

The Literature of World War I - A workshop by Karen Vuranch

Poetry

In Flanders Field by John McCrae, May 1915

Reader 1 Between the crosses, row on row,
Reader 2 That mark our place; and in the sky
Reader 3 The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Reader 4 Scarce heard among the guns below
All We are the dead **Reader 5** Short days ago
 Scarce heard among the guns below
Reader 6 We lived, felt dawn, watched sunset glow,
Reader 7 Lived, and were loved, and now we lie
All In Flanders Field

Reader 8 Take up our quarrel with the foe:
Reader 9 To you from failing hands we throw
Reader 10 The torch; be yours to holt high.
Reader 11 If ye break faith with us who die
Reader 12 We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
All In Flanders fields.

For All We Have And Are by Rudyard Kipling, 1914

(We are just going to read stanza 1 and 4)

1	For all we have and are, For all our children's fate, Stand up and take the war. The Hun is at the gate!	Comfort, content, delight, The ages' slow-bought gain, They shrivelled in a night. Only ourselves remain
2	Our world has passed away, In wantonness o'erthrown. There is nothing left to-day But steel and fire and stone!	To face the naked days In silent fortitude, Through perils and dismays Renewed and re-renewed.
3	Though all we knew depart, The old Commandments stand:— "In courage kept your heart, In strength lift up your hand."	Though all we made depart, The old Commandments stand:— "In patience keep your heart, In strength lift up your hand."
	Once more we hear the word That sickened earth of old:— "No law except the Sword Unsheathed and uncontrolled." Once more it knits mankind, Once more the nations go To meet and break and bind A crazed and driven foe.	4 No easy hope or lies Shall bring us to our goal, But iron sacrifice Of body, will, and soul. 5 There is but one task for all— One life for each to give. All What stands if Freedom fall? All Who dies if England live?

My Boy Jack by Rudyard Kipling (Written 1915, after his son died in the Battle of Loos)

Reader 1 Have you news of my boy Jack?"
All *Not this tide.*
Reader 1 "When d'you think that he'll come back?"
All *Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*

Reader 1 "Has any one else had word of him?"
All *Not this tide.*
Reader 2 *For what is sunk will hardly swim,*
 Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.

Reader 1 "Oh, dear, what comfort can I find?"
All *None this tide, Nor any tide,*
Reader 3 *Except he did not shame his kind —*
 Not even with that wind blowing and that tide.

Reader 4 *Then hold your head up all the more,*
All *This tide, And every tide;*
Reader 5 *Because he was the son you bore,*
All *And gave to that wind blowing and that tide!*

Dulce et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owen (Latin phrase is from the Roman poet Horace: "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country.")

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

5 Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
6 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
 And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime —
7 Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
8 In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

9 If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,

10 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
 11 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
 12 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
 13 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie: **ALL** *Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori.*

War Girls by Jessie Pope, 1915

<p>1 There's the girl who clips your ticket for the train, 2 And the girl who speeds the lift from floor to floor, 3 There's the girl who does a milk-round in the rain, 4 And the girl who calls for orders at your door. 5 Strong, sensible, and fit, 6 They're out to show their grit, 7 And tackle jobs with energy and knack. 8 No longer caged and penned up, 9 They're going to keep their end up ALL Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back.</p>	<p>10 There's the motor girl who drives a heavy van, 11 There's the butcher girl who brings your joint of meat, 12 There's the girl who cries 'All fares, please!' like a man 13 And the girl who whistles taxis up the street. 14 Beneath each uniform 15 Beats a heart that's soft and warm, 16 Though of canny mother-wit they show no lack; 17 But a solemn statement this is, 18 They've no time for love and kisses ALL Till the khaki soldier-boys come marching back.</p>
---	---

Marching Men, by Marjorie Pickthall

1. Under the level winter sky
 I saw a thousand Christs go by.
 They sang an idle song and free
 As they went up to calvary.

2. Careless of eye and coarse of lip,
 They marched in holiest fellowship.
 That heaven might heal the world, they gave
 Their earth-born dreams to deck the grave.

