

# Letteratura inglese (CdS LETTERE)

## *Spiriti inquieti alle soglie della modernità*

### A. I POETI DELLA GUERRA

1. F. Marucci, *Letteratura Inglese, un profilo storico* (2020)

Sociologicamente parlando la Prima guerra mondiale dà luogo alla più grande mobilitazione della classe intellettuale inglese dopo le guerre napoleoniche. È l'anticamera della «terra desolata». Taluni cercano nel conflitto il superamento di una crisi esistenziale, di una vita sbandata, spesso anche squattrinata: non sanno di stare per entrare in un'altra crisi, ben peggiore. Altri, dopo aver soppesato le alternative, finiscono per arruolarsi in nome dei puri ideali patriottici e di civiltà. Poeti e intellettuali inglesi confluiscono in un reggimento denominato 'i fucili degli artisti'. La guerra, in altre parole, non falcia più i poveri agricoltori o gli operai spediti inconsapevoli al fronte, o gli aristocratici che combattono per tradizione o per vocazione; in senso statistico mai come allora vi è stata un'ecatombe di tali porzioni di intellettuali e di poeti

2. Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), *The Fish* (1915)

In a cool curving world he lies  
And ripples with dark ecstasies.  
The kind luxurious lapse and steal  
Shapes all his universe to feel  
And know and be; the clinging stream  
Closes his memory, glooms his dream,  
Who lips the roots o' the shore, and glides  
Superb on unreturning tides.

Those silent waters weave for him  
A fluctuant mutable world and dim,  
Where wavering masses bulge and gape  
Mysterious, and shape to shape  
Dies momentarily through whorl and hollow,  
And form and line and solid follow  
Solid and line and form to dream  
Fantastic down the eternal stream;

3. Edward Thomas (1878-1917), *Rain*

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain  
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me  
Remembering again that I shall die  
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks  
For washing me cleaner than I have been  
Since I was born into this solitude.  
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:  
But here I pray that none whom once I loved  
Is dying tonight or lying still awake  
Solitary, listening to the rain,

Either in pain or thus in sympathy  
Helpless among the living and the dead,  
Like a cold water among broken reeds,  
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,  
Like me who have no love which this wild rain  
Has not dissolved except the love of death,  
If love it be towards what is perfect and  
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

4. ISAAC ROSENBERG (1890-1918), *Break of Day in the Trenches*, 1916

The darkness crumbles away.  
 It is the same old druid Time as ever  
 Only a live thing leaps my hand,  
 A queer sardonic rat,  
 As I pull the parapet's poppy  
 To stick behind my ear.  
 Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew  
 Your cosmopolitan sympathies.  
 Now you have touched this English hand  
 You will do the same to a German  
 Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure  
 To cross the sleeping green between.  
 It seems you inwardly grin as you pass  
 Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,  
 Less chanced than you for life,  
 Bonds to the whims of murder,  
 Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,  
 The torn fields of France.  
 What do you see in our eyes  
 At the shrieking iron and flame  
 Hurl'd through still heavens?  
 What quaver—what heart aghast?  
 Poppies whose roots are in man's veins  
 Drop, and are ever dropping;  
 But mine in my ear is safe—  
 Just a little white with the dust.

5. SIGFIED SASSOON (1886-1967), *SURVIVORS* (1917)

No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and the strain  
 Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.  
 Of course they're 'longing to go out again' –  
 These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.  
 They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed  
 Subjection to the ghosts and friends who died, –  
 Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud  
 Of glorious was that shatter'd all their pride ...  
 Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;  
 Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad

**B. WILFRED OWEN**

6. LA PROTESTA. W. Owen Letter of August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914

I can do no service to anybody by agitating for news or making dole over the slaughter. On the contrary I adopt the perfect English custom of dealing with an offender: a Frenchman duels with him: an Englishman ignores him. I feel my own life all the more precious and more dear in the presence of this **deflowering of Europe**. While it is true that the guns will effect a little useful weeding, I am furious with chagrin to think

that the Minds which were to have excelled the civilization of ten thousand years, are being annihilated – and bodies, the product of aeons of Natural Selection, melted down to pay for political statues.

7. POSSIBILITÀ MANCATE. C. Day-Lewis, “Introduction” *The Collected Poems of W. Owen*. (1966).

What Wilfried Owen’s future as a poet would have been, had he survived the war, it is impossible to say. War is the subject of nearly all his best poems, and a reference point in others [...] It is true that he wrote a few poems of great merit on other subjects. But when, during the great productive period, he sought to write or finish such poems, we often notice a regression to his immature manner. It is interesting to speculate upon what subjects might have fired his imagination and possessed his whole mind, as did the war experience. Would the vein of savage indignation prove exhausted, or might Owen have found it renewed in the struggle against social injustice which animated some of his poetic successors? It seems possible; but his honesty, fervour and sensuousness might have been directed elsewhere to produce a Catullan kind of love-poetry. My own conviction is that, whatever poetry he turned to, he would have proved himself in it a poet of high order. His dedication was complete: he passionately wanted to survive the war, so that he might continue to write poetry.