

peace pledge union

POETRY, PEACE & WAR

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Poetry written in the English language has a long and fascinating history. Like other creative arts, poetry began in service to communities. Its function was to aid the memory and enshrine in its rhythmic diction the history of the tribe. Over the centuries it became a way in which people could communicate not only stories but also ideas and emotions in an imaginative and expressive way. One characteristic has remained: throughout the history of poetry-making, poems have provided a commentary - often critical - on what people, communities and nations do. And in the 20th century, the horrors and irreversible changes created by modern warfare changed poetry for good.

The thirty or so poems in this selection (written between 1914 and 1998) demonstrate - among many other things - this change. After the First World War it was clear that the subject of war could no longer be treated as though its slaughter was solemn and glorious. But how could war now be written about by poets? The following poems illustrate the diversity of answers to that question, in a variety of ways expressing the fundamental unacceptability of war. They also show that poets have not found the subject easy.

We hope that anyone visiting the website will find the poems interesting. But the poems are also presented for use by teachers of English Language and Literature, History, Citizenship, and general studies in schools, and by tutors in English Literature and Creative Writing anywhere. Reading groups, now springing up in communities across the UK, might also like to make the collection a basis for discussion. The poems are divided into eight groups, roughly chronologically where possible.

1. THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Most people consciously adjust their choice and use of words in the face of great events. This may be in order to express strong feelings: the day after Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, the novelist Henry James wrote to a friend of 'the plunge of civilisation into this abyss of blood and darkness'.

But in 1914 'high' language had another purpose: to encourage people to believe that war was a noble enterprise. 'The stern hand of Fate has scourged us to an elevated place where we can see the great everlasting things that matter for a nation - the great peaks of honour we had forgotten: Duty, Patriotism, and, clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to heaven.' That was a politician (soon to become Britain's prime minister) in September 1914, addressing a large audience of potential recruits. Many such volunteers would go to certain death, and not in glittering white.

In January 1916 Britain's Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, published an anthology of poetry and prose intended to console and encourage its readers. It was called 'The Spirit of Man' and was hugely successful. Bridges was a 19th century man, 70 years old in 1914, who had never fought in a war. In his introduction, he referred to the importance of religious faith; to 'joy' that 'our country is called of God to stand for the truth of man's hope'; and to what that hope is: 'the desire for brotherhood and universal peace to men of good-will'. He ended: 'Britons have ever fought well for their country, and their country's Cause is the high Cause of Freedom and Honour. ...We can therefore be happy in our sorrows, happy even in the death of our beloved who fall in the fight; for they die nobly, as heroes and saints die, with hearts and hands unstained by hatred or wrong.'

Stirring stuff; or so it was back then. But nothing to do with reality, or even truth. It was the men who fought the war who knew the facts. A captain in 1914: 'It's absolutely a war of attrition. We've got to stick it longer than the other side and go on producing men, money and material until they cry quits; and that's all about it as far as I can see.' A soldier at the Somme in July 1916: 'By the end of the day both sides had seen, in a sad scrawl of broken earth and murdered men, the answer to the question. No road. No thoroughfare. Neither race had won, nor could win, the war. The War had won, and would go on winning.'

There was yet another kind of language: the button-pushing clichés of heroism-to-order. Ordered in words like these of General Haig: 'Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one must fight on to the end.' As it happened, many men failed to hear the order: 'we were too scattered, too busy trying to survive, to be called into formation to hear the orders of the day'..

And what about the men they were fighting?

German generals too had high-sounding words: 'Keep the German army's bright shield of honour clean to the last, and then you will be able to look back in pride, to the end of your days, on your heroic deeds.'

But again, it was the footsoldiers who had the clearer view. A young German soldier watched a wretched crowd of Russian prisoners: 'A word of command has made these silent figures our enemies, a word of command might transform them into our friends. At some table a document is signed by people we don't know; and then our highest aim becomes the very crime which the world had formerly condemned and punished.'

Another, whose health was broken by his experiences, saw that war itself kills thought and language. 'I was at the front for 13 months, and by the end the sharpest perceptions were dulled, the greatest words had become mean. War had become an everyday affair, life in the line was now routine. There were no heroes, only victims. And conscripts now, instead of volunteers. There was no rhyme or reason in all this slaughtering and devastation.'

Not much poetry, either. But poets learned the hard way that poems can, after all, deal truthfully with this kind of pain.

The first two poems in this section, 'In Flanders Fields' and 'For the Fallen', are still caught up in 19th century high-flown rhetoric; and we can see now how it masks meaning. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'On Passing the New Menin Gate' don't entirely reject the vocabulary of rhetoric - the grand words 'ecstasy', 'ardent', 'glory', 'absolve', 'fate', 'doomed', 'pride', 'immolation', and 'sepulchre' are here - but they make it participate in forcefully telling truths about war.

Ernest Hemingway wrote that 'abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, are obscene beside the concrete names of villages and rivers, the numbers of regiments, and the dates' on which their men killed and were killed. Though some of its vocabulary has changed, political and military rhetoric is still with us. Do we recognise it when we hear it? Does it work? Are there enough people prepared to cut through it to find its real meaning - and do that publicly? Are writers and poets among them? And do they get noticed?

Poems of interest:

- In Flanders Fields by John McCrae
- For the Fallen by Laurence Binyon
- Dulce et decorum est by Wilfred Owen
- On Passing the New Menin Gate by Siegfried Sassoon

2. THE 1930S

The poet Roy Fuller was born in 1912. 'It turned out that my boyhood ended at the start of a world upheaval, which led to an upheaval in English writing, particularly the writing of poetry.'

In 1929, when the great economic depression began, Fuller was 17 years old. 'It can't be said that before 1929 one lived in a just, prosperous and ordered England. I was conscious of the injustices and illogicalities in the social distribution of money and privileges.' By 1932 he had become a Marxist. 'I believed that the wrongs in society could be righted only through social revolution. I believed that the threat of war could be removed only by the victory of the international working classes. I believed that opposition to Nazi and other fascist movements would only be effective from left-wing parties and leadership. By then W H Auden, Stephen Spender and C Day Lewis had published their early books, all containing verse concerned with social issues and political beliefs. One felt part of a new movement in literature.'

But nothing was straightforward. 'Almost from the start there were difficulties and unhappiness. The belief in Marxism seemed to some people a matter of faith. On losing that faith they felt deeply guilty at ever having held it.' Fuller too had doubts about the way Marxism worked, or did not work, in practice. He began to be uncertain about 'the goodness of mankind in the mass, and about State ownership'. The problem for everyone was what was happening in Russia, a country whose government was built on Marxist principles and had turned out to be run by a brutal dictator. The 1930s saw three dictators in power: Joseph Stalin in Russia (between 1934 and 1938 millions of so-called 'enemies of the people' were imprisoned, exiled or shot), Benito Mussolini in Italy (in power from 1922 and at his most aggressive in the 1930s), and Adolf Hitler, whose Nazi party was elected to the leadership of Germany and who made himself sole ruler in 1933.

Roy Fuller pinpointed something else: the developing sense that poets were 'temperamentally and otherwise unfitted for political life and action'. This bothered him. 'The evils of the age go on presenting themselves as conquerable, if at all, only by the active steps taken by each individual.' Taking no steps was letting oneself and others down.

Roy Fuller's own way of writing was ultimately inspired by a remark made by Stephen Spender: that a poet might usefully and honestly write about, or 'out of', his or her own doubts. Doubts about beliefs: is communism really the answer, can all problems be dealt with by politics? Doubts about actions: is one holding back when one shouldn't, pressing forward when one should? Doubts about strong views: are they fair, is it sometimes OK to compromise? In fact raising questions and airing doubts can be inspiring, enlightening, thought-provoking - in a word, poetic.

Indeed, it was in the 1930s that poetry was accepted as having to do with everything. 'Poetry,' said W H Auden, 'is memorable speech' - about what? Everything; anything. Birth, death, hatred, fear, the delights and miseries of desire, the prosperity of unjust people and the misery of many just ones, triumphs, earthquakes, boredom and anxiety, terror, despair... When Auden said that all the things we remember, 'no matter how trivial, are equally the subject of poetry', he also meant that they can be used to convey ideas and feelings about things that aren't trivial at all.

'Poetry,' said Roy Fuller, 'is a succinct art: readers must let it expand in their understanding'. In the 1930s poems began to do what they do best: shine light, from different angles, on things that should not always be kept in the dark. But they have to be given time to work in the mind, as it, so to speak, adjusts itself to the light.

The four poems in this section are all, in very different ways, wake-up calls, reminders that, as Roy Fuller said, each individual should 'take active steps'. Their authors were all young, intelligent, alert, aware, and confident that poetry was the new medium for ideas. (In 1935, John Lehmann was 28, Stephen Spender 25, C Day Lewis 31, W H Auden 28.) They wanted to make people think. How often do we say 'it makes you think'? How often ought we to hang on to that thought and do something with it - 'take active steps'?

