



Poetry 4

A guide



Literary modernism is difficult to define as it encompasses a wide variety of movements and as many writers who are termed as modernists were not affiliated with these movements. Broadly, modernist literature is characterized by a radical break with traditional ways of writing in favor of new forms of expression. Ezra Pound captured the essence of Modernism with his famous dictum, “Make it new!” The First World War is critical to modernist literature and it is the point around which it evolved while World War II is considered by many as the end of the movement. Modernist poetry favors the intellect over emotion, is impersonal and values themes like isolation. Moreover, it doesn’t aim to provide an answer and is instead open to interpretation. Modernist poets also experimented with form and their works usually don’t have a set structure or a recognizable pattern. Instead, Modernist poems often seem fragmentary or disjointed.

Modernist poetry refers to [poetry](#) written between 1890 and 1950 in the tradition of [modernist literature](#), but the dates of the term depend upon a number of factors, including the nation of origin, the particular school in question, and the biases of the critic setting the dates.^{[1][2]} The critic/poet [C. H. Sisson](#) observed in his essay *Poetry and Sincerity* that "Modernity has been going on for a long time. Not within living memory has there ever been a day when young writers were not coming up, in a threat of iconoclasm."^[3]

It is usually said to have begun with the [French Symbolist](#) movement and it artificially ends with the [Second World War](#), the beginning and ending of the modernist period are of course arbitrary. Poets like [W. B. Yeats](#) (1865–1939) and [Rainer Maria Rilke](#) (1875–1926) started in a post-Romantic, Symbolist vein and modernised their poetic idiom after being affected by political and literary developments.

[Acmeist poetry](#) was a Russian modernist poetic school, which emerged c. 1911 and to symbols preferred direct expression through exact images. Figures involved with Acmeism include [Nikolay Gumilev](#), [Osip Mandelstam](#), [Mikhail Kuzmin](#), [Anna Akhmatova](#), and [Georgiy Ivanov](#).^{[4][5]}

The [Imagism](#), Anglo-American school from the 1914 proved radical and important, marking a new point of

departure for poetry.^{[6][7]} Some consider that it began in the works of [Hardy](#) and [Pound](#), [Eliot](#) and [Yeats](#), [Williams](#) and [Stevens](#).^[8]

Around World War II, a new generation of poets sought to revoke the effort of their predecessors towards impersonality and objectivity. Thus, **[Objectivism](#)** was a loose-knit group of second-generation modernists from the 1930s. They include [Louis Zukofsky](#), [Lorine Niedecker](#), [Charles Reznikoff](#), [George Oppen](#), [Carl Rakosi](#), and [Basil Bunting](#). Objectivists treated the poem as an object; they emphasised sincerity, intelligence, and the clarity of the poet's vision.^[9] In the English-language modernism ends with the turn towards **[confessional poetry](#)** in the work of [Robert Lowell](#) and [Sylvia Plath](#), among others.^[10] Poets, like [Robert Frost](#), [Wallace Stevens](#), and [E. E. Cummings](#) also went on to produce work after World War II.

The **[British Poetry Revival](#)** was a loose wide-reaching collection of groupings and subgroupings during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was a modernist reaction to the conservative [The Movement](#) influenced by [Basil Bunting](#) and others. The leading poets included [J. H. Prynne](#), [Eric Mottram](#), [Tom Raworth](#), [Denise Riley](#), and [Lee Harwood](#).^{[11][12]}

Nature of modernism[[edit](#)]

Modernism emerged with its insistent breaks with the immediate past, its different inventions, 'making it new' with elements from cultures remote in time and space.^[7] The questions of impersonality and objectivity seem to be crucial to Modernist poetry. Modernism developed out of a tradition of lyrical expression, emphasising the personal imagination, culture, emotions, and memories of the poet. For the modernists, it was essential to move away from the merely personal towards an intellectual statement that poetry could make about the world. Even when they reverted to the personal, like [T. S. Eliot](#) in the *[Four Quartets](#)* and [Ezra Pound](#) in *[The Cantos](#)*, they distilled the personal into a poetic texture that claimed universal human significance. [Herbert Read](#) said of it, "The modern poet has no essential alliance with regular schemes of any sorts. They reserve the right to adapt their rhythm to their mood, to modulate their metre as they progress. Far from seeking freedom and irresponsibility (implied by the unfortunate term [free verse](#)) they seek a stricter discipline of exact concord of thought and feeling."^[13]

Wiki

Characteristics of Modern Poetry:

1. Modern poetry is written in simple language, the language of every day speech and even sometimes in

dialect or jargon like some poems of Rudyard Kipling (in the jargon of soldiers).

2. Modern poetry is mostly sophisticated as a result of the sophistication of the modern age, e. g. T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land".

3. Alienation. The poet is alienated from the reader as a result of the alienation of the modern man.

4. Fragmentation: the modern poem is sometimes fragmented like a series of broken images, and a gain like "The Waste Land".

5. Modern poetry is highly intellectual; it is written from the mind of the poet and it addresses the mind of the reader, like the poems of T. S. Eliot.

6. It is interested in the ugly side of life and in taboo subjects like drug addiction, crime, prostitution and some other subjects. Like the poems of Allen Ginsberg.

7. Modern poetry is pessimistic as a result of the bad condition of man in many parts of the world, such as most of the poems of Thomas Hardy.

8. Modern poetry is suggestive; the poem may suggest different meanings to different readers.

9. Modern poetry is cosmopolitan. It appeals to man everywhere and at every time because it deals with the problems of man or humanity.

10. Experimentation is one of the important characteristic features of modern poetry. Poets try to break new grounds, i. e. to find new forms, new language and new methods of expression. 1

1. It is irregular, written without metre and rhyme scheme and sometimes written in prose like the prose poem.

12. Interest in politics and the political problems of the age.

13. Interest in the psychology and in the subconscious. Many poets wrote unconsciously under the effect of wine or drugs.

14. Irregularity of form. Modern poetry is mostly written in free verse and prose (the prose poem).

15. Ambiguity: Most of the modern poetry is ambiguous for many reasons.

16. Interest in myth and especially Greek myth.

17. Interest in the problems of the average man and the lower classes of society.

In general, modernist literature is characterized by the radical break with the traditions of literary subjects, forms, concepts and styles.

In poetry, we can discuss the modernist elements in terms of four major subheadings: modern or new experiments in form and style, new themes and word-games, new modes of expression, and complex and open-ended nature of their themes and meaning.

The most striking element of modernist poetry is the invention and experimentation of new modes of expression. Modernism includes the many ‘-isms’ and therefore many different ways to express ideas and feelings. The different ways of expressing include the imagist way of presenting just concrete images for the readers to understand the idea and experience the feelings themselves; the symbolist way of presenting things in terms of deeply significant symbols of ideas and feelings for readers to interpret them intellectually; the realist way of truly reflecting the reality of the world; the naturalist way of going to the extreme of realism by showing the private, psychological, fantastic and the neurotic; the impressionistic way of presenting unrefined first impression of everything by the observer; the expressionistic way of probing deep into one’s own psyche and trying to express the hidden and deepest feelings, as in confessional poems; the surrealist way of imposing the mood of madness, intoxication and neurosis to excite the illogical ‘language’ of the unconscious; to name a few. Modernism includes all such experimentations in the technique of expression.

Another important element of modernist poetry is the use of new and wide range of subjects, themes and issues. Traditional poetry had to be limited to subjects of universal significance, general human appeal, and so on, even when the poems were romantically personal on their surface. But in modernist poetry, we read poems about just any topic and theme. We find poems about nature as well as eating plums, myth as well as satire of an old Christian woman, single characters as well as poor people, meaning of art as well as erotic memories of a woman, spiritual crisis as well as guilt of abortion, feminist movement as well as neurotic despise of a father, allegory of life-journey as well as the irony of death, and so on.

Besides being written on a large range of subjects and themes, modernist poems tend to be multiple in themes. It means that some single poems are about many things at the same time. For instance, Dylan Thomas's poem "This Bread I Break" is at the same time about nature, about spirituality, and also about art. The poem "Jellyfish" is also about the fish itself, the nature of human emotions and desires, the nature of women, as well as poetic expression. The poet never fully says, as in traditional poems, what the one and precise meaning of the poem is. That is why the reader has to work with many 'possible' themes and meanings in the same poem. The best one can expect is to try and find logical support for the theme or

themes that he ‘finds’ in the poem. So, in modernist poetry, the meaning of a poem is the ‘differing’ interpretation of different readers. There can be no single and fixed meaning of any poem.

Also, modernist poets have violated all the known conventions and established rules of the past. In the form, style, stanza, rhythm and such other technical devices of poetry, old traditions have been demolished and new experiments are tested. Cummings’ poems are good examples. There have been blank verse poems, pictorial poems, remixed rhythms, and so on. The old metrical systems, rhyme-schemes, and traditional symbols and metaphors are no longer dominating. Each poet makes his own rules. The multiplicity of styles is the characteristic of modernist poetry.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Launch Audio in a New Window

BY T. S. ELIOT

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,*

*Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a
platter,
I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head

Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the
floor—

And this, and so much more?—

It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

Would it have been worth while

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,

And turning toward the window, should say:

"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two,

Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Source: *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (1963)

- The Waste Land

BY [T. S. ELIOT](#)

*'Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere,
et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σύβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat
illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.'*

For Ezra Pound
il miglior fabbro.
I. The Burial of the Dead

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Frisch weht der Wind

Der Heimat zu

*Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?*

'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With **a wicked pack of cards**. Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(**Those are pearls that were his eyes**. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,

And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!
'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

II. A Game of Chess

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,

Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

'My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think.'

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

'What is that noise?'

The wind under the door.

'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'

Nothing again nothing.

'Do

'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing?'

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'
But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—

It's so elegant
So intelligent
'What shall I do now? What shall I do?'
'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
'With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
'What shall we ever do?'

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.
Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.
You are a proper fool, I said.
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

III. The Fire Sermon

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Lemman I sat down and wept . . .

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel

Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)

Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

'This music crept by me upon the waters'
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia

Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
 Weialala leia
 Wallala leialala

'Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.'

'My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a 'new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?'

'On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.'

la la

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

IV. Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. What the Thunder Said

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation

Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses

If there were water

And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.

It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder

DA

Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms

DA

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

DA

Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient

To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascese nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. **Hieronymo's mad againe.**
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih

II war poetry

The First World War inspired profound poetry – words in which the atmosphere and landscape of battle were evoked perhaps more vividly than ever before.

The First World War poets – many of whom lost their lives – became a collective voice, illuminating not only the war's tragedies and their irreparable effects, but the hopes and disappointments of an entire generation.

Although it has been more than one hundred years since the Armistice and the end of the First World War, it continues to move and inspire poets, with Carol Ann Duffy penning a sonnet, 'The Wound in Time', as part of a series of special Remembrance Day events organised by film director Danny Boyle in 2018.

Alongside 'The Wound in Time', here we've curated a collection of just some of the most poignant World War One poems, featuring the writing of the famous soldier poets, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen, alongside the First World War poetry of nurses, mothers, sweethearts and family and friends who experienced the war from

entirely different perspectives. These poems give a profound insight into this period of history.

The Wound in Time

Carol Ann Duffy

It is the wound in Time. The century's tides,
chanting their bitter psalms, cannot heal it.
Not the war to end all wars; death's birthing place;
the earth nursing its ticking metal eggs, hatching
new carnage. But how could you know, brave
as belief as you boarded the boats, singing?
The end of God in the poisonous, shrapneled air.
Poetry gargling its own blood. We sense it was love
you gave your world for; the town squares silent,
awaiting their cenotaphs. What happened next?
War. And after that? War. And now? War. War.
History might as well be water, chastising this shore;
for we learn nothing from your endless sacrifice.
Your faces drowning in the pages of the sea.

G.K. Chesterton

Elegy in a Country Churchyard

The men that worked for England

They have their graves at home:

And bees and birds of England

About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,

Following a falling star,

Alas, alas for England

They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,

In stately conclave met,

Alas, alas for England

They have no graves as yet

The Soldier

Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England
given;

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Reported Missing

Anna Gordon Keown

My thought shall never be that you are dead:
Who laughed so lately in this quiet place.

The dear and deep-eyed humour of that face
Held something ever living, in Death's stead.
Scornful I hear the flat things they have said
And all their piteous platitudes of pain.
I laugh! I laugh! – For you will come again –
This heart would never beat if you were dead.
The world's adrowse in twilight hushfulness,
There's purple lilac in your little room,
And somewhere out beyond the evening gloom
Small boys are culling summer watercress.
Of these familiar things I have no dread
Being so very sure you are not dead.

Dulce et Decorum Est
Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! - An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime ...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, --
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

Searchlight

F. S. Flint

There has been no sound of guns,
No roar of exploding bombs;
But the darkness has an edge
That grits the nerves of the sleeper.

He awakens;
Nothing disturbs the stillness,
Save perhaps the light, slow flap,
Once only, of the curtain
Dim in the darkness.

Yet there is something else
That drags him from his bed;
And he stands in the darkness
With his feet cold against the floor
And the cold air round his ankles.
He does not know why,
But he goes to the window and sees
A beam of light, miles high,
Dividing the night into two before him,
Still, stark and throbbing.

The houses and gardens beneath
Lie under the snow
Quiet and tinged with purple.

There has been no sound of guns,
No roar of exploding bombs;
Only that watchfulness hidden among the snow-covered houses,

And that great beam thrusting back into heaven
The light taken from it.

Easter Monday (In memoriam E.T.)
Eleanor Farjeon

In the last letter that I had from France
You thanked me for the silver Easter egg
Which I had hidden in the box of apples
You liked to munch beyond all other fruit.
You found the egg the Monday before Easter,
And said, 'I will praise Easter Monday now –
It was such a lovely morning'. Then you spoke
Of the coming battle and said, 'This is the eve.
Good-bye. And may I have a letter soon.'

That Easter Monday was a day for praise,
It was such a lovely morning. In our garden
We sowed our earliest seeds, and in the orchard
The apple-bud was ripe. It was the eve.
There are three letters that you will not get.

To His Love
Ivor Gurney

He's gone, and all our plans
Are useless indeed.
We'll walk no more on Cotswold
Where the sheep feed
Quietly and take no heed.

His body that was so quick
Is not as you
Knew it, on Severn river
Under the blue
Driving our small boat through.

You would not know him now . . .
But still he died
Nobly, so cover him over
With violets of pride
Purple from Severn side.

Cover him, cover him soon!
And with thick-set
Masses of memoried flowers—
Hide that red wet
Thing I must somehow forget.

Break of Day in the Trenches **Isaac Rosenberg**

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever,
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver — what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;

But mine in my ear is safe —
Just a little white with the dust.

The Lament of the Demobilized
Vera Brittain

‘Four years,’ some say consolingly. ‘Oh well,
What’s that? You’re young. And then it must have been
A very fine experience for you!’
And they forget
How others stayed behind and just got on—
Got on the better since we were away.
And we came home and found
They had achieved, and men revered their names,
But never mentioned ours;
And no one talked heroics now, and we
Must just go back and start again once more.
‘You threw four years into the melting-pot—
Did you indeed!’ these others cry. ‘Oh well,
The more fool you!’
And we’re beginning to agree with them.

Reconciliation
Siegfried Sassoon

When you are standing at your hero’s grave,
Or near some homeless village where he died,
Remember, through your heart’s rekindling pride,
The German soldiers who were loyal and brave.

Men fought like brutes; and hideous things were done,
And you have nourished hatred harsh and blind.
But in that Golgotha perhaps you’ll find
The mothers of the men who killed your son.

An Irish Airman Foresees His Death

W. B. Yeats

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,

A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

As the Team's Head Brass

Edward Thomas

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 strewed 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.
Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,
And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.

 The blizzard felled the elm whose crest
I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,
The ploughman said. 'When will they take it away?'

'When the war's over.' So the talk began—
One minute and an interval of ten,
A minute more and the same interval.
'Have you been out?' 'No.' 'And don't want to, perhaps?'
'If I could only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
A leg. If I should lose my head, why, so,
I should want nothing more. . . . Have many gone
From here?' 'Yes.' 'Many lost?' 'Yes, a good few.
Only two teams work on the farm this year.
One of my mates is dead. The second day
In France they killed him. It was back in March,
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree.'
'And I should not have sat here. Everything
Would have been different. For it would have been
Another world.' 'Ay, and a better, though
If we could see all all might seem good.' Then
The lovers came out of the wood again:
The horses started and for the last time
I watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.

End