



## NOT WRITING ABOUT WAR - POEMS

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### **Charles Wolfe, 'The Burial of Sir John Moore After Corunna' (1816)**

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,  
As his corpse to the rampart we hurried;  
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot  
O'er the grave where our hero we buried. [L] [SEP]

We buried him darkly at dead of night,  
The sods with our bayonets turning,  
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light  
And the lantern dimly burning. [L] [SEP]

No useless coffin enclosed his breast,  
Not in sheet or in shroud we wound him;  
But he lay like a warrior taking his rest  
With his martial cloak around him. [L] [SEP]

Few and short were the prayers we said,  
And we spoke not a word of sorrow;  
But we steadfastly gazed on the face that was dead,  
And we bitterly thought of the morrow. [L] [SEP]

We thought, as we hollowed his narrow bed  
And smoothed down his lonely pillow,  
That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head,  
And we far away on the billow! [L] [SEP]

Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that's gone,  
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him –  
But little he'll reck, if they let him sleep on  
In the grave where a Briton has laid him. [L] [SEP]

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But half of our heavy task was done  
When the clock struck the hour for retiring;  
And we heard the distant and random gun  
That the foe was sullenly firing. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

Slowly and sadly we laid him down,  
From the field of his fame fresh and gory;  
We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone,  
But we left him alone with his glory.

**James Carrick Moore, *A Narrative of the Campaign of the British Army in Spain* (London: J. Johnson, 1809), 366-7.**

At twelve o'clock at night the remains of Sir John Moore were accordingly carried to the Citadel [...] A grave was dug by a party of the 9th Regiment, the Aides-de-Camp attending by turns. No coffin could be procured, and the body was never undressed, but wrapt up by the Officers of his Staff in a military cloak and blankets.

Towards eight o'clock in the morning some firing was heard. It was then resolved to finish the interment, lest a serious attack should be made; on which the Officers would be ordered away, and not suffered to pay the last duties to their General.

The officers of his family bore the body to the grave; the funeral service was read by the Chaplain, and the corpse was covered with earth.

**Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (1917)**

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
—Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,

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And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

**Batool Abu Akleen, 'I want a grave' from *48Kg.* (2025)**

I want a grave  
I don't want my corpse to be  
decomposing in the middle of the street.

**Other References**

(1) 'You had this absolute avalanche of material from our BBC colleagues in Baghdad and with the actual units in the field. But in a strange sort of way a lot of it was like looking through a keyhole at a very small piece of the war. People wanted to know: [...] "Is it going wrong?", "Is it not going wrong?", "What does this particular bit of action mean?" Pulling all that together proved dramatically difficult in this particular campaign. (Jonathan Marcus, 'Reporter's Log: Final Thoughts', BBC News Channel (19 April 2003), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in\\_depth/world/2003/reporters\\_log/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/world/2003/reporters_log/default.stm), accessed 24 November 2025)

(2)

But pardon, gentles all, [he writes at the play's opening]  
The flat unraised spirits that hath dared  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
(William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Prologue, lines 11-14)

(3)(a) Combat gnosticism: 'a construction that gives us war experience as a kind of gnosis, a secret knowledge which only an initiated elite knows'. (James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Criticism', *New Literary History* 30 (1999), 203-15: 204)

(3)(b) '[T]hey [combatant-poets] cannot truly inform an audience who lacks the experiential basis for understanding their work, and the only way an audience can acquire such a basis is to experience combat, at which point they are no longer the noncombatant audience the poetry assumes.' (Ibid, 210)

(4) 'A distinction should be made between two groups – those who themselves risk their lives in battle, and those who have stayed at home and have only to wait for the

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loss of one of their dear ones.' (Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', trans. under the supervision of Joan Rivière, *Collected Papers*, ed. Ernest Jones (London: The Hogarth Press / The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1950), 291)

(5) 'What is meant by the truthfulness of war books? [...] I would even paradoxically say that the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench warfare are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities. High explosive barrages will make a temporary liar or visionary of anyone.' (Robert Graves, 'The Garlands Wither', *The Times Literary Supplement* (26 June 1930), 534)

(6) I think it better that in times like these

A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth

We have no gift to set a statesman right.

(W. B. Yeats, 'On Being Asked for a War Poem', *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 259, lines 1-3)

(7) 'if I were to speak of all the nameless horrors of that spring as plainly as I could, I should really disgust you [...] my memory prefers to dwell upon what was pleasing and amusing' (Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, ed. Sara Salih (London: Penguin, 2005))

(8) 'Time and space were obliterated, and the thoughts of men and women encircled the world... The tension was almost too great. When seconds seemed to halt people held their breath lest they should be heard in the stillness.' (Anonymous, 'In the Abbey. The Warrior Laid to Rest', *The Times* (London), 12 November 1920, Supplement, ii)

(9) 'When the words in the city are full of savagery and lies, nothing speaks louder than the unwritten poem' (George Steiner, *Language and Silence. Essays 1958-1966* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 76)

(10) 'When, for instance, the gods who take different sides in the Trojan war come at last to actual blows, the contest goes on in the poem unseen. This invisibility leaves the imagination free play to enlarge the scene at will, and picture the gods and their movements on a scale far grander than the measure of common humanity.' (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1880), 78)

(11) '[t]o be able to find pleasure in avalanches and fissured glacier fields sets English nobles and bourgeois travelers on the Grand Tour apart from Swiss peasants for whom such natural features are a despised daily danger' (Gene Ray, 'Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime', *Yale Journal of Criticism* 17.1 (2004), 7)

(12) 'the terror of the sublime becomes a permanent, ghastly latency, compounded by the anguish of shame' (ibid, 5)

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