Roy Fuller again: 'The evils of the age go on presenting themselves as conquerable, if at all, only by the active steps taken by each individual - or at any rate so pervasive and fundamental as to make taking no steps a matter of self-reproach.' It makes you think.

Poems of interest:

- This Excellent Machine by John Lehmann
- Port Bou by Stephen Spender
- Newsreel by Cecil Day Lewis
- Here War Is Simple by W H Auden

3. THE SECOND WORLD WAR

'The two world wars were destructive beyond measure, and they spread right across the globe.... Future historians must look back on the 3 decades between August 1914 and May 1945 as the era when Europe took leave of its senses. Totalitarian horrors and the horrors of total war created an unequalled sum of death, misery and degradation. When choosing the symbols to represent the human experience of those years, one can hardly choose anything other than the agents of 20th century death: the tank, the bomber, the gas canister, the trenches, the tombs of unknown soldiers, the death camps, and the mass graves.' (historian Norman Davies)

'Before the war I was an engineer on the design team for a new bomber. I heard about pacifism and I saw straight away that it was right. So I set about thinking what I should do. I wanted to help ordinary people, so I became a chiropractor. I changed my profession from bombers to bodies, you might say - from potential destructive power to the power of healing.... The idea of refusing to fight must be kept alive.' (conscientious objector Ronald Rice).

'You can say the words "death and destruction" and they don't mean anything. But they're awful words when you are looking at what they mean... All around was the usual riffraff: papers, tin cans, cartridge belts, helmets, an odd shoe. There were also, ignored and unhuman, the hard-frozen corpses of Germans. Then a clump of houses, burned and gutted, and around them the enormous bloated bodies of cattle....You've seen places like this in the newsreels. They're spread over Europe and one forgets the human misery and fear and despair that they represent.' (journalist Martha Gellhorn)

'I was never a soldier, only a civilian in uniform...Death always had to be heroic, for a great cause and founded in belief. And what is it really? It means to perish like cattle from cold and starvation - just another biological process. Mutilated men are dying here like flies, and no-one even takes the trouble to bury them. Someone ought to film it, just to discredit the "Noblest Form of Death". It's a filthy way of dying - and doubtless it will be glorified on granite pedestals in the shape of dying warriors with their heads in bandages and their arms in slings.' (From a letter written by a German conscript trapped in the siege of Stalingrad).

In the end it is stories of individual experience that convey most to a reader, and the poets of the time knew that, as the poems that follow demonstrate. Henry Reed wrote about his own military training, and reveals how war kills the spirit. Keith Douglas wrote about his own experience of killing - one of the first poems of its kind - and shows how war kills conscience. Randall Jarrell wrote about his experience in the US Air Force, and sadly highlights the wastefulness of war. Norman Nicholson wrote about his own neighbourhood in wartime, and the way war draws people into its deadly service.

As WW2 got under way the newspapers asked 'Where are the war poets?' Most of those who gave the papers what they wanted (poems like 'For the Fallen' - see Part 1) sank without trace after 1945, and many never wrote again. The war, said C Day Lewis (see Part 2), was 'no subject for immortal verse'. Most of the serious poetry of the time attended to other things, but did not exclude the images and details of war: black-out curtains, barrage balloons, 'the patch you sewed on my old battledress', newsboys delivering, to 'peaceful steps, reports of last night's battles', the army tent, the letter from home, 'the tense eye and the tired mind'. What's also noticeable in poems written during the war are words of exhausted numbness and detachment. A man whose son has just been killed in the Blitz looks with 'an indifferent eye', hears bomb-thuds 'impassively'. Another, stuck in an army encampment waiting for rain to stop, tells how the men think of 'the loud celebrities exhorting us to slaughter, and the herded refugees' but think of them ...'as indifferently

As of ourselves or those whom we
For years have loved, and will again
Tomorrow maybe love; but now it is the rain
Possesses us entirely.'

Keith Douglas said, grimly, 'To be sentimental or emotional now is dangerous to oneself and others'. War kills more than bodies.

And now? Most of Norman Davies' ominous symbols of 20th century human experience are still with us, still potent; and what other menacing ones have been added to the list since 1945?