3. With souls unpurged and steadfast breath
 They supped the sacrament of death.
 And for each one, far off, apart,
 Seven swords have rent a woman's heart

A *War Film* by Teresa Hooley, 1926

- 1 I saw,
With a catch of breath and the heart's uplifting,
Sorrow and pride,
The 'week's great draw'-
- 2 The Mon Retreat;
The 'Old Contemptibles' who fought, and died,
The horror, the anguish and the glory.
- 3 As in a dream,
Still hearing machine-guns rattle and shells
scream,
I came out into the street.
- 4 When the day was done,
My little son
Wondered at bath-time why I kissed him so
Naked upon my knee
- 5 How could he know
The sudden terror that assaulted me?...
The body I had borne
Nine moons beneath my heart,
A part of me.....
- 6 If, someday
It should be taken away
To War. Tortured, Torn.
Slain.
Rotting in No Man's Land, out in the rain –
My little son....
- 7 How should he know
Why I kissed and kissed and kissed him,
crooning his name?
He thought that I was daft.
He thought it was a game,
And laughed and laughed.

Novels

Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1929 (movie released in 1930)

Reader 1: "This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war."

Reader 2: "We're no longer young men. We've lost any desire to conquer the world. We are refugees. We are fleeing from ourselves. From our lives. We were eighteen years old, and we had just begun to love the world and to love being in it; but we had to shoot at it. The first shell to land went straight for our hearts. We've been cut off from real action, from getting on, from progress. We don't believe in those things any more; we believe in the war."

Reader 3: "It is very queer that the unhappiness of the world is so often brought on by small men."

Reader 4: "At school nobody ever taught us how to light a cigarette in a storm of rain, nor how a fire could be made with wet wood--nor that it is best to stick a bayonet in the belly because there it doesn't get jammed, as it does in the ribs."

Reader 5: "But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony--Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?"

*Scripted version of a passage from All Quiet on the Western Front:
Roles for Albert, Paul, Tjaden, Kat, Miller, Detering*

Albert: But what I would like to know is whether there would not have been a war if the Kaiser had said "No."

Paul: I'm sure there would, he was against it from the first.

Albert: Well, if not him alone, then perhaps if twenty or thirty people in the world had said "No."

Paul: That's probable, but they damned well said, "Yes."

Albert: It's queer, when one thinks about it, we are here to protect our fatherland. And the French are over there to protect their fatherland. Now who's in the right?

Paul: (*without believing it*) Perhaps both.

Albert: Yes, but our professors and parsons and newspapers say that we are the only ones that are right, and let's hope so; but the French professors and parsons and newspapers say that the right is on their side, now what about that?

Paul: That I don't know, but whichever way it is there's war all the same and every month more countries coming in.

Tjaden: I wonder, just how does a war gets started?

Albert: (*with a slight air of superiority*) Mostly by one country badly offending another.

Tjaden: (*pretends to be obtuse*) "A country? I don't follow. A mountain in Germany cannot offend a mountain in France. Or a river, or a wood, or a field of wheat."

Albert: Are you really as stupid as that, or are you just pulling my leg? I don't mean that at all. One people offends the other--"

Tjaden: Then I haven't any business here at all, I don't feel myself offended."

Albert: (*sourly*) Well, let me tell you, it doesn't apply to tramps like you.

Tjaden: Then I can be going home right away. (*all laugh*)

Miller: Ach, man! He means the people as a whole, the State--

Tjaden: State, State. (*snaps his fingers contemptuously*) Gendarmes, police, taxes, that's your State; if that's what you are talking about, no, thank you.

Kat: That's right, you've said something for once, Tjaden. State and home-country, there's a big difference.

Albert: But they go together. Without the State there wouldn't be any home-country.

Kat: True, but just you consider, almost all of us are simple folk. And in France, too, the majority of men are laborers, workmen, or poor clerks. Now just why would a French blacksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us? No, it is merely the rulers. I had never seen a Frenchman before I came here, and it will be just the same with the majority of Frenchmen as regards us. They weren't asked about it any more than we were."

Tjaden: Then what exactly is the war for?

Kat: (*shrugs his shoulders*) There must be some people to whom the war is useful.

Tjaden: Well, I'm not one of them.

