

## Three Poems: Then and Now

### Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

#### Cavalry Crossing a Ford

A line in long array where they wind betwixt green  
islands,  
They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun—  
hark to the musical clank,  
Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loiter-  
ing stop to drink,  
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a  
picture, the negligent rest on their saddles,  
Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering  
the ford—while,  
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,  
The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind.

**Wilfrid Owen (1893-1918)****Anthem for Doomed Youth**

What passing bells for those 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 for them from prayers or 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 good-byes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;

Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds,

And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

**Catharine Savage Brosman****Dinant, August 1914**

Late June '14: an Austrian archduke died  
by an assassin's hand. A pawn, that's all.  
The chessboard changed; alliances and pride  
moved pieces toward an end none could forestall.

Mid-August, Feast of the Assumption: war  
now two weeks old. In Belgium, on the Meuse,  
Dinant had been contested twice before.  
This time the Teuton forces would not lose.

French fighters occupied the Citadel,  
when Jägers, with machine guns, overcame  
them, leaving one-half dead. The stronghold fell  
again that very day—a deadly game

foreshadowing the trenches. Germans massed  
their troops, secured pontoons. First, raids at night.  
The 23<sup>rd</sup>, they crossed: blast after blast,  
grenades and cannon, houses fired, to spite

resistance. In one month, a thousand dead  
civilians, pillage, executions, rape,  
two libraries in ruins—and ahead  
four years of butchery, with no escape.

To what avail were pacts, with Europe, torn,  
gougued out, perhaps nine million soldiers killed?  
Though time grew late, the peace was never born.  
War is the poisoned fruit that we have willed.

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