

## Glory of Women T89

Siegfried Sassoon (1916)



Practise your listening  
with the karaoke



TRACK 047

In this sonnet, published in 1916, Sassoon pitilessly exposes not only the **women's lack of knowledge of what the war really is, but also their hypocrisy**: only certain wounds can be mentioned, tales of dirt and horror are found entertaining, and it is inconceivable that British troops should retreat. In the last tercet, the poet shifts the scene: from the fanfares and celebration of Britain to a solitary German mother knitting socks for her son by the fire. She does not know that at that very moment he is dead and being trodden into the mud.

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,<sup>1</sup>  
Or wounded in a mentionable<sup>2</sup> place.  
You worship<sup>3</sup> decorations; you believe  
That chivalry<sup>4</sup> redeems<sup>5</sup> the war's disgrace.  
5 You make us shells.<sup>6</sup> You listen with delight,  
By tales of dirt and danger fondly<sup>7</sup> thrilled.<sup>8</sup>  
You crown our distant ardours while we fight,  
And mourn<sup>9</sup> our laurelled<sup>10</sup> memories when we're killed.  
You can't believe that British troops 'retire'  
10 When hell's last horror breaks<sup>11</sup> them, and they run,  
Trampling<sup>12</sup> the terrible corpses – blind with blood.  
O German mother dreaming by the fire,  
While you are knitting socks to send your son  
His face is trodden<sup>13</sup> deeper in the mud.

1. **on leave**: in licenza.
2. **mentionable**: noto.
3. **worship**: adori.
4. **chivalry**: cavalleria.
5. **redeems**: riscatti.
6. **shells**: proiettili.
7. **fondly**: stupidamente.
8. **thrilled**: eccitate.
9. **mourn**: piangete.
10. **laurelled**: gloriose, incoronate d'alloro, come i generali vittoriosi e i poeti.
11. **breaks**: disperde.
12. **Trampling**: calpestando.
13. **trodden**: schiacciata.

A war poster of 1914, in which British women urge their men to enlist: at that time, military conscription was not yet compulsory in Britain.

### FOCUS ON THE TEXT

#### Content

**1** Sassoon's sonnet is entirely devoted to women and to their attitude to the war. Read the poem and underline all the actions women are said to carry out. What is women's feeling towards war according to Sassoon?

**2** Women's feeling is in contrast with what war really is. Find quotations in the text supporting this.

**3** Two ideas of war are contrasted here. Which words and images does Sassoon use to present these contrasting ideas?