Miller: Not you, nor anybody else here.

Tjaden: Who are they then?

Paul: It isn't any use to the Kaiser either. He has everything he can want already.

Kat: I'm not so sure about that, he has not had a war up till now. And every full-grown emperor requires at least one war, otherwise he would not become famous. You look in your school books.

Detering: And generals too, they become famous through war.

Kat: Even more famous than emperors.

Detering: There are other people back behind there who profit by the war, that's certain.

Albert: I think it is more of a kind of fever. No one in particular wants it, and then all at once there it is. We didn't want the war, the others say the same thing--and yet half the world is in it all the same.

(*End short script*)

Reader 6: "He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence: All quiet on the Western Front. He had fallen forward and lay on the earth as though sleeping. Turning him over one saw that he could not have suffered long; his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come."

Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929

Reader 1: "There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates."

Reader 2: Perhaps wars weren't won anymore. Maybe they went on forever. Maybe it was another Hundred Years' War."

Reader 3: "We think. We are not peasants. We are mechanics. But even the peasants know better than to believe in a war. Everybody hates war. There is a class that controls the country that is stupid and do not realize anything and never can. That is why we have this war. Also they make money out of it."

Reader 4: "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry."

Reader 5: "I believe that all the people who stand to profit by a war and who help provoke it should be shot on the first day it starts by accredited representatives of the loyal citizens of their country who will fight it."

Willa Cather, *One of Ours*, 1922

Reader 1: “While Claude was washing for dinner, Mahailey came to him with a page of newspaper cartoons, illustrating German brutality. ... “Mr Claude,” she asked, “how comes it all them Germans is such ugly lookin’ people? The Yoeders and the German folks round here ain’t ugly lookin’.” Claude put her off indulgently. “Maybe it’s the ugly ones that are doing the fighting and the ones at home are nice, like our neighbors.” “

Reader 2: “Ernest was offended and did not come back for nearly a month – not indeed until the announcement that Germany would resume unrestricted submarine warfare made everyone look questioningly at his neighbor.”

Reader 3: “Claude and his mother had not long to wait. Three days later they knew that the German ambassador had been dismissed and the American ambassador recalled from Berlin. To older men these events were subjects to think and converse about; but to boys like Claude they were life and death, predestination.”

Reader 4: “Claude found big Leonard watering his team at the windmill. When Leonard asked him what he thought of the President’s message, he blurted out at once that he was going to Omaha to enlist. **Reader 5:** Leonard reached up and pulled the lever that controlled the almost motionless wheel. “Better wait a few weeks and I’ll go with you. I’m going to try for the Marines. They take my eye.” **Reader 4:** Claude, standing on the edge of the tank almost fell backward, “Why, what –what for?” **Reader 5:** Leonard looked him over. “Good Lord, Claude, you ain’t the only fella around here that wears pants! What for? Well, I’ll tell you what for,” he held up three large red fingers threateningly; “Belgium, the Lusitania, Edith Cavell. That dirt’s got under my skin. I’ll get my corn planted, then Father will look after Susie till I come back.”

Reader 6: “Most of them shared his Quixotic ideas. They had come together from farms and shops and mills and mines, boys from college and boys from tough joints in big cities, sheepherders, street car drivers, plumbers’ assistants, billiard makers. **Reader 7:** Claude has seen hundreds of them when they first came in; “show men” in cheap, loud sports suits, ranch boys in knitted waistcoats, machinists with grease still on their fingers, farm-hands like Dan, in their one Sunday coat. Some of them carried paper suitcases tied up with rope; some brought all they had in a blue handkerchief. **Reader 8:** But, they all came to give and not to ask, and what they offered was just themselves; their big red hands, their strong backs, the steady, honest, modest look in their eyes.... Claude loved the men he trained with, -- wouldn’t choose to live in any better company.”