Poems of interest:

- Judging Distances by Henry Reed
- How to Kill by Keith Douglas
- A Front by Randall Jarrell
- Cleator Moor by Norman Nicholson

4. CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

In 1945 an International Military Tribunal was set up at Nuremberg. Its Nuremberg Charter contained the following definition:

Crimes against humanity: murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against civilian populations...; persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds

This was the first time that crimes against humanity were established in international law.

By 1999 there were 11 international texts defining crimes against humanity. All of them refer to specific acts of violence against any human beings, regardless of their nationality, who they are, why they are being persecuted, and whether the time is of war or of peace.

In recent years two other specific crimes have been added to the list: rape and torture.

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up to assert the rights of every human individual. Only since then have individuals had a 'legal personality' in international law. The Declaration was an attempt to protect people: 'Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind'.

The United Nations Charter deals only with the rights of States. As a result, there has been tension. The UN Charter gives States the right to operate without interference in their internal affairs. In recent years humanitarian concerns have been allowed to override this respect for privacy, in the case of atrocities such as genocide and ethnic cleansing. But intervention has mostly been late, unsuitable and problem-making, or has simply failed.

There is also tension between the Declaration of Human Rights, which is implicitly against war, and the Geneva Conventions, which accept war as normal and are concerned only with regulating it.

Another difficulty faced by the Declaration is the way States have, or have not, acknowledged it (which has been made easier by the weakening presence of an opt-out clause). It has even been involved in a kind of trade-off: one State or group of States may, for example, agree to keep quiet about another's human rights abuses, in return for political stability, economic agreements, or even peace itself.

In 1975 an agreement called the Helsinki Final Act (signed by most European countries, the USA and what was then the Soviet Union) acknowledged a more world-wide understanding of what human rights are:

The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

They will promote and encourage the effective exercise of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and freedoms all of which derive from the inherent dignity of the human person.

The participating States on whose territory national minorities exist will respect the right of persons belonging to such minorities to equality before the law, will afford them the full opportunity for the actual enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The participating States recognise the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and co-operation among themselves as among all States.

At least the language of human rights is becoming universal. But that doesn't mean that they are kept, or interpreted the same way. In Europe, for example, there is a Court of Human Rights to which cases can be taken for Appeal when abuses have not been acknowledged by courts in individual States.

It's also worth remembering that even the world wide web doesn't guarantee freedom of communication. There are governments which block their citizens' access to material which encourages freedom of expression.

In the end, the acceptance of any individual's rights depends, still, on the governments of States. In support of any individual's rights, however, is a huge world-wide Human Rights movement, at work to create a world in which human rights are universally respected. This is the vision of the peace movement, too.

Is there a place for the 'language of human rights' in poetry? Most poets could be said to belong to a community which places a high value on individual human beings, their needs, their insights - and their suffering.

Poems of interest:

- Refugee Blues by W. H. Auden
- Bread and a Pension by Louis Albert Johnson
- Dispossessed by Evangeline Paterson
- After the War by Rachel Galvin

5. THE NUCLEAR AGE

At the beginning of the 20th century Albert Einstein published his theory proving that energy and matter were equivalent and could be converted from one to the other. At the same time physicists were at work on atomic theory - the nature and behaviour of the smallest particles of matter (even smaller than their predecessors had thought). The urge to find a way actually to release atomic energy was irresistible to many scientists. Across more than 3 decades the discoveries were made that led to the splitting ('fission') of the nucleus of an uranium atom and a scientists' memorandum saying that 'a moderate amount of Uranium 235 would indeed constitute an extremely efficient explosive'.

That memorandum (by physicists Otto Frisch and Rudolf Peierls, who were working in Birmingham, UK) was written in 1940, and the Second World War was under way. Work on nuclear fission was now regarded by US military chiefs solely as the means to make a new and ultra-powerful bomb. No-one could be sure how long it would take, or even if it would work. In 1941 America's secret \$2bn 'Manhattan Project' was set up (in Los Alamos, New Mexico) to find out. The scientists employed on the project, some of them Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, thought it possible that their colleagues still in Germany might be trying to do the same thing. The military believed that the answer was simple: be sure to be the first to make the bomb.

In fact the war with Germany was over before the first bomb was tested (code name 'Trinity'), on July 16, 1945, near Alamogordo. The explosion, which took place at dawn, was spectacular and terrifying. The glow could be seen for 125 miles. A press release was frantically rushed out to maintain secrecy - it said that a munitions dump had blown up (no loss of life)

The scientists were exhilarated by their success, and by the extent of the energy released; but many saw that a great danger had been released as well. Some tried to stop the bomb being put into use. Some got up a petition, urging the government not to use the bomb against Japan (unless the Japanese were given a test demonstration of its power and a chance to surrender); and to ensure that the new weapon was placed under international control. But the petition was spiked by the military (they simply designated it 'secret' and didn't allow it to be circulated).

The military authorities in America had wanted to use the bomb all along. The USA was still at war with Japan, and had not forgotten the Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (which had brought the USA into the Second World War). Two other bombs had been built as well as the one for the 'Trinity' test. One of them was dropped on Hiroshima, on August 6, 1945. (The other was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9.)

Poems of interest:

- August 6, 1945 by Alison Fell
- Apocalypse by D J Enright

- Your Attention Please by Peter Porter
- Talk in the Dark by Denise Levertov

6. OTHER WARS

After WW2 the world made an effort to pull itself together. The United Nations organisation was founded, and its charter, aimed at resolving interstate disputes by other means than war, drawn up. So were other agreements. 'First use' of force was banned: under modern international law, aggression is illegal.

It took the UN 20 years to agree on what 'aggression' is: invasion; attack; occupation; bombardment; blockade; attack on another state's army; unauthorised use of an army stationed on foreign soil; allowing territory to be used for aggression; sending militias or other groups to carry out aggressive acts.

Since all these things are illegal, one could have hoped that people would at last realise that they could do without armies. But not every state was yet a member of the UN, and even some of its members were committed to pacific principles more in theory than in practice. So it was agreed that using armed force in self-defence was legal; and that it was legal to make the first aggressive move if the UN said OK.

Every one of these acts of aggression has been committed, some of them repeatedly, some of them long-term, since 1945. Since 1945 there has been armed conflict going on somewhere in the world every year. American armed forces alone have been involved in conflicts in over 50 countries. Three of the poems that follow deal with three post-1945 wars: the USA's war with Japan, the USA's involvement with Vietnam's civil war, and the civil war in Ireland.

War is a survivor. It adapts itself to local climate and terrain and resources; it exploits both the strengths and weaknesses of the people it infects. But it does meet with resistance, and we do know that it can be eradicated if we choose. As it became clear in the 1950s and 1960s that with the end of world war there was still no world peace, the peace movement was reborn.

The ideas of Gandhi spread. Nonviolent resistance was put into practice. Specific campaigns were launched, against nuclear weapons, against the Vietnam war, against the British military presence in Northern Ireland. (Towards the end of the Vietnam war more young Americans had registered as conscientious objectors than had joined the army, and the USA abolished conscription in 1973.) There were peace marches and walks across countries and continents (one walk began in Quebec and ended in Guantanamo Bay). Peace research organisations and institutes were founded. There were moves towards making social changes in order to prevent conflict before violence could start.

Peace has its symbolic images no less than war: such as the 'sit-down' (the first was organised by the PPU in 1951) and other mass protests, or (in 1968) civilians in Prague standing unarmed in the path of advancing tanks. In this period there was also a new

youth culture of nonviolence and 'universal love', beginning on America's west coast and rapidly spreading around the world. The last poem in this section is a product of that culture, which has persisted as an idea long after it ceased to be a trend. John Lennon's 'Give Peace a Chance' was written in 1969, and pro-peace campaigners sing it still. Some would say it means even more now than it did then.

Poems of interest:

- The US Sailor-Japanese Skull by Winfield Townley Scott
- Missing by Margaret Richardson
- Two Lorries by Seamus Heaney
- O Come Love by Dave Cunliffe

7. RESPONSIBILITY

'Wars are much like road accidents. They have a general and a particular cause at the same time. Every road accident in the last resort is caused by the invention of the internal combustion engine....The police and the courts do not weigh profound causes. They seek a specific cause for each accident - driver's error, excessive speed, drunkenness, faulty brakes, bad road surface. So it is with wars.' (historian A J P Taylor)

A fair analogy? It's true that wars have more than one cause, with their roots in place long before the first shot. It's true that there would be no war if the machinery for it hadn't been invented, or if there had been no inventors or warmongers to pay them. It's true that, too often, the short-term causes that lead to war are assessed, rather than the conditions that created them: it's easier to dish out blame and retribution that way. Yes, it's a neat comparison.

Too neat. It's dangerous - irresponsible - to think of war as a happening beyond control. If you must compare war to a vehicle, then choose the tank: designed by human beings to kill and devastate efficiently. A tank driver's error is to fail in that, though no-one arrests him for failure except possibly the people he meant to target. Or death.

It's a fatal error to leave out the human element when thinking about war. It is human beings who invented war, run it, wage it. Every decision in war, from entering it to sorting the mess out afterwards, is made by individual human beings, sometimes on their own, sometimes by default. Those who influence them have a choice, too. The use of war is never compulsory, whatever reasons people may come up with to persuade you that it is.

So it's vital to be aware of the chain of human responsibility, and where each one of us is on it. The four poems that follow suggest some starting points.

The first, 'The hand that signed the paper', looks at the corrupting power of leaders. Such leaders include not just brutal dictators, but also those whose stated principles are humane. The second poem, 'The Castle', is perhaps more complicated than it looks. The army and its castle could stand for any individual fighter, who always runs the risk of being defeated by a trick. The third poem, 'The Responsibility', goes straight to the human point - but is also aware of the issue of the weapons system itself: someone is responsible for that too, and its existence changes the nature of a society even when it isn't in use.

The last poem ('The Voice of Authority: a language game') is about more than language and concerns more than a game. When you've read it, and perhaps given a thought to the questions that follow it, ask yourself another: who or what is the O'Grady in your life?

Responsibility:

- being accountable for your actions

- being trustworthy
- deserving credit for something
- deserving blame for something
- standing on your own

Whatever their circumstances, all human beings are called to fulfil at least one of those definitions, and often.

What has poetry to do with issues like these? If nothing else, poems can alert us to essential truths that we may have forgotten or find easy to ignore. As for the poets - they take responsibility for their poems: they are sent out under the poets' names. In a different way, the choices each of us makes, whether to act or do nothing, have our names on them. Like a stone thrown in a pond, what we do (including writing poetry or working for peace) spreads out ripples that affect other people, influence other events

Poems of interest:

- The hand that signed the paper by Dylan Thomas
- The Castle by Edwin Muir
- The Responsibility by Peter Appleton
- The Voice of Authority by Kingsley Amis

8. WOMEN'S VOICES

Why should women have a section especially for them? This is what some women say:

- 'Women's characteristic life experience gives them the potential for two things: a very special kind of intelligence, social intelligence, and a very special kind of courage, social courage. The courage to cross the lines drawn between us, which are also the lines drawn inside our heads. And the intelligence to do it safely, without a gun, and to do it productively.'
- 'Allowing men who plan wars to plan peace is a bad habit. Common sense dictates that women should be central to peacemaking, but the people who typically negotiate peace settlements are overwhelmingly men.'
- 'Male negotiators sometimes worry that having women participate in the discussion may change the tone of the meeting. They're right. During the Northern Ireland peace talks, the men would get bogged down by abstract issues and past offences. The women would come and talk about their loved ones, their bereavement, their children and their hopes for the future. These deeply personal comments helped keep the talks focused. The women's experiences reminded the men that it was people who really mattered.'
- 'People need peace education. An education for peace is an education for co-operation, caring and sharing, nonviolent problem-solving. An education that fosters competition, conquest, aggression and violence is an education for war.'

The 20th century was packed with women emerging from the shadows of marginalisation and saying, in different ways, 'stop war'. Whatever and wherever the conflict, women (and their children) have always been the chief sufferers and victims, and at last they started saying so. Some are known by name. Some have won Nobel Peace Prizes. Others gathered together in their own communities, or joined international organisations, or started their own kind of campaigns, all looking for ways to be heard. They are still at work - and getting somewhere, especially in resolving conflicts at community level, in almost every country in the world.

Some of them are poets. In Britain, the index of any anthology of poetry from Chaucer to Ted Hughes reveals the shameful gap: almost all published poets until the mid-20th century were men. The movement to 'liberate' women, which gathered momentum in the 1960s, liberated women poets too, and not only in Britain. They, too, began, with growing confidence, to write about, among many other things, the world of male violence as they saw and interpreted it.

The four poems that follow deal with different kinds of suffering experienced by women as a result of war. The first three in various ways reflect the centuries-long marginalisation of

women, and provoke thoughts about the sorts of victimhood which women have begun to resist. The suffering and struggle of women in war is by no means over; much of it will not end until war ends.

Poems of interest:

- Come on, come back by Stevie Smith
- The Enemies by Elizabeth Jennings
- A Wartime Education by U A Fanthorpe
- Tortures by Wislawa Szymborska