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole
Why don’t they come and put him into bed? 61

In “Disabled,” Owen employs a pattern of adjectives that create a canopy of sadness over every stanza. The “dark,” that time which was once filled with youthful excitement during town parties where they would “swing so gay, now brings only the relief of sleep.” In a turn of phrases, the joyous, hymn-like voices of youth now bring sadness. His suit of grey, the color of the sky over so many trench scenes, is ghastly, and the alterations mask the three lost limbs. The manliness that was displayed by his once powerful body, highlighted with superficial bloodletting, is now dependent on others. Now that women’s eyes are attracted to the whole and healthy men, “he wonders why.” Why him, and why did he pursue with such zeal a war that was for him unnecessary and not legally his to fight?
Isaac Rosenberg, a British soldier from very humble beginnings, was an enlisted soldier-poet, not an officer like Owen. He left England a young man and, like others, found the war appalling. In the summer, he found the climate merely “unhealthy.” As his first winter set in he stated: “We are having rotten wet weather in the trenches, mucky, and souzing and cold.” He continues, “I don’t think I’ve been dry yet, these last 3 days.” Rosenberg found the indignities of war death repulsive as indicated in his poem, “Dead Man’s Dump”:

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched,
Their shut mouths made no moan,
They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,
Man born of man, and born of woman,
And shells go crying over them
From night till night and now.

Earth has waited for them
All the time of their growth
Fretting for their decay:
Now she has them at last!

None saw their spirits’ shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half used life to pass…
These dead strode time with vigorous life,
Till the shrapnel called, ‘an end!’62

In “Dead Man’s Dump, Sassoon emphasizes one of the enduring tragedies of war, the undignified, grisly deaths as well as the anonymity of so many war casualties. Adjectives bring the poem to life: wheels lurch, bones crunch, shells go crying, earth waits and frets, spirits shake, death strides. It is the contrast between the wheels of a vehicle on a mission lurching over dead, strewn like rubbish. Rosenberg then reminds us that friends as well as enemies have ended up together, no one superior and no victor or loser. In the second
stanza, earth has longed to continue its cycle of renewing itself through the remains of human death. However, it is the spirit as animated in stanza three that once filled the earth with energy and now moves on at the call of a shell’s fatal shrapnel.

Sassoon’s “The Hero” represents a shift in mood from the horror of war to the gulf between the unenlightened civilian world and the soldiers at the front. The hero, according to Sassoon, “does not refer to anyone I have known but is pathetically true.”

“Jack fell as he’d have wished,” the Mother said,
And folded up the letter that she’d read.
“The Colonel writes so nicely.” Something broke
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.
She half looked up. “We mothers are so proud
Of our dead soldiers.” Then her face was bowed.
Quietly the brother officer went out.
He’d told the poor old dear some gallant lies
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt,
Her face was full of pride for her brave and glorious son, but she would be shielded from the truth about Jack: how we was, in fact, a “cold-footed, useless swine”:
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he’d tried
To get sent home and how, at last, he died,
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care
Except that lonely woman with white hair.  

“The Hero” shows a tension between opposites, the reality that both respective parties held on to, hers for her son, and the Colonel’s, shaped by the necessity of protecting a mother and preserving her soldier-son’s dignity. While all mothers believe the best about their sons, some boys are quickly forgotten by others especially where cowardice is the most memorable characteristic. What she believes is, in fact, false, and that is counterposed by the Colonel’s actions that are equally false.
“The Man He Killed” by Thomas Hardy is a revelation on the bizarre and often contradictory nature of war:

Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have set us down to wet
Right many a niperkin!

But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place

I shot him dead because-
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That’s clear enough; although

He thought he’d ‘list, perhaps,
Off-hand like-just as I-
Was out of work-had sold his traps-
No other reason why.

Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You’d treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.64

Thomas Hardy here dramatizes in a few lines how an individual reacts to the fact that in war, one must kill or be killed. The terrible battles of World War I greatly depressed Hardy, who saw in them what he believed to be the beginning of a new kind of savagery and national suicide. Circumstances and the impersonal nature of modern warfare, in which enormous numbers of men and technology are mixed together, have made deadly enemies of two soldiers who might have exchanged drinks in a bar and been friends.

There is a consistency in the writings of the war poets. The poems included in this chapter are not meant to be repetitive, but to reinforce that millions of World War I
veterans suffered extreme privation, agony, and painful death in a war that was to end all
wars. What the writers and poets made clear was that the turmoil of war just hinted at in
“Channel Firing” was far worse than was even imagined. These poets speak of the
unnatural fate of men who obediently served their country in war. And what they reveal
is that it is just as unnatural for those soldiers to live in trenches and in the words of
Owen to “die as cattle” as it is for the dead to be so violently disturbed in “Channel
Firing.”