Reader 9: “Something was released that had been struggling for a long while, he told himself. He had been due in France since the first battle of the Marne; he had followed false leads and lost precious time and seen misery enough, but he was on the right road at last, and nothing could stop him.... **Reader 10:** Three years ago he used to sit moping by the windmill because he couldn’t see how a Nebraska farmer boy had any “call,” or indeed any way, to throw himself into the struggle in France. ... **Reader 11:** But then the miracle happened; a miracle so wide in its amplitude that the Wheelers, --and all the Wheelers and the roughnecks and the low brows were caught up in it. Yes, it was the rough-necks own miracle, all this; it was their golden chance. He was in on it and nothing could hinder or discourage him **Reader 12:** The feeling of purpose, of fateful purpose, was strong in his breast.”

Reader 13: “...but now the bullets began popping around him; two rattled on his tin hat, one caught him in the shoulder. The blood dripped down on his coat, but he felt no weakness. He only felt one thing; that he commanded wonderful men. When David came up with the supports he might find them dead, but he would find them all there. They were there to stay until they were carried out to be buried. They were mortal, but they were unconquerable.”

Reader 14: "...she reads Claude's letters over and over again and reassures herself; for him the call was clear, the cause was glorious. Never a doubt stained his bright faith...he died believing his own country better than it is and France better than any country can be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with."

Edith Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, 1923

Reader 1: "What did it mean, and what must it feel like, for parents in this safe denationalized modern world to be suddenly saying to each other with white lips: A son in the war?"

Reader 2: "Campton's lips were opened to reply when her face changed, and he saw that he had ceased to exist for her. He knew the reason. That look came over everybody's face nowadays at the hour when the evening paper came. The old maid-servant brought it and lingered to here the communiqué. At that hours, everywhere over the globe, business and labor and pleasure (if it still existed) were suspended for a moment while the hearts of all men gathered themselves up in a question and a prayer."

Reader 3: "There was enough misery and confusion at the rear for every civilian volunteer to find his task."

Reader 4: "War had turned out to be so immeasurably more hideous and abominable than those who most abhorred war had dreamed it could be; the issues at stake had become so glaringly plain, right and wrong, honor and dishonor, humanity and savagery faced so squarely across the trenches..."

Reader 5: (*Remembering views of No Man's Land*) "Wherever he went he was pursued by visions of that land of doom: visions of fathomless mud, rat-haunted trenches; freezing nights under the sleety sky, men dying in barbed wire between the lines or crawling out to save a comrade and being shattered to death on the return."

Reader 6: "His commanding officer reported him as "wounded and missing." The words had taken on a hideous significance in the last months, freezing to death between the lines, mutilation and torture, or weeks of slow agony in German hospitals; there were the alternative visions associated with the now familiar formula."

Reader 7: (*on deciding to paint again and the responsibility of the artist*) "We must save Beauty for the world; before it is too late we must save it out of this awful wreck and ruin."

Reader 8: (*After attending a party*) "It's queer," he said..."all these people who have forgotten the war suddenly made me remember it."

Reader 9: "There was heavy news from Verdun; from east to west the air was dark with calamity."

Reader 10: "She triumphed in the fact that her boy was at Verdun, when he might have been at the Somme, where things, though stagnant, were on the whole going less well. Mothers prayed for "a quiet sector" -- and then, she argued, what happened? The men grew careless, the officers were oftener away; your son was ordered out to see to the repairs of a barbed wire entanglement, and a sharpshooter picked him off while you were sitting reading one of his letters and thinking, "Thank God he's out of the fighting."

Reader 11: "The weeks thus punctuated by private anxieties rolled on dark with doom. At last, in December, came the victory of Verdun. Men took it reverently but soberly. The price paid had been too heavy for rejoicing; and the horizon was too ominous in other quarters"

Reader 12: "And still the flood of war rolled on. Success here, failure there, the menace of disaster Through all this alternating of tragedy and triumph ran the million and million individual threads of hope, fear, fortitude, resolve, with which the fortune of war was obscurely but fatally interwoven."

Non-fiction, Journals, Diaries

Mildred Aldrich – from *A Hilltop on the Marne: Being Letters Written June 3 – September 8, 1924*

Reader 1: The sensation was uncanny. Out there in the northeast still boomed the cannon. The smoke of the battle still rose straight in the still air. I had seen the war. I had watched its destructive bombs. For three days its cannon had pounded on every nerve in my body; but none of the horror it had sowed from the eastern frontier of Belgium to within four miles of me, had reached me except in the form of a threat. Yet, out there on the plain, almost within my sight, lay the men who had paid with their lives, each dear to some one – to hold back the battle from Paris – and incidentally, from me.

May Sinclair, *Munro Ambulance Driver*

Reader 2: It is all unspeakably beautiful and it comes to me with the natural, inevitable shock and ecstasy of beauty. I am going straight into the horror of war. For all I know it may be anywhere, here, behind this sentry; or there, beyond that line of willows. I don't know. I don't care. I cannot realize it. All that I can see or feel is the beauty. I look and look so that I may remember it. Is it possible I am enjoying myself?

Flora Sandes, *An English Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army, 1916*

Reader 3: All the patients were to go off that afternoon if the bullock-wagons arrived. The question of transport is always a terrible problem; in many cases the bullock-wagons are the only things that can stand the rough tracks, ... and had we had service of motor cars we could have saved the poor fellows an immense amount of suffering. Imagine yourself with a shattered leg lying in company with three or four others on the floor of a spring-less bullock-wagon, jolting like that for 20 or 30 miles. ... We used to get in big batches of wounded who had travelled like that for three or four days straight from the Front, with only the first rough dressing which each man carries in his pocket.

Reader 4: (*Fighting on Mount Chukus*) I met three officers ... running in the same direction...the officers hesitated about letting me come, and said, "Certainly not on Diana," who was white and would make an easy mark for the enemy; so I jumped off and threw my reins to a soldier. "Well, can you run fast," they said. "What? Away from the Bulgars?" I exclaimed in surprise. "No, towards them" "Yes, of course I can." "Well come on then," and off we went.

Reader 5: Though no one had the breath to tell me where we were going, it was plain enough, as we could hear the firing more clearly every moment. We finally came to a ruined hut where we found the Commander of the battalion...The Bulgarians had seemed to have gotten their artillery fairly close, and the shrapnel was bursting thickly all around.

Reader 6: The officer in charge showed me how to fire off one of the guns when he gave the word and let me take the place of the man who had been doing it.

Reader 7: The firing died down at dark and we left the firing-line and made innumerable camp fires and sat around them. The Commander took me into his company, and I was enrolled in its books and he seemed to think I might be made a corporal pretty soon if I behaved myself.

Plays

The Christmas Truce by Aaron Shepard, story 2001, script 2003

SOLDIER 1: (*to audience*) Christmas Day, 1914. Dear mother,

SOLDIER 4: (*to audience*) My darling Meg,

SOLDIER 2: (*to audience*) My good friend Charles,

SOLDIER 3: (*to audience*) My dear sister Janet,

SOLDIER 1: It is 2:00 in the morning and most of our men are asleep in their dugouts.

SOLDIER 4: Yet I could not sleep myself before writing to you of the wonderful events of Christmas Eve.

SOLDIER 2: In truth, what happened seems almost like a fairy tale, and if I hadn't been through it myself, I would scarce believe it.

SOLDIER 3: Just imagine: While you and the family sang carols before the fire there in London, I did the same with enemy soldiers here on the battlefields of France!

SOLDIER 1: As I wrote before, there has been little serious fighting of late. The first battles of the war left so many dead that both sides have held back until replacements could come from home. So, we have mostly stayed in our trenches and waited.

SOLDIER 4: But what a terrible waiting it has been! Knowing that any moment an artillery shell might land and explode beside us in the trench, killing or maiming several men. And in daylight not daring to lift our heads above ground, for fear of a sniper's bullet.

SOLDIER 2: And the rain—it has fallen almost daily. Of course, it collects right in our trenches, where we must bail it out with pots and pans. And with the rain has come mud—a good foot or more deep.

SOLDIER 3: It splatters and cakes everything, and constantly sucks at our boots. One new recruit got his feet stuck in it, and then his hands too when he tried to get out—just like in that American story of the tar baby!

SOLDIER 1: Through all this, we couldn't help feeling curious about the German soldiers across the way. After all, they faced the same dangers we did, and slogged about in the same muck.

SOLDIER 4: What's more, their first trench was only fifty yards from ours. Between us lay No Man's Land, bordered on both sides by barbed wire—yet they were close enough we sometimes heard their voices.

SOLDIER 2: Of course, we hated them whenever they killed our friends. But other times, we joked about them and almost felt we had something in common.

SOLDIER 3: And now it seems they felt the same.

SOLDIER 1: Just yesterday morning—Christmas Eve Day—we had our first good freeze. Cold as we were, we welcomed it, because at least the mud froze solid.

SOLDIER 4: Everything was tinged white with frost, while a bright sun shone over all. Perfect Christmas weather.

SOLDIER 2: During the day, there was little shelling or rifle fire from either side. And as darkness fell on our Christmas Eve, the shooting stopped entirely.

SOLDIER 3: Our first complete silence in months! We hoped it might promise a peaceful holiday, but we didn't count on it. We'd been told the Germans might attack and try to catch us off guard.

SOLDIER 1: I went to the dugout to rest, and lying on my cot, I must have drifted asleep. All at once my friend was shaking me awake, saying, "Come and see! See what the Germans are doing!" I grabbed my rifle, stumbled out into the trench, and stuck my head cautiously above the sandbags.

SOLDIER 4: I never hope to see a stranger and more lovely sight. Clusters of tiny lights were shining all along the German line, left and right as far as the eye could see.

SOLDIER 2: "What is it?" I asked in bewilderment, and someone answered, "Christmas trees!"

SOLDIER 3: And so it was. The Germans had placed Christmas trees in front of their trenches, lit by candle or lantern like beacons of good will.

SOLDIER 1: And then we heard their voices raised in song. (*singing*) “Stille nacht, heilige nacht . . .”

SOLDIER 4: This carol may not yet be familiar to us in Britain, but one soldier knew it and translated: “Silent night, holy night.” I’ve never heard one lovelier—or more meaningful, in that quiet, clear night, its dark softened by a first-quarter moon.

SOLDIER 2: When the song finished, the men in our trenches applauded. Yes, British soldiers applauding Germans!

SOLDIER 3: Then one of our own men started singing, and we all joined in. (*singing*) “The first Nowell, the angel did say . . .”

SOLDIER 1: In truth, we sounded not nearly as good as the Germans, with their fine harmonies. But they responded with enthusiastic applause of their own and then began another. (*singing*) “O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum . . .”

SOLDIER 4: Then we replied. (*singing*) “O come all ye faithful . . .”

SOLDIER 2: But this time they joined in, singing the words in Latin. (*singing*) “Adeste fideles . . .”

SOLDIER 3: British and German harmonizing across No Man’s Land! I would have thought nothing could be more amazing—but what came next was more so.

SOLDIER 1: “English, come over!” we heard one of them shout. “You no shoot, we no shoot.”

SOLDIER 4: There in the trenches, we looked at each other in bewilderment. Then one of us shouted jokingly, “You come over here.”

SOLDIER 2: To our astonishment, we saw two figures rise from the trench, climb over their barbed wire, and advance unprotected across No Man’s Land.

SOLDIER 3: One of them called, “Send officer to talk.”

SOLDIER 1: I saw one of our men lift his rifle to the ready, and no doubt others did the same—but our captain called out, “Hold your fire.” Then he climbed out and went to meet the Germans halfway.

SOLDIER 4: We heard them talking, and a few minutes later, the captain came back with a German cigar in his mouth! “We’ve agreed there will be no shooting before midnight tomorrow,” he announced. “But sentries are to remain on duty, and the rest of you, stay alert.”

SOLDIER 2: Across the way, we could make out groups of two or three men starting out of trenches and coming toward us.

SOLDIER 3: Then some of us were climbing out too, and in minutes more, there we were in No Man’s Land, over a hundred soldiers and officers of each side, shaking hands with men we’d been trying to kill just hours earlier!

SOLDIER 1: Before long a bonfire was built, and around it we mingled—British khaki and German grey. I must say, the Germans were the better dressed, with fresh uniforms for the holiday.

SOLDIER 4: Only a couple of our men knew German, but more of the Germans knew English. I asked one of them why that was. “Because many have worked in England!” he said. “Before all this, I was a waiter at the Hotel Cecil. Perhaps I waited on your table!” “Perhaps you did!” I said, laughing.

SOLDIER 2: One German told me he had a girlfriend in London and that the war had interrupted their plans for marriage. I said, “Don’t worry. We’ll have you beat by Easter, then you can come back and marry the girl.” He laughed at that. Then he asked if I’d send her a postcard he’d give me later, and I promised I would.

SOLDIER 3: Another German had been a porter at Victoria Station. He showed me a picture of his family back in Munich. His eldest sister was so lovely, I told him I should like to meet her someday. He beamed and said he would like that very much and gave me his family’s address.

SOLDIER 1: Even those who could not converse could still exchange gifts—our cigarettes for their cigars, our tea for their coffee, our corned beef for their sausage. Badges and buttons from uniforms changed owners, and one of our lads walked off with the infamous spiked helmet!

SOLDIER 4: I myself traded a jackknife for a leather equipment belt—a fine souvenir to show when I get home.

SOLDIER 2: Newspapers too changed hands, and the Germans howled with laughter at ours. They assured us that France was finished and Russia nearly beaten too.

SOLDIER 3: We told them that was nonsense, and one of them said, “Well, you believe your newspapers and we’ll believe ours.”

SOLDIER 1: Clearly they are lied to—yet after meeting these men, I wonder how truthful our own newspapers have been.

SOLDIER 4: These are not the “savage barbarians” we’ve read so much about. They are men with homes and families, hopes and fears, principles and, yes, love of country.

SOLDIER 2: In other words, men like ourselves.

SOLDIER 3: Why are we led to believe otherwise?

SOLDIER 1: As it grew late, a few more songs were traded around the fire, and then all joined in for—I am not lying to you—“Auld Lang Syne.”

SOLDIER 4: Then we parted with promises to meet again tomorrow,

SOLDIER 2: and even some talk of a football match.

SOLDIER 3: I was just starting back to the trenches when an older German clutched my arm. “My God,” he said, “why cannot we have peace and all go home?” I told him gently, “That you must ask your emperor.” He looked at me then, searchingly. “Perhaps, my friend. But also we must ask our hearts.”

SOLDIER 1: And so, dear mother,

SOLDIER 4: dear wife,

SOLDIER 2: dear friend,

SOLDIER 3: dear sister,

SOLDIER 1: tell me, has there ever been such a Christmas Eve in all history?

SOLDIER 4: And what does it all mean, this impossible befriending of enemies?

SOLDIER 2: For the fighting here, of course, it means regrettably little. Decent fellows those soldiers may be, but they follow orders and we do the same.

SOLDIER 3: Besides, we are here to stop their army and send it home, and never could we shirk that duty.

SOLDIER 1: Still, one cannot help imagine what would happen if the spirit shown here were caught by the nations of the world.

SOLDIER 4: Of course, disputes must always arise.

SOLDIER 2: But what if our leaders were to offer well wishes in place of warnings?

SOLDIER 3: Songs in place of slurs?

SOLDIER 1: Presents in place of reprisals?

SOLDIER 4: Would not all war end at once?

SOLDIER 2: All nations say they want peace.

SOLDIER 3: Yet on this Christmas morning, I wonder if we want it quite enough.

SOLDIER 1: Yours truly,

SOLDIER 4: Yours always,

SOLDIER 2: Sincerely,

SOLDIER 3: With all my love,

SOLDIER 1: John

SOLDIER 4: Andrew

SOLDIER 2: Philip

SOLDIER 3: Tom

End: The Christmas Truce

Partial List of World War I Literature

This is not a complete or definitive list. There were thousands of writers, poets, playwrights, journalists and diary writers who responded to World War I through the written word. Listed below are some of the classics of World War I literature as well as those recommended.

