

This passage is reprinted below for your use in answering the remaining questions.

### Insensibility

1.

Happy are men who yet before they are killed  
Can let their veins run cold.

Whom no compassion fleers<sup>1</sup>

(5) Or makes their feet

Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.  
The front line withers.

But they are troops who fade, not flowers,  
For poets' tearful fooling:

(10) Men, gaps for filling, who might have fought  
Longer; but no one bothers.

2.

And some cease feeling  
Even themselves or for themselves.

Dullness best solves

(15) The tease and doubt of shelling,

And Chance's strange arithmetic

Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.<sup>2</sup>

They keep no check on armies' decimation.

3.

Happy are these who lose imagination:

(20) They have enough to carry with ammunition,  
Their spirit drags no pack.

Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more  
ache.

Having seen all things red,

Their eyes are rid

(25) Of the hurt of the color of blood for ever.

And terror's first constriction over,

Their hearts remain small-drawn.<sup>3</sup>

Their senses in some scorching cautery<sup>4</sup> of battle

Now long since ironed,

Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

(30) 4.

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion

How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,

And many sighs are drained.

Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:

(35) His days are worth forgetting more than not.

He sings along the march

Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,

The long, forlorn, relentless trend

From larger day to huger night.

5.

(40) We wise, who with a thought besmirch  
Blood over all our soul,

How should we see our task

But through his blunt and lashless eyes?

Alive, he is not vital overmuch;

(45) Dying, not mortal overmuch;

Nor sad, nor proud,

Nor curious at all.

He cannot tell

Old men's placidity from his.

6.

(50) But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,  
That they should be as stones.

Wretched are they, and mean

With paucity that never was simplicity.

By choice they made themselves immune

(55) To pity and whatever moans in man

Before the last sea and the hapless stars;

Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;

Whatever shares

The eternal reciprocity of tears.

—Wilfred Owen

<sup>1</sup> to laugh or grimace in a coarse manner; scoff

<sup>2</sup> counting of their pay

<sup>3</sup> shrunk

<sup>4</sup> cauterization; burning; searing

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Insensibility

irrational war is

1.

Happy are men who yet before they are killed  
Can let their veins run cold. — no compassion  
Whom no compassion fleers!

(5) Or makes their feet  
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.  
The front line withers.  
But they are troops who fade, not flowers,  
For poets' tearful fooling:

(10) Men, gaps for filling, who might have fought  
Longer; but no one bothers. — no one cares for them

2.

And some cease feeling  
Even themselves or for themselves.  
Dullness best solves

(15) The tease and doubt of shelling,  
And Chance's strange arithmetic  
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.<sup>2</sup>  
They keep no check on armies' decimation.

3.

Happy are these who lose imagination.  
They have enough to carry with ammunition,  
Their spirit drags no pack.  
Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more  
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Having seen all things red,  
Their eyes are rid

(25) Of the hurt of the color of blood for ever.  
And terror's first constriction over,  
Their hearts remain small-drawn.<sup>3</sup>  
Their senses in some scorching cautery<sup>4</sup> of battle  
Now long since ironed,  
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

4.

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion — ignorance is bliss  
How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,  
And many sighs are drained.  
Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:  
His days are worth forgetting more than not.  
He sings along the march  
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,  
The long, forlorn, relentless trend  
From larger day to huger night.

Stanza \* Complex: Contrasting people like himself  
5. includes speaker from stanza 4

(40) We wise, who with a thought besmirch  
Blood over all our soul,  
How should we see our task — duty  
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?  
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;  
(45) Dying, not mortal overmuch;  
Nor sad, nor proud,  
Nor curious at all.  
He cannot tell  
Old men's placidity from his. + tranquility

question - how a poet can a poet + a soldier who is numb?

(50) But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,  
That they should be as stones.  
Wretched are they, and mean  
With paucity that never was simplicity.  
By choice they made themselves immune  
To pity and whatever moans in man  
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;  
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;  
Whatever shares  
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

—Wilfred Owen (1918) (WW I)

<sup>1</sup> to laugh or grimace in a coarse manner; scoff  
<sup>2</sup> counting of their pay  
<sup>3</sup> shrunk  
<sup>4</sup> cauterization; burning; searing

\* Broken rhythm + irregular meter  
\* Stanzas unequal length but uses his famous pararhyme throughout

\* shifts perspective = soldiers cursed high price for peace bec. they no longer understand humanity

- (8) - dullard - idiot
- \* define: - besmirch - tarnish; remove honor
- placidity - peaceful
- paucity - fewness/scarc
- forlorn - dreary/unhappy
- taciturn - inclined to silence
- reciprocity - mutual exchange
- hapless - unlucky

but est. he does!

personification

not feel pain to imagine life @ home or normalcy after war

barely men fill spots

military

paradox

replaceable brutally ignored

no emotion

numbness

bullets

easier to not dwell on where

bullets fall

no one calculates losses

imagination is too heavy a wt. w/ ammo + packs

don't care about what others mourn

senses have been cauterized + ironed; no fear

able to laugh among the dying - numb

switches to 1st person "we"

day + night meld into one long darkness - little to alleviate despair

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\* He does not condemn soldiers, understanding why they suppress feelings, but feels profound sadness @ their lack of pity

1. The title, "Insensibility," may be plausibly associated with which of the following?

- I. The shattered psyches of the soldiers.
- II. The insensitive nature of the dullards.
- III. The lunacy of warfare in general.

- (A) I only
- (B) II only
- (C) I and II
- (D) II and III
- (E) I, II, and III

2. According to the poem, all of the following instances of "insensibility" are acceptable EXCEPT

- (A) hardening one's feelings to engage in battle
- (B) numbing oneself to bombardment and carnage
- (C) being incapable of envisioning anything more horrible
- (D) being uneducated or naive
- (E) being unmoved by compassion

3. Stanza one figuratively emphasizes the degree to which the soldiers have become desensitized via

- (A) lurid diction describing the battle
- (B) a macabre metaphor that depicts fallen comrades
- (C) a staccato rhythm that mimics gunfire
- (D) an allusion to the underworld
- (E) a generalization that questions the soldiers' commitment to battle

4. When one considers the context in which they appear, phrases such as the "tease and doubt of shelling" (line 14) and "Chance's strange arithmetic" (line 15) most accurately describe the

- (A) proximity of the bombardment
- (B) time when the next shelling will commence
- (C) psychological ploys of the enemy
- (D) soldiers' belief that a truce is near
- (E) odds of surviving or being killed in battle

5. Which of the following does the speaker imply in stanza three about the soldiers' loss of imagination?

- (A) It dispirits them further.
- (B) It decreases their sense of empathy.
- (C) It steels them against a horrid reality.
- (D) It prevents them from ever feeling physical pain.
- (E) It reduces them to madness.

6. The primary difference between the lad "whose mind was never trained" (line 33) and the soldiers who march with him is their

- (A) superior intelligence
- (B) soldierly discipline
- (C) sober demeanor
- (D) greater confidence
- (E) slavish conformity

7. Stanza five bemoans which of the following?

- (A) the fascination of poets with the macabre
- (B) the superciliousness of intellectuals
- (C) the debasement of individuals by war
- (D) the mortality of all humans
- (E) the erosion of the mind by aging

8. Stanza five also implies that the poet's "task" is to

- (A) immerse himself in human tragedy
- (B) celebrate the valor of the soldier
- (C) cheer up the troops
- (D) eulogize the deceased
- (E) keep himself alive

9. All of the following contribute to the power of the concluding stanza EXCEPT

- (A) inverted syntax
- (B) a trio of noun clauses
- (C) a simple but appropriate simile
- (D) trenchant diction
- (E) powerful understatement

**11.** At the conclusion of the poem the speaker ultimately implies that the “dullards” have lost their

- (A) hearing
- (B) intelligence
- (C) fortune
- (D) health
- (E) humanity

**12.** The poem implies that the speaker sees poets and other artists as

- (A) passionate but misguided jingoists
- (B) sensitive but ineffectual chroniclers
- (C) hardened but apathetic warriors
- (D) lowly and despicable cowards
- (E) good-intentioned but meddling critics

**13.** When one considers the poem as a whole, the “no one” in line 10 most closely relates to

- (A) “men” (line 1)
- (B) “brothers” (line 5)
- (C) “lad” (line 33)
- (D) “We” (line 39)
- (E) “dullards” (line 49)

**14.** All of the following can be seen as either a euphemism or a figurative expression for death EXCEPT

- (A) “veins run cold” (line 2)
- (B) “The front line withers” (line 6)
- (C) “Chance’s strange arithmetic” (line 15)
- (D) “many sighs are drained” (line 32)
- (E) “leave these shores” (line 56)

**15.** Which of the following is NOT a stylistic trait of the poem?

- (A) choral-like repetition
- (B) a connotatively rich title
- (C) use of the first person plural to indicate the communal wisdom of all poets
- (D) images of the ruination of nature
- (E) an abundance of figurative language

**16.** The poem’s dominant allusion, manifest in lines 1, 18, 30 and 33, is drawn from the

- (A) Old Testament
- (B) New Testament
- (C) Iliad
- (D) Song of Roland
- (E) Koran