

The Glorious Dead

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The shadows of ghosts inhabit my dreams
tenebrael whispers in the twilight of the soul
Pursued by phantoms, inaudible breathing
These whitewashed silent walls scream out
with shell song whistling in the air and exploding in the head
Tramping over another twisted body melting in the mud
All life blown open and squashed out
Sacrificed for glory
And still they come the lost legions
Over the top and into the mud
Blood, viscera, and the stinking slime and excremental remains of regiments
Resigned to slaughter

Somewhere beside me, an explosion
Some are gone, some remain, warm and wet on my face and hands
Sticking to my clothing and boots
Dragging me down to drown in their slough and slurry
I long to sink into the earth
Real men would have laid down screaming
But we were the already dead
And so we walked on
Our minds numb, eyes open but sightless in the smoke
And ears blasted silent by the noise

You never thinking, brought me here
To see a monument in memory of the fallen
An object of civic pride
To honour the dead
The lucky dead, remembered with walls of whitewash and lies
Built with blood money, blackmailed on grief
Having sacrificed their sons
A monument built by public subscription
On a city growing fat on War bonds and military ordinance orders
Each named tree nurtured forever if a family afford so many schillings of silver
He died anonymously
There was no name on the shell that killed him, alongside so many others
Unknown in mist, mingling in unity with his pals

These walls have eyes, ever staring, never seeing
Eyes fixed and hard, eyes speaking
That strange, soundless accusation of anger and pain
These eyes of sorrow staring at a card
Thanking you for your loved one
Who died with valour?
Fighting for his King and Country
Did he Hell! All bloody lies
He died under the wheels of an ammunition cart
Carrying Coventry's shells for boys back behind the lines
Slipped in the mud and got run over
Squealed like a pig, he did.
And screamed and screamed
Screamed louder than the shells around us
As the column moved on

The iron wheels rolling unable to stop
We were being shelled, could've blown the bloody lot!

His eyes beseeching help and the voice quietened
As his mouth filled with mud
Still light in his eyes begging for help, imploring help

Now growing dimmer, the condemning is all
For living, his only relief was death
Death slow
Death not glorious
Death drowned in mud
The eyes gone cold
Staring and calling out till the end
Eyes condemning the living
Just eyes that I can't forget
Eyes that haunt me and taunt me with cowardice
But I had no choice
The column moved on
The eyes didn't, but they return everywhere
There is no glorious death