Poets – over 2,000 poets published during and immediately after WWI. Here is a partial list from www.poetryfoundation.org

Richard Aldington

Lawrence Binyon

Mary Borden

Vera Mary Brittain

Rupert Brooke

Mary Wedderburn Cannan

Margaret Postgate Cole

Ford Maddox Ford

Wilfred Wilson Gibson

Robert Graves

Ivor Gurney

Julian Grenfell

Thomas Hardy

Corbin Henderson

Teresa Hooley

David Jones

Akhil Katyal
Rudyard Kipling
Francis Ledwidge
Amy Lowell
Florence Ripley Maston
John McRae
Henry Newbolt
Robert Nichols
Wilfred Owen
Marjorie Pickthall
Jessie Pope
Isaac Rosenberg
Carl Sandburg
Siegfried Sassoon

Alan Seeger
Robert Service
Charles Sorley
Gertrude Stein
Wallace Stevens
Sara Teasdale
Edward Thomas
Katherine Tynan
William Watson
Arthur Graeme West
Edith Wharton
Ella Wheeler Wilcox
William Butler Yeats

Novels

Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, 1929
Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, 1916
Pat Barker, *Ghost Road (Regeneration Trilogy)* 1995 (Received Booker Prize, 1995)
Willa Cather, *One of Ours*, 1922 (Pulitzer, 1923)
Donald Jack, *Three Cheers for Me and That's Me in the Middle*, 2014
A.P. Herbert, *The Secret Battle*, 1919 John Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers*, 1921
Ford Maddox Ford, *Parade's End* (tetralogy), 1924- 1927
C.S. Forester, *African Queen*, 1935
Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929
Frederic Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, 1929
W. Somerset Maugham, *Ashenden: Or the British Agent*, 1928
Michael Morpurgo, *War Horse*, 1982 (children's book)
Ralph Hale Mottram, *Spanish Farm Trilogy*, 1924 - 1926
Evadne Price, *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of the War*, 1930
May Sinclair, *Tasker Jevons*, 1916 (2 more novels)
Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*, 1930
Edith Wharton, *Marne*, 1918
Edith Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, 1923
Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1928
Henry Williamson, *The Patriot's Progress*, 1930
Victor Maslin Yeates, *Winged Victory*, 1934

Non-Fiction, Journals and Diaries

Mildred Aldrich, *A Hilltop on the Marne* (1915), *On the Edge of the War Zone* (1917), *The Peak of the Load* (1918), *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (1919). (French Legion of Honor, 1922).
Enid Bagnold, *A Diary without Dates*, 1918
John Hay Beith, *The First Hundred Thousand*, 1915
Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War*, 1928
Mary Borden, *Forbidden Zone*, 1929
Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 1933
Nellie Bly, journalist, covered Women's Suffrage Parade, 1913
Charles Edmund Carrington, *A Subaltern's War*, 1929

Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality*, 1933
Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 1929
Arthur Jenkins, *A Tank Driver's Experiences*, 1922
Percy Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 1937
Irene Rathbone, *We that Were Young*, 1932
Elisabeth S. Sergeant, *Shadow Shapes: The Journal of a Wounded Woman*
Charles Edward Montague, *Disenchantment*, 1922
May Sinclair, Munro Ambulance driver, *A Journal of Impression in Belgium*, 1925
Flora Sandes, An English-Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army, 1916
Mrs. Humphrey Ward, *England's Effort*, 1916 (four more books)
Edith Wharton, *Fighting France*
Edith Wharton (editor), *Book of the Homeless*

Plays

Mark James, *Dear Mother*, (2014 (Winner of 8 Awards))
Joan Littlewood, *Oh, What a Lovely War!*, 1963
Stephen MacDonal, *Not About Heroes*, 1982
Frank McGuinness, *Behold the Sons of Ulster Marching Toward the Somme*, 1985
Michael Morpurgo, *War Horse*, 2007
R.C. Sheriff, *Journey's End*, 1928
Peter Whelan, *The Accrington Pals*, 1982

Films – Wikipedia lists 142 films on the subject of WWI. These are some favorites.

African Queen, 1951
All Quiet on the Western Front, 1930
Gallipoli, 1981
Johnny Got His Gun, 1971
King of Hearts, 1966
Lawrence of Arabia, 1962
The Lost Battalion, 2001
My Boy Jack, 2007
Sergeant York, 1941
War Horse, 2011
Wings, 1927 (winner of 1st Oscar for Best Picture)