

1st 61 Merry-Go-Round

Merry Go Round references Mark Gertler's painting of the same name and captures his pacifist views without spelling them out. There is a great sense of dislocation. The fair may be on Hampstead Heath but the horror of the war in France is ever present, in the mindless mechanical gallop of the horses and in the contrast between the gaudiness of the fair, the forced jollity and vaudeville joke with language that subtly evokes military linkages. And for sheer nightmare, the glimmering of the dead comrade in the vortex created by the spinning carousel at the end is genius.

2nd 10 Shell Shock

This poem is based on 'Cardiff No More, Mametz Woods July 7th 1917', a painting by Jack Sullivan. It is an imaginative evocation of a man falling apart under the shock of an advance. It is a dramatic monologue written almost as stream of consciousness and takes us right inside his head. We see him losing his grip as he talks to his dead comrade as if he is still alive. The breakdown of linguistic structures echoes perfectly his mental disintegration.

3rd 39 Resurrection of the Soldiers

Resurrection of the Soldiers was inspired by Stanley Spencer's mural in Sandham Memorial Chapel. It captures the painting's visionary, quality, showing the Last Day when graves will open and the dead rise up. The discipline of the sonnet form brings focus so that no word is wasted. The soldier's grave goods hint at lives cut brutally short but they receive a kind of benediction and redemption. A clever sub-text hints that the Last Day brings judgement – the risen soldiers are welcomed back into the light with kindness but those responsible for war will be judged.

Rest of the Shortlist:

1 It's Time

It's Time is inspired by Peter August Böckstiegel's painting *Departure of the Youngster for War*. It is the most tender of the shortlisted poems, showing real affection for the young man portrayed. It is a coming of age poem, moving from Böckstiegel's painting of the naked boy waking, through a portrayal of his youthful innocence to a picture of his injuries and death. It captures perfectly the pity of it all. The mention of verdigris suggests the poem is a monument to his death just as much as a memorial sculpture would be.

2 1916

1916 is based on the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* and fragments of the diary of private Dieter Finzen, who served in the 86th regiment of the German Army 1916 to 18. I liked its episodic structure of terse three line tercets, each giving a snapshot of an event in much the same way as the film or a diary does. It covers a lot of ground but captures small day to day details. The understatement and irony of something as beautiful as a butterfly causing tragedy at the end is truly masterly.

5 The Western Front – Christmas Eve 1914

The Western Front – Christmas Eve 1914 is inspired by Paul Nash's painting *Wire* and describes how the two sides spontaneously came out of their trenches to celebrate Christmas together over the Christmas of 1914. It's an imaginative and detailed evocation that appeals to all our senses and brings the scene to life. There are some beautiful descriptive phrases. It captures the scene in a matter-of-fact way that never tips into sentimentality or rails against the waste of young lives on both sides.

32 The Finding of Parts

The Finding of Parts is inspired by the poet's grandfather's tattoos and is the only poem on the shortlist to tell the individual story of a serviceman who existed. The tale is well told. There is real bravery in the grandfather's sense of humour, echoed in a title which references the wry Second World War poem *Naming of Parts* by Henry Reed. The simplicity of the poem carries a weight of pathos and I was left feeling very moved by the ending.

I ought to explain the poem refers to KOYLI, which is the grandfather's regiment, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

68 The Menin Road – Paul Nash

The Menin Road is a response to the painting of the same name by Paul Nash. It's an acrostic sonnet which, for the benefit of those here who are not poetry aficionados, is a fourteen line poem where the first letter of each line spells a word or phrase, in this case O Passchendaele. The references to the atrocities of war are oblique and all the more effective for being so. It starts by evoking Nash selecting the colours to paint the picture and segues very cleverly into the insidious smells of war, which linger in the empty gallery.

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