



# Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics

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As the Great War dragged on and its catastrophic death toll mounted, a new artistic movement found its feet in the United Kingdom. The Trench Poets, as they came to be called, were soldier-poets dispatching their verse from the front lines. Known for its rejection of war as a romantic or noble enterprise, and its plainspoken condemnation of the senseless bloodshed of war, Trench Poetry soon became one of the most significant literary moments of its decade.

The marriage of poetry and comics is a deeply fruitful combination, as evidenced by this collection. In stark black and white, the words of the Trench Poets find dramatic expression and reinterpretation through the minds and pens of some of the greatest cartoonists working today.

With New York Times bestselling editor Chris Duffy (*Nursery Rhyme Comics*, *Fairy Tale Comics*) at the helm, *Above the Dreamless Dead* is a moving and illuminating tribute to those who fought and died in World War I. Twenty poems are interpreted in comics form by twenty of today's leading cartoonists, including Eddie Campbell, Kevin Huizenga, George Pratt, and many others.

## Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics Details

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# **From Reader Review Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics for online ebook**

## **Shelley says**

This is an interesting collection of literature that has been combined with illustrations. I don't want to say this is a never done before concept however this really brings life to some of these older poems and classical writings which helps bring them to a completely new audience. This would be a great addition to World War II lessons in school settings and are very interesting for students who are interested in war material. This might even encourage them to read more classics of the past.

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## **First Second Books says**

When our editor, Calista Brill, came into the office fired up about 'trench poetry,' I had no idea what she was talking about.

Two and a half years later, I'm so glad that I've gotten the chance to learn more about this really fascinating category of writing -- poetry written from the trenches of World War I.

And I'm glad that with ABOVE THE DREAMLESS DEAD, we're able to share these fascinating, thoughtful, viscerally written poems with a new generation of readers, with an all-new comics interpretation.

It's the 100th anniversary of World War I this year, you guys. This is a wonderful book to read to get a sense of how people at that time thought about war, and about life during wartime.

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## **Shiyel says**

This book is so important. My favorite poem/comic combination was Robