

## FOUR POEMS FROM WWI

### Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967):

#### "They"

The Bishop tells us: "When the boys come  
back  
"The will not be the same; for they'll have  
fought  
"In a just cause: they lead the last attack  
"On Anti-Christ; their comrade's blood has  
bought  
"New right to breed an honourable race.  
"They have challenged Death and dared him  
face to face."

"We're none of us the same!" the boys reply.  
"For George lost both his legs; and Bill's  
stone blind;  
"Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like  
to die'  
"And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find  
"A chap who's served that hasn't found *some*  
change."  
And the Bishop said: "The ways of God are  
strange!"

#### Suicide in the Trenches

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.

Inn 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 crowd with kindling eyes  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.

## Glory of Women

You love us when we're heroes, home on  
leave,  
Or wounded in a mentionable place.  
You worship decorations; you believe  
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.  
You make us shells. You listen with de-  
light,  
By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.  
You crown our distant ardours while we  
fight,  
And mourn our laurelled memories when  
We're killed.

You can't believe that British troops "retire"  
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they  
run,  
Trampling the terrible corpses--blind with  
blood.  
O German mother dreaming by the fire,  
While you are knitting socks to send your  
son  
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.

### **John McCrae, M.D. (1872-1918):**

In Flanders Fields  
(the most famous poem to come out of the war)

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders Fields.