

Falls back from the intolerable speed of an Ambulance
in retreat
On the sacred, dolorous Way.

May Sinclair

A Memory

There was no sound at all, no crying in the village,
 Nothing you would count as sound, that is, after
the shells;
Only behind a wall the slow sobbing of women,
 The creaking of a door, a lost dog – nothing else.

Silence which might be felt, no pity in the silence,
 Horrible, soft like blood, down all the blood-stained
ways;
In the middle of the street two corpses lie unburied,
 And a bayoneted woman stares in the market-place.

Humble and ruined folk – for these no pride of
conquest,

10 Their only prayer: ‘O! Lord, give us our daily
bread!’

Not by the battle fires, the shrapnel are we haunted;

Who shall deliver us from the memory of these
dead?

Margaret Sackville

Dead Man's Dump

The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
Upon our brothers dear.

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched;
Their shut mouths made no moan.

10 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:

Her temper overwrought me,
And I edged to shun her view,
For I felt assured she thought me
One who should drown him too.

Thomas Hardy

Picnic

July 1917

We lay and ate sweet hurt-berries
In the bracken of Hurt Wood.
Like a quire of singers singing low
The dark pines stood.

Behind us climbed the Surrey hills,
Wild, wild in greenery;
At our feet the downs of Sussex broke
To an unseen sea.

And life was bound in a still ring,
Drowsy, and quiet, and sweet...

When heavily up the south-east wind
The great guns beat.

We did not wince, we did not weep,
We did not curse or pray;
We drowsily heard, and someone said,
‘They sound clear to-day’.

We did not shake with pity and pain,
Or sicken and blanch white.
We said, ‘If the wind’s from over there
There’ll be rain to-night’.

20

*

Once pity we knew, and rage we knew,
And pain we knew, too well,
As we stared and peered dizzily
Through the gates of hell.

But now hell’s gates are an old tale;
Remote the anguish seems;
The guns are muffled and far away,
Dreams within dreams.

30 And far and far are Flanders mud,
 And the pain of Picardy;
 And the blood that runs there runs beyond
 The wide waste sea.

 We are shut about by guarding walls:
 (We have built them lest we run
 Mad from dreaming of naked fear
 And of black things done.)

 We are ringed all round by guarding walls,
 So high, they shut the view.
 Not all the guns that shatter the world
40 Can quite break through.

*

 Oh, guns of France, oh, guns of France
 Be still, you crash in vain...
 Heavily up the south wind throb
 Dull dreams of pain,...

 Be still, be still, south wind, lest your
 Blowing should bring the rain...
 We'll lie very quiet on Hurt Hill,

And sleep once again.

Oh, we'll lie quite still, nor listen nor look,
50 While the earth's bounds reel and shake,
Lest, battered too long, our walls and we
 Should break ...should break ...

Rose Macaulay

As the Team's Head-Brass

As the team's head-brass flashed out on the turn
The lovers disappeared into the wood.
I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
That strewn an angle of the fallow, and
Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
Of charlock. Every time the horses turned
Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
Upon the handles to say or ask a word,
About the weather, next about the war.
10 Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,
And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.

The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry

EDITED BY GEORGE WALTER

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland, (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Mairangi Bay, Auckland 1310, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

This collection first published by Penguin Books as *In Flanders Fields: Poetry of the First World War* 2004 Published under the current title with an updated Introduction in Penguin Classics 2006

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ISBN-13: 978-0-141-18190-5

ISBN-10: 0-141-18190-7