



Siegfried Sassoon

(1886-1967)

1 COMPLETE the life and works of Siegfried Sassoon with the words from the box.

bitter and violent
compassion
realistic

Jewish family
pastoral life
sacrificed

declaration
pacifist
shell shock

influenced
political errors
satire

Siegfried Sassoon was born into a wealthy **(1)** in 1886. As a young man, he lived the **(2)** of a young squire – fox-hunting, playing cricket, golfing – and wrote romantic verse. In 1915 he joined the war and was sent to France. His reactions to the realities of the war were **(3)** and he expressed them through irony in his poems. Sassoon also protested publicly against the war, reading out a **(4)** against it in the House of Commons in July 1917. It was his friend and fellow poet Robert Graves who prevented him from being court-martialled by convincing the review board that Sassoon was suffering from **(5)** and he was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, where he met and **(6)** Wilfred Owen. In his poems, collected in *The Old Huntsman* (1917) and in *Counter-Attack* (1918), Sassoon denounced the **(7)** and insincerities for which the soldiers were being **(8)** in various ways: in a documentary manner, by which he recreated the physical horror of the war, through anger and **(9)** (→ *Glory of Women*) and through sardonic distancing. What Sassoon achieved was neither **(10)** nor pity, but the bitter spontaneity of shocking and **(11)** detail. A resolute **(12)**, he got involved in politics, siding with the Labour Party, and, in 1957, at last he found peace in his religious faith, becoming a Roman Catholic. He died in 1967.

COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

2 READ the text and decide whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- 1 Sassoon came of a humble family. **T F**
- 2 He protested in the House of Commons. **T F**
- 3 He was court-martialled. **T F**
- 4 He influenced Wilfred Owen. **T F**
- 5 He adopted a romantic attitude to war. **T F**
- 6 At the end of his life he rejected religion and God. **T F**



Glory of Women

The poem you are going to read was written at Craiglockhart War Hospital and published for the first time in The Cambridge Magazine in December 1917. Like many other poems by Sassoon, it was 'deliberately written to disturb complacency'.

Siegfried Sassoon
*Counter-Attack,
and Other Poems
(1918)*

- You love us when we're heroes, home **on leave**,
Or **wounded** in a **mentionable** place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems¹ the war's disgrace.
5 You make us shells². You listen with delight,
By tales of dirt and danger **fondly thrilled**.
You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
And **mourn** our laurelled³ memories when we're killed.
You can't believe that British troops 'retire'
10 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 socks⁴ to send your son
His face is trodden⁵ deeper in the mud.

- 1 **redeems**. Redime, compensa.
2 **shells**. Bombe, granate.
3 **laurelled**. Coronate d'alloro.
4 **While you are knitting socks**. Mentre lavori a maglia calzini.
5 **trodden**. Calpestata, spinta.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 **READ** the poem and match the highlighted words and phrases with their meaning.

- 1 that can be referred to
- 2 feel or express sorrow for a death
- 3 stepping heavily on
- 4 allowed to be absent from military duty
- 5 foolishly excited
- 6 suffering injury

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 **READ** the poem again and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who do 'You' and 'we' (line 1) refer to?
- 2 What is women's attitude towards men at war?
- 3 What do they do at home in the meantime?
- 4 Is the poem about 'real' war or 'reported' war?

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

3 **ANALYSE** the rhyme scheme of the poem. Is it regular? What type of poem is it?

4 **POINT** out the technical device Sassoon uses to draw the reader's attention away from the rhyme scheme.



5 FOCUS on the use of imagery. List the images of the poem under the following headings.

Domestic life	Honour and glory	Horror

6 WRITE down what the following phrases suggest about the reality of war.

- 1 'home on leave' (line 1)
- 2 'wounded in a mentionable place' (line 2)
- 3 'tales of dirt' (line 6)
- 4 'hell's last horror' (line 10)
- 5 'Trampling the terrible corpses' (line 11)

7 EXPLAIN how Sassoon succeeds in universalising the experience of war.

8 DEFINE the tone of the poem. Choose from the following adjectives. Then justify your choice with examples from the text.

angry
polemical

sober
ironical

rough
sympathetic

> COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE

9 DISCUSS the way in which the two pictures below reflect the contrast between the propaganda and the social realities connected with war. You can refer to 6.2.



> COMPETENCE: READING AND ORGANISING INFORMATION

10 GO through the material about the War Poets again and write down your notes and key ideas in a Cornell note-taking page. Then write your summary in section C of the page.