

## Section F

### THE 1914-18 WAR (i)

**Thomas Burke** (1887 – 1945)

*Of the Great White War* – page 79

A British poet and travel writer whose poems and stories were about life in poor areas of London's East End, particularly the Limehouse district where many Chinese immigrants lived. *Of the Great White War* is taken from *The Songbook of Quoong Lee of Limehouse*, published in 1920. It looks at war from the point of view of an elderly Chinese immigrant. Some of his stories have been published in *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Ghost Stories*.

**Eleanor Farjeon** (1881 – 1965)

*Easter Monday* – page 85

Her parents contributed much to her career as a writer, poet and playwright, her father Benjamin Leopold Farjeon being a successful writer and novelist. He encouraged her to write from the age of five, and she did the lyrics for an operetta composed by her brother when she was eighteen. She was a friend of many poets including D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare, Robert Frost, and Edward Thomas. She fell in love with Thomas, but never admitted this to him because he was married and devoted to his wife. She introduced Thomas to Frost and to poetry, and aged 84 wrote the forward to Thomas's *The Road Ahead*, published 40 years after he was killed in action in France, 1917. She is probably best known for her children's verse and stories, and was awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 1958. She wrote the words of the hymn *Morning has Broken*. *Easter Monday* was written in memory of Edward Thomas.

**Wilfrid Wilson Gibson** (1878 – 1962)

*Breakfast* – page 83

He was a social worker in London and a prolific poet whose early poems were on traditional rural themes before focusing on the lives of the poor and then with great sympathy on the experiences of the common soldiers of the First World War. He volunteered to serve in 1915, but was rejected four times on grounds of poor vision until finally being accepted in 1917. He never served abroad, despite frequent statements to the contrary.

**Florence Ripley Mastin** (1896 – ?)

*At the Movies* – page 77

She was an American writer and English teacher. *At the Movies* was first published in a 1919 American collection, *A Treasury of War Poetry*.

**Edna St Vincent Millay (1892 – 1950)**

*Sonnet ('What my lips have kissed...')* – page 81

An American poet and writer who was encouraged as a child in music and literature, and was taught to write verse by her mother at the age of four. As a young girl she studied to become a concert pianist and this early intimacy with music survived in the quality of her lyrics. Her wit, satire and cynicism made her the spokesman for a younger generation, especially women. She spent two years travelling in France, Italy, and Albania, living for a time in Vienna and then, joined by her mother, in England, where illness plagued her. She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1922. The Second World War brought anxiety for the safety of her husband's family in German-occupied Holland. Throughout her career devoting herself and her poetry to social issues, she directed her poetic talents to the war effort during the 1940s. Unfortunately, her real poetic achievements, especially noted for her sonnets, were overshadowed by her image as the free but "naughty" woman of the 1920's.

**Wilfred Owen (1893 – 1918)**

*Disabled* – page 80, *Exposure* – page 82, *Mental Cases* – page 84

Owen is now generally recognised as one of the major poets of the war, though his work was little known at the time. An ambitious but very amateur poet in his youth, he was teaching in France when the war broke out. He joined up in late 1915 but was not sent into the trenches until January 1917. During the winter and spring of 1917 he participated in some of the worst fighting of the war; in the early summer he was diagnosed as suffering from shell-shock and sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh. There he met Siegfried Sassoon who encouraged him to write directly about the war in his poetry. Owen remained at Craiglockhart until he was returned to service in France in September 1918; the majority of his war poetry was written between September 1917 and October 1918. He fought through the final campaigns of the war, winning the Military Cross, and was killed on November 4, 1918, just a week before the war's end. Sassoon helped to publish the first edition of Owen's poetry in 1920; since then, Owen's reputation has grown steadily. Owen appears as a character in Pat Barker's recent novels in the *Regeneration* trilogy, in which his letters provide much material for the battlefield scenes.

**Jessie Pope (1868 – 1941)**

*War Girls* – page 78

Pope was well known as a writer during the war years, publishing articles in *Punch* and jauntily patriotic war poetry in newspapers like the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* encouraging men to enlist. Although her writing was always vigorously – sometimes almost bloodthirstily – pro-war, it is typical of a great deal that was written and published during wartime on the home front. Her verses roused the anger, in particular, of Wilfred Owen, whose poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* was originally aimed at her – 'To a Certain Poetess' – although he later broadened his attack.

**Isaac Rosenberg (1890 – 1918)**

He worked as an engraver and was a student at the Slade School of Art from 1911 to 1913. At the start of the war he was in South Africa. He despised war, but enlisted in October 1915 when he returned to England and was unable to find work. He hoped that his experience in the trenches would 'refine itself into poetry later on.' He described army life as ridiculous, idiotic and meaningless. He was killed in action in 1918. His poetry is forceful, rich in its vocabulary, and starkly realistic in its attitudes to war.

**Siegfried Sassoon (1886 – 1967)**

*Base Details* – page 79, *The Dug-Out* – page 81

He was the son of wealthy Anglo-Jewish parents. Before 1914 he lived a leisured life, golfing, hunting, writing derivative poetry. He joined up on the first day of the Great War and was nicknamed 'Mad Jack' in the trenches because of his reckless courage. For bombing and capturing a German trench single-handed he won a Military Cross which he later renounced, throwing it into the River Mersey. Sassoon had become radicalised by the losses at the Battle of the Somme and by meeting leftwing pacifist intellectuals. His famous protest against the politics of the war – *A Soldier's Declaration* – was printed in the Times and quoted in parliament. To prevent Sassoon from being court-martialled, poet Robert Graves, a fellow-officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, got him admitted to Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh where the psychological effects of war were treated. There he met and influenced Wilfred Owen and wrote some of his bitterest war poems.

**Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895 – 1915)**

'When you see millions of the mouthless dead...' – page 77

He was educated at Marlborough. He enlisted in August 1914 rather than taking up his Oxford Scholarship, even though he loved Germany where he had lived for six months, and hated the idea of fighting for England. He was killed in action the following year, one of the youngest poets to die in the war. '*When you see millions of the mouthless dead*' was his last and most bitter poem. He left only 37 complete poems.

**Sara Teasdale (1884 – 1933)**

'There will come soft rains...' – page 85

Sara was born in St. Louis, Missouri, to staunch Baptists with a Puritan heritage. She was a voracious reader, a keen observer of nature, and analytical about her emotions and responses. Sheltered and protected and thought to be frail by her family, although there is no medical evidence to support ill health, she was made to retreat when stressed. Over the years, she developed illness as a response to stressful experiences, and her preoccupation with death stems from an early age. As she perfected her skills, her poetry grew from the child-like verses to the adult exploration of emotional life. A characteristic of the principal poets of the nineteenth century was their reclusiveness. Christina Rossetti and others withdrew from the world to create their poetry in seclusion. Sara did this as well, retreating when her life, her later marriage and her career demanded too much of her. Love is the central theme of her work, writing of her emotions and her response to the world and people around her. Sara first entertained thoughts of suicide in 1913 when a relationship she'd counted on failed to happen. Later critics credit these thoughts to her lack of self-worth. Sara had little or no experience with

love affairs, or with men, and this is reflected in the romantic nature of her poetry. Marriage changed her life - and her poetry.

*Lesbia Thanet*

*In Time of War* – page 78

Little is known about Thanet. *In Time of War* was first published in a collection called *War Verse* in America during 1919.

**Edward Thomas** (1878 – 1917)

*As the Team's Head-Brass* – page 76

He grew up in London, but developed a passion for nature. He was encouraged to write poetry by the American writer, Robert Frost. Hating the economic forces that had destroyed agricultural communities and expanded cities, Thomas absorbed, as his poetry shows, the literary and folk traditions of the English countryside. He wrote 144 poems between 1914 and 1916 and while most of these were about landscape, the weather and the seasons, several, including '*As the team's head-brass...*' dealt directly with the influence of the war on the English countryside. After studying history at Oxford, he lived in rural southern England. He supported his family by writing reviews, country books, biography and criticism. Overwork caused a sometimes suicidal depression and creative despair. Thomas's may be the first ecological poetry. He defined English nationality in terms of locality or "home". '*As the team's head brass*', which registers change in the very fabric of its blank verse, revises Hardy's '*In time of "The Breaking of Nations"*'. Thomas's language, images and forms reflect traditional properties of English poetry.