As demonstrated by these writings, the Civil War and World War I were
devastating to humankind and nature. In order to make sense of it all and avoid being
crushed by the weight of this tragedy, a soldier could cling to thoughts of home and seek
assurance that God was on his side. The recollection of ethereal nature as known by the
English countryside was easy. The search to understand God’s purpose was not.
CHAPTER 4
A RAFT TO RIDE THE SEAS OF LIFE

In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates posits that the intellect is “a raft to ride the seas of life.”¹ For others, that raft might also be hope, particularly for those in the world’s most inhospitable situations like war. The poetry of both periods, during the American Civil War and World War I, reveal that thoughts of nature, home, and a hope in a benevolent God were often part of a soldier’s thinking as they sought to find meaning among chaos and suffering. In this chapter, poems that show the love for recollections of home as well as those that explore God’s meaning through such suffering are considered.

In an introduction to World War I poetry, the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* provides the following overview of the times:

By the dawn of the 20th century, traditional stabilities of society, religion, and culture seemed to have weakened, the pace of change to be accelerating. The unsettling force of modernity profoundly challenged traditional ways of structuring and making sense of human experience. Because of the rapid pace of social and technological change, because of the mass dislocation of populations by war, empire, and economic migration, because of the mixing in close quarters of cultures and classes in rapidly expanding cities, modernity disrupted the old order, upended ethical and social codes, cast into doubt previously stable assumptions about self, community, the world, and the divine.²

In order to make sense of a world and war that seemed out of control, recollections of one’s home, and the hope of returning, helped soldiers cope with war. Englishmen held fast to recollections of their homeland with its rich and varied landscape that was known for its lush gardens. In America, the vast rural landscape was treasured with all of its diversity and potential.
Paul Fussell notes that poet Edmund Blunden believed that both the countryside and English literature were “alive” and both have “feelings.” Fussell also goes on to say that “the shared cultural memory of an almost impossibly pastoral and peaceful England contrasted with the grim horrors of the Great War.” Some descriptions of the pastoral landscape recalled included: “the deep wood, great hills, valleys beyond the wood in twilight…and slopes covered with mint and thyme, all solemn at evening.”

In John Greenleaf Whittier’s “The Battle Autumn of 1862” nature is “calm and patient” in the calamity of war:

And still she walks in golden hours
Through harvest happy farms,
And she still wears her fruits and flowers
like jewels on her arms.

The image of productive farms that are nurtured by nature, is crowned with the abundant fruit, a testament of fertility. This poem was written during the war and centers on the theme of how nature heals. Nature persists in the storm that is brought on by man.

In Whitman’s “Bivouac on a Mountain Side,” a traveling army stops for a moment and the poem hints that they may have stopped to take in the splendor of nature that surrounds them on every side:

Below a fertile valley spread, with barns and the orchards of summer,
Behind, the terraced sides of a mountain, abrupt, in places rising high…
And over all the sky—the sky! far, far out of reach,
studded, breaking out, the eternal stars

From the valley to the mountains to the stars, this scene is a gift to one’s eyes. It is enough to give anyone reason for pause.
Francis Orray Ticknor’s “The Virginians of the Valley” is a poem expressing pride in Virginia chivalry, the nobility of their men, matched only by the state’s glorious natural beauty:

In valleys fair, the lily and the rose;  
Whose fragrance lives in many lands  
Whose beauty stars the earth.  

These glorious flowers set Virginia apart like a jewel and spread their graceful pleasure all over the world where they bloom.

In “By the Potomac” by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, a soft rain passes over a graveyard on the banks of the Potomac River. Nature springs to life with the singing of the nightingale:

The Southern nightingale that hour by hour  
In its melodious summer madness raves.  
Ah, with what delicate touches of her hand,  
With what sweet voice of bird and rivulet  
And drowsy murmur of the rustling leaf.  

Describing some of his favorite daily walks, Confederate General Robert E. Lee reflects: “…my pleasure is derived from my own thoughts, and from the sight of the flowers and animals I there meet with.”

While not a soldier, a mother, nonetheless, holds on to bittersweet memories about the day her son enlisted in the confederate army in “Enlisted Today”:

I know the sun shines, and the lilacs are blowing,  
And summer sends kisses by beautiful May-  
Oh! to see all the treasures the spring is bestowing,  
And think my boy Billie enlisted today.

The promise of spring coincides with the promise she saw in her son, the young soldier. But she will not see him again however, although she will have eternal memories of the bountiful springs in her life, both in her son and in nature.
Charles Sorley, like other World War I poets, reflected on peaceful memories of homes, or lessons from nature to sustain him. In “Le Revenant,” a stranger returns to the place of his youth:

He trod the oft-remembered lane
(Now smaller-seeming than before
When he first he left his father’s door
For newer things), but still quite plain

(Though half-benighted now) upstood
Old landmarks, ghosts across the lane
That brought the Bygone back again:
Shorn haystacks and the rocky wood,

The guide post, too, which once he clomb
To read the figures: fourteen miles
To Swindon, four to Clinton Stiles,
And only half a mile to home.¹²

This stranger who returns experiences great pleasure seeing the familiar that brings back fond memories. The images are of weather-worn, aged landmarks, yet the memory of them is beautiful, “oft remembered,” and most meaningful.

In “The Roads Also,” Owen reflects on peaceful images familiar to him:

The roads also have their wistful rest,
When the weathercocks perch still and roost,
And the town is a candle-lit room-
The streets also dream their dream.
The old houses muse of the old days
And their fond trees leaning on them doze…¹³

In Owen’s image, everything is at rest and peace. The most active roads and streets are as lazy and quiet as the houses and town. The town as a candle-lit room is the most harmonious of all. Sassoon recalls in “The Triumph”: 
The whisper of leaves or a bird’s lone cry
in the glen,
On dawn lit hills and horizons girdled with flame.…

Sassoon’s view of natural beauty overcomes the shadow of death that is waiting over the horizon. Sassoon provides a strong contrast between the “whisper” and “cry,” as well as the hills that are delicately “dawn lit” with the flaming horizon. Together, both are harmonious with each other providing a balance to the senses.

Richard Aldington, in his poem, “A Village” makes a serious personal observation that makes a difference in his life and helps him form a new perspective:

But when you’ve pondered
Hour upon chilly hour in those damned trenches
You get at the significance of things,
Get to know clearer than before,
What a tree means, what a pool,
Or a black wet field in sunlight

In this reflection, Aldington sees the world through new lenses after suffering and fighting in the deadly trenches and on wasted battlefields. Trees, pools of water, and open fields, that in a war zone were sources of despair, are now objects of contemplation. In Aldington’s “A Place of Young Pines,” he finds pleasures among small trees that will grow greatly to sing and provide shade:

So for a little time I stand among the pines
Above the clean dry water-course
Where all sounds are hushed.
There I am at peace, there I am at one with all things.

This place is a natural progression for Aldington following his experiences in trenches. The dramatic contrast between the hideous and the sublime, loud and quiet, helps him appreciate what is truly good in the world around him.
The previous sample of poems that are reminders of the beauty of the land people knew and longed for include details of beauty, harmony, and peace. There is a sense of sacredness as indicated by the sounds, smells, and sights that are rich in details and are clear in their memories. The following section transitions from thoughts of nature as God’s creation to the challenge of understanding God’s own nature within human adversity.

First, it is necessary to provide some background to the mood of the United States on the eve of Civil War. It was both deeply religious and patriotic. Both sides of the conflict sincerely believed that their cause was not only right in itself, but that it was sanctioned and approved by God. There was no higher incentive than to believe that God had led one’s actions and would, if necessary, fight along with them. Explicit in these works is the idea of a God who demonstrates his approval by serving as judge and warrior with both sides of the conflict equally convinced that they were serving on the correct side. Complications arise, however, when both sides sincerely believe that they are the chosen vessels for God’s favor.

Drew Gilpin Faust, Lincoln Professor of History and President of Harvard University stated the following:

Americans on the eve of civil war found their traditional systems of belief both powerfully challenged and fervently reaffirmed. Although the United States had been established as a secular state by founders wary of religious influences upon government, religion defined the values and assumptions of most-mid-nineteenth century Americans. Nearly four times as many attended church services every Sunday in 1860 as voted in that year’s critical president election. Overwhelmingly Christian and Protestant, Americans were also increasingly evangelical, committed to the hope of salvation, and eager to seize their own responsibility for any future beyond the grave….17
Some of the religious dynamics behind the war were over substantive and detailed views of Scripture and according to Gardiner Shattuck in his book, *A Shield and Hiding Place*:

The most important theoretical disagreement between religion in the north and religion in the south concerned the responsibility of the churches for the morals of their society.\(^{18}\)

In an essay entitled *The Bible and Slavery*, Mark Noll contends that there were other theological issues that consumed the southern faithful, including divisions over the meaning, interpretation, and infallibility of the Bible.\(^{19}\) Shattuck posits that the North had a broad vision for reforming the country, specifically the South:

In the eyes of most mainline Christians in the North, however, the Civil War was not merely punishing the American people; it was purifying them as well for further service as a nation...In a sermon in 1862, Unitarian preacher Edward Everett Hale declared his belief that his government bore a responsibility to introduce Christian civilization into the south.\(^{20}\)

And during this same time, Shattuck continues, “Southern soldiers were about to go to war to protect religion and civilization against the incursions of the godless Northern hordes.”\(^{21}\)

In the years leading up to World War I, there also were strong dynamics within the religious community that had far-reaching effects on citizens. According to Herbert Schlossberg: A contemporary study of the faith of the soldiers of the World War concluded that British troops were ignorant of the meaning of Christian faith because they had no idea that it was supposed to be relevant to the way they actually lived; they seemed to think it was to be believed as a duty rather than assimilated and lived out.\(^{22}\)

The loss of faith in the young occurred at the university, says Frank Turner:

…where not only new intellectual influences impacted on the young man but novel personal loyalties as well as new friends and teachers brought about the acceptance of new ideas.\(^{23}\)
This loss of faith can also be traced, in part, to some of the religious and social dynamics in England at the time. Late 19th century forces were shaping the thinking of many and one of the biggest influences of all, the state church, was undergoing some painful changes. One theory posits that the Church of England’s decline came chiefly from its voluntary adoption of the mores of the larger culture—in effect, it secularized itself. Church historian Edward Norman noted as follows:

Modern scholarship has come to an all but unanimous judgment that the clergy of the Church of England had declined precipitously by the end of the reign, both in quality and quantity. Instead of a calling it had become a career...clergymen were increasingly alienated from the concerns of ordinary people. Oft-repeated complaints about intellectual dishonesty in the ranks of the orthodox weakened the effect of their apologetics.24

These forces together shaped the religious thinking of the time and influenced the soldiers who fought in the Civil War and World War I. The poetry in this section will trace the search for meaning by writers of the time and suggest some of the differences between the writers of the Civil War and World War I.

Writers in the Civil War period often described an active and vigilant God who was on their side in the war. For example, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Warning” is a clear threat to the current state of the country:

Beware! The Israelite of old, who tore
The lion in his path,-when, poor and blind,
He saw the blessed light of heaven no more…
His desperate hands, and in its overthrow
Destroyed himself, and with him those who made
A cruel mockery of his sightless woe…

There is a poor, blind Samson in this land,
Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,
And shake the pillars of this Commonweal,
Till the vast Temple of our liberties
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.  

Longfellow, who was a strong New England abolitionist, crafted this biblically thematic poem with strong imagery. The now disgraced former Israelite king, with one final flash, is able to exact revenge of those who mocked him. According to the account, Samson’s motive was revenge, and the parallel warning between that time and this recalls the heap of stones that, with pent-up anger, can crush those who have blinded and bound the captive slaves.

In the “Boston Hymn” Ralph Waldo Emerson, a New England transcendentalist, uses the voice of God to speak with power:

God said, I am tired of kings,
I suffer them no more;
Up to my ear the morning brings
The outrage of the poor.

My angel, his name is -Freedom,-
Choose him to be your king

But, laying hands on another
To coin his labor and sweat,
He goes in pawn to his victim
For eternal years in debt.

My will fulfilled shall be,
For, in daylight or in dark,
My thunderbolt has eyes to see
His way home to the mark.  

It is God’s voice here that speaks as a great conscience. It is a sobering reminder to those who enslave fellow humans that His gift to the new world was freedom, and they need to cherish and extend it to the “poor” whose pain He hears. The warning includes the
assurance that God will enforce the treating of all human beings with dignity, and that He does not fail.

The poem “At Harpers Ferry Just Before the Attack” Edward W. Williams reinforces to the faithful that the upcoming holy war is in the name of God:

The blood that must be shed to-night
Can never stain the name we bear,
We fight for God’s own holy right
Which is to all mankind so dear
My brothers what a holy war
In which we all will soon engage

The laws of God your rights ordain
We are the instruments they send ²⁷

With two references to God and an association between what God wants and what humans treasure, the argument for holy war is made. The aphorism “instruments” provides an effective neutralizing balance to the earlier reference to the bloody battle ahead.

The following poems represent a transition from an inspiring God that brings storms of punishment to enforce judgment, to where He steps forth as a warrior to lead the army that embodies truth. The imagery is dramatic and rich: lightning fires from His sword, He blows the war trumpet, crushes the grapes of wrath, and judges the human hearts. Again the association of the God’s holy cause with the abolition of slavery: “As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal….”²⁸

Julia Ward Howe wrote the famous “Battle Hymn of the Republic” that is replete with powerful images of God actively exercising his power in pursuit of righteousness, and carried out in the abolition of slavery. The poem seamlessly blends the gift of
holiness for humans as an empowering force to secure freedom for those American slaves in bondage. The poem is an affirmation that one sees God’s work in exercising resolution and judgment through fearful and powerful acts. In fact, God is a warrior that implements the change He requires through humankind. In biblically similar language she writes:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored…;
I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on. 20

The “Anniversary Poem” by John Greenleaf Whittier, was originally read before the alumni of the Friends’ yearly meeting school, at the Annual Meeting at Newport, Rhode Island June 15, 1863. It sounds a warning regarding the trouble of complacency, allowing slavery to flourish, which in turn, brings God’s disfavor:

Yet trouble springs not from the ground,
Nor pain from chance;
The Eternal order circles round,.
And wave and storm find mete and bound
In Providence…
Too long the world has smiled to hear
Our boast of full corn in the ear
By others sown…

The cry of innocent blood at last
Is calling down
An answer in the whirlwind-blast,
The thunder and the shadow cast
From Heaven’s dark frown 30
The tone of this poem is stern. Here the blame for the monstrous, gathering storm is society’s own actions, those who have been proud of their progress at the expense of slave labor or just complacent. As in “The Warning,” a calamity awaits since the imagery the poem draws from, is biblical, where innocent blood is atoned for one way or another.

John Greenleaf Whittier’s, “The Furnace Blast” is a perceptive recognition of possibility in wars’ hardship:

We wait beneath the furnace-blast
The pangs of transformation;
Not painlessly doth God recast
And mould a new nation.
Hot burns the fire
Where wrongs expire

With a repetition of words denoting pain and discomfort including “blast,” “pangs,” “recast,” and “burns,” there is a recognition that a painful refining of society will take place. This intense image is drawn from the Bible where those undergoing reformation are refined as in fire. Here, God tells the prophet Isaiah, “See I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the fires of adversity.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes, “To Canaan” is a supremely strong claim of God’s favor in war:

Where are you going, young soldiers,
With banner, gun, and sword?
We’re marching South to Canaan
To battle for the Lord!
What captain leads your armies
Along the rebel coasts?
The Mighty One of Israel,
His name is Lord of Hosts!
To Canaan, to Canaan
The Lord has led us forth,
To blow before the heathen walls
The trumpets of the North!

What song is this you’re singing?
The same that Israel sung
When Moses led the mighty choir,
And Miriam’s timbrel rung!

When Canaan’s hosts are scattered,
And all her walls lie flat,
What follows next in order?
-The Lord will see to that!
We’ll break the tyrant’s sceptre,-
We’ll build the people’s throne,-
When half the world’s is freedom’s,
Then all the world’s our own!
To Canaan, to Canaan
The Lord has led us forth,
To sweep the rebel threshing-floors,
A whirlwind from the North!³²

“To Canaan” is a brashly confident poem boldly weaving the Union Army cause in with
God’s will. This choice of event and language is not without controversy. When the
Hebrews conquered Canaan, they wiped out everyone and everything in their path.
According to historian John Bowker, “The moral issues raised by the book (Joshua) are
complicated for the modern reader, not the least the practice of ‘devoting’ cities to total
destruction at God’s specific command.” The poem, however, draws a parallel between
the sin of slavery with the Canaanites worship of idols, and for that reason, they deserve
severe punishment.

Will Henry Thompson “The High Tide at Gettysburg” commemorates a specific
battle where the Heaven’s sound:

64
A cloud possessed the hollow field,
The gathering battle’s smoky shield
Athwart the gloom the lightning flashed…
And from the heights the thunder pealed.
Through the bloody and ferocious battle

Where the south saw itself losing:
God lives! He forged the iron will
that clutched and held the trembling hill.
God lives and reigns! He built and lent
the heights for Freedom’s battlement
Where floats her flag in triumph still.\(^\text{33}\)

Although this battle is lost by the South, their spirit that was forged by the Almighty does
not falter. Their confirmation is the heavenly lightning and thunder through the gloomy
and smoky field.

Margaret Junkin Preston “Hymn to the National Flag” makes patriotism and
holiness one:

Shelter freedom’s holy cause-
Liberty and sacred laws…
Strike Thou for us! King of armies!
Loosen all the despot’s fetters,
Back be all his legions hurled!
Give us peace and liberty,
Let the land we love be free.\(^34\)

God’s help and favor are again requested for the high cause of liberty since our “liberty
and laws are “sacred.” God is asked to exercise that judgment successfully through his
armies.

Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis” is based on a meeting of the first Southern
Congress in 1861:
And what if, mad with wrongs themselves have wrought,
In their own treachery caught,
By their own fears made bold,
And leagued with him of old,
Who since in the limits of the North
Set up his evil throne, and warred with God…
Then he considers the possibility that the North
Could visit destruction upon them:
We shall not shrink my brothers, but go forth
To meet them, marshalled by the Lord of Hosts…³⁵

This poem goes beyond merely a claim of right; it equates the North with the devil who originally “warred with God.” The call is then to fight against the aggressor who is as a devil full of their own treachery. It is a battle cry and the audience is inspired by the call to fight for a righteous cause with God fighting along with them.

Kate Brownlee Sherwood’s “Thomas at Chickamaguga confirms the feelings of pride Southerners had in their soldiers:

God never set his signet on the hearts of braver men,
Or fixed the goal of victory on higher heights than then;
With bayonets and muskets clubbed, they close the rush and roar;
Their stepping-stones to glory are their comrades gone before.³⁶

The audience for this poem is the Southerner who is inspired and encouraged by the thought of his native honor, a confirmation that they fought for God’s cause. The “stepping stones” is a powerful image, a reminder of tradition and recognition of example.

Paul Hamilton Hayne’s “Vicksburg—A Ballad,” grimly recalls the raging battle in Vicksburg when the battle was going poorly:
For sixty days and upwards,
The eye of heaven waxed dim;  
And e’en throughout God’s holy morn  
O’er Christian prayer and hymn,  
Arose a hissing tumult,  
As if the fiends in air  
Strove to engulf the voice of faith  
In the shrieks of their despair

When the South saw the North closing in on victory, some were dismayed that God did not win the war for them. This despairing scene has the writer coming to terms with prayers not answered and an enemy that is prevailing while God is distant.

As Confederate fortunes slipped away, some white southerners became most disillusioned. One woman reported that “If our cause failed, they will lose all faith in a prayer answering God.” Even the most devout struggled to reconcile themselves to defeat and to find meaning for the great defeat. The Presbytery of South Carolina observed in the fall of 1865 that “The faith of many a Christian is shaken by the mysterious and unlooked-for course of divine providence.”

Rev. Peter Gomes, Harvard Divinity School professor and minister at the Memorial Church describes some of the confusion:

One could argue that the chief victim of the Civil War was not the vanquished South, but the Bible. Its authority had been challenged. Those who had trusted in it to preserve the righteousness of the southern case for slavery were utterly defeated and disappointed. Those who had been used to a clear and consistent view of biblical morality and authority were saddened, and perhaps, surprised, to see that the Bible could be read in so many different ways, and could be heard to speak in contradictory and divisive terms.” He continues, “Brothers went to war and shed blood in the most divisive form of human conflict, a civil war, and did so in large measure on the authority of mutually exclusive readings of scripture.” Those who won the conflict, according to Gomes, won the right to view themselves on the right side of the battle for the Bible.
The following poems are more intimate and introspective, revealing the feelings and humanity towards those who fight, and look forward to the poems of World War I.

In “Hospital Duties,” an unknown author depicts the role of southern nurses in the war:

Here’s another—a lad—a mere stripling,
Picked up in the field almost dead,
With the blood through his sunny hair rippling
From the horrible gash in the head.
They say he was first in the action;
Gay-hearted, quick-headed, and witty:
He fought till he dropped with exhaustion
At the gates of our fair Southern city.

Then considering those who cannot be saved:
But e’en if you drop down unheeded,
What matter? God’s ways are the best;
You have poured out your life where ‘twas needed,
And he will take care of the rest.40

This poem brings forth the sense of loss when young and promising youth are lost and, in a familiar theme, the soldiers are eager, brave, and honorable. Acknowledging the many losses, the writer equally as patriotic as her northern counterparts, also claims God’s favor. The reassurance that regardless of how one dies, or if one is forgotten in the littered soil, it is just as well, for God rewards the honorable fighting.

Walt Whitman introduces another theme in Civil War poetry. He shifts from the patriotic slogans and claims of divine favor to doing the quiet work of a healer. “The Wound Dresser” is a powerful narrative that teaches the young and curious about the uniquely human and intimate side of the Civil War:
An old man bending I come among new faces,
Years looking backward resuming in answer to children…
Come tell us old man…
Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell us?
What stays with you the latest and deepest?
Of curious panics,
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest remains

His answer recalls the heat of battle:

Soldier alert, I arrive after a long march
cover’d with sweat and dust, in the nick of
time I come, plunge into the fight, loudly shout in the rush of successful charge

His choice of words teases and surprises, and he goes on to explain that his “fight” and “charge” serve to provide necessary aid to those the hospital who are injured or dying on both sides of the conflict:

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground after the battle Brought in,
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass the ground
To the long rows of cots all up and down Each side I return,
To each and all one after another I draw Near, not one do I miss…

With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds,
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable,
One turns to me his appealing eyes
poor boy!
I never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to
die for you, if that would save you.

The hurt and wounded I pacify with
Soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night,
Some are so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience
Sweet and sad.\textsuperscript{41}

In Whitman’s “A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Din,” he visits a camp at
daybreak and walks around the dead lying there. Without mentioning which side they had
served on, he expresses profound pity and compassion when in quiet observance:

Then to the third-a face nor child nor old,
calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory;
Young man I think I know you—I think this face
is the face of the Christ himself, Dead and divine
and brother of all, and here again he lies.\textsuperscript{42}

In “Reconciliation” Whitman reveals the maturity of one who feels profoundly
sad at the cost of war, yet finds beauty and hope in the world:

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of
carnage must in time be utterly lost.
That the hands of the sisters Death and
Night
Incessantly softly wash again, and ever
again, this soil’d world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as
myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in
the coffin—I draw
near, Bend down and touch lightly with my
lips the white face in the coffin.\textsuperscript{43}
Poetry of World War I considers God in the context of life in war. The central theme of God is the framework for understanding all of the emotions of war. Finding meaning in a world that seems out of control with little or no hope is sometimes in the mind of those who are facing war. Some writers find hope in the most desperate of circumstances, horrific carnage, and massive loss of life. Others express disillusionment that clouds their lives and minds, and the consequential writings are particularly powerful. Some of Siegfried Sassoon’s most poignant poems are what he once viewed as “…a commentary on the mental condition of most front-line soldiers, a reminder of the inability of religion to co-operate with the carnage and catastrophe they experienced.”

Consider “Christ and the Soldier,” where Christ is present in the volatile front lines with a soldier. “The straggled soldier halted-stared at him [Christ]…between two splintered trees.” The soldier goes on to exclaim:

I was born full of lust, with hunger, thirst, and wishfulness to wed. Who cares today if I done wrong or right?

With great pity Christ seeks to remind the soldier that his actions do matter,

Can you put no trust in my known word that shrives each faithful head? Am I not the resurrection, life and light?

Between the machine guns, bullets, and smoke, Christ again addresses him:

Believe; and I can cleanse all your ill. I have not died in vain Between two thieves; Nor made a fruitless gift of miracles.

The deteriorating battle conditions and hardened attitude seem to compel Christ to remind the soldier of who He is. The soldier responds:
Heal me if you will, Maybe there’s comfort when a soul believes In mercy, and we need it in these hells. But be you for both sides? I’m paid to kill And if I shoot a man his mother grieves. Does that come into what your teaching tells?

Christ, however, fails to respond and the soldier’s hope is lost. “The soldier shifted and picked up his pack, and slung his gun, and stumbled on his way.

Oh god he groaned, why ever was I born?... the battle boomed and no reply came back.

Sassoon explains that he understood little about religion at the time he wrote this poem and noticed that priests and other ministers never came near them in battle. “I intended it to be a commentary on the mental condition of most front line soldiers, for whom a roadside Calvary was merely a reminder of the inability of religion to co-operate with the carnage and catastrophe they experienced.” This theme of indifference and lack of understanding by those who are expected to be the most sympathetic and empathetic, religious leaders, seems reminiscent of the poem “They” by Sassoon, where a Bishop makes bold statements about how boys (soldiers) have been changed by war and now deserve the creation of a proud race, when in reality, massive numbers have been killed or brutally maimed. Sassoon later wrote later in “Vicarious Christ” that “the Bishop of Byegumb was an old friend of our General. He preached…the impression that he made was astounding; he was such a Christian man. He compared us to the martyrs who were burnt alive and strangled; O, it made us love the war-to hear him speak!” Then in reflection he recounts that the Bishop “has preached on victory…but when I was his
victim, how I wished I could have kicked him, for he made me love Religion less and less.\textsuperscript{47}

Religious leaders seem as impotent as God in answering the critical questions of why war is taking such an awful toll and whether there is any hope beyond the smoke, bullets, and machine gun fire. Sassoon’s “A Mystic as a Soldier,” is a reflection of the poet’s continual searching for God and meaning in the world’s madness:

\begin{quote}
I lived my days apart, Dreaming fair songs
for God
Now God is in the strife and I
must seek him there,
Where death outnumbers life,
and fury smites the air.
Oh music through my clay,
When will you sound again? \textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

In Sassoon’s “In the Church of St Ouen,” a thoughtful soldier who seeks a spiritual connection considers how if he had lived in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, he would have been devoted to chanting prayers, separated from the world in a separate existence such as a monastic community:

\begin{quote}
My spirit longs for prayer; and, lost to God,
I seek him everywhere.
In heart-shaped stone the glory of Heaven glows.
But where I stand, yet to stay, hearing rich music at the close of day, the spring offensive (Easter is it date) Calls me.
And that’s the music I await. \textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Sassoon feels lost to, and distant from, God. The acts of praying and longing reveal that he still retains hope. Until he finds his peace with the divine, his thoughts go to what is ahead and sure, such as the “Spring Offensive.”
In Sassoon’s “The Investiture,” the ambiguity of war is shown in stark detail. God welcomes a soldier but seems eerily and depressingly distant:

God with a Roll of Honour in his hand  
Sits welcoming the heroes who have died…  
Then you come shyly through the garden gate  
And God says something kind  
because you’re dead,  
And homesick, discontented with your fate….

God remains seated with His honor roll in hand and shows gratitude. This still leaves the new resident in Heaven dissatisfied. But this is Heaven, place of unspeakable beauty and joy. There are some familiar themes when considering the disillusionment of soldiers towards God and religion. They are conflicted as a result of experiencing the terror of war, and the clergy’s uninformed enthusiasm for war, yet their inability to provide answers to the most serious of questions, why.

Wilfred Owen’s “Soldiers Dream” has a different and complex approach in a vision where Jesus does, in fact, intervene but as portrayed earlier as judge and warrior:

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 as an old flint-lock, nor even a pikel.  
But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;  
and when I woke, he’d seen to our repairs.

Like God in “Investiture,” Jesus seems strangely quiet and timid. The work he performs is remarkable. After disabling everyone’s weapons, he becomes “vexed” and delegates the necessary repairs for the British and their allies.
“The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” is a remarkable poem that echoes the biblical story of Abraham’s obedience to God by preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac:

So Abraham rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife…
Isaac the first-born spake and said,
My Father, behold the preparations, fire and iron
But where is the lamb for this burnt-offering?

The climax builds as God’s angel instructs Abraham not to hurt Isaac,

Lay not thy hand upon the lad…Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.

The surprise comes in the action taken by Abraham:

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.52

Fourteen of the fifteen lines are in perfect harmony with the biblical text. The dramatic shift occurs when the famed obedience of Abraham is turned on its head and he savagely destroys his son. In the dramatic final line, Owen counts the cost of so many young lives so violently taken, “the minds which were to have excelled the civilization of two thousand years…the product of aeons of natural selection, melted down to pay for political statues.”53

Some of the real power of this poem comes from using such a familiar yet in modern minds, an alien story. It is difficult to fathom one instructed by God to prepare an offspring for sacrifice whole being assured that there will be a substitute. Owen takes this fascinating narrative and superimposes the modern world on this framework. Abraham today is the nations’ so hungry for war that they are willing to sacrifice their young men in unbelievably high numbers for a war started over an assassination of a foreign leader.
The War poems like Wilfred Owen’s The Parable of the Old Man and the Young are very important parts of the canon of War literature. These works represent some of what is truly great about literature. Recognizing the power and potential behind words, writers like Owen employ their skills to provide all readers with pleasure, instruction, the means to move them, and simply to inform. Thus, words again and again, prove their enormous value to humanity.

To be sure, violence, conflict, and war are likely to continue unabated through history due to the nature of humankind. What a poet can accomplish through this medium of powerful, compressed, language saturated with imagery, is to perhaps encourage us to step back and reflect on our world, consider how it got to this place, how we can improve it, and help us consider where to start.

Writers provide a foundation for our consideration of what kind of world we want. Implicit in nearly all of the war poems is a recognition of the value of life. Whether it is trying to survive in the horrific trenches or quietly caring for wounded soldiers after battle, the value of life is revealed by the desire to survive, heal, and to eventually return home. For many, God is the source of meaning, truth, and strength in the world of war. Everyone who is committed to living understands that life has value for one reason or another. It is the poet who is a beacon of hope when they write to warn, a duty of a poet says Wilfred Owen. By writing, they show the confidence in the power of words and their potential to move and even transform the world.
END NOTES

CHAPTER 1


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 1954.


CHAPTER 2


2. Ibid., 442.


5. Ibid., 4-5.


7. Ibid., 101.


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17. Ibid., 634.

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26. Ibid., 8.


**CHAPTER 3**


2. Ibid.

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9. Ibid., 67.
10. Ibid., 70-72.
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13. Ibid., 176-177.
15. Ibid., 8-9.
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42 Ibid., 129.


49. Ibid., 43.


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60. Ibid., 97.


**CHAPTER 4**


4. Ibid., 291.

5. Ibid., 296.


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8. Ibid., 122.

9. Ibid., 168.


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21. Ibid., 35.


27. Ibid., 116-117.


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30. Ibid., 22.


35. Ibid., 139.

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41. Ibid., 17-18.

42. Ibid., 164.


45. Ibid., 45-46.

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47. Ibid., 141.

48. Ibid., 60.

49. Ibid., 72.

50. Ibid., 98.


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53. Ibid., 19.
Fig 1. Ruins of Charleston, South Carolina, 1865.
Fig 2. Union and Confederate Dead, 1864.
Fig 3. Chickamagua Battlefield, 1864.
Fig 4. Flanders Field, France, 1919.
Fig 5. Soldier caught in barbed wire. Undated World War I photograph.
Fig 6. Destroyed French town possibly Forges-les-Eaux.
Fig 7. Motorcycle Courier Wallace Fisher, Newton, Massachusetts, 1918.
Killed September, 1918 in France. Source: Personal Library of Rodney Fisher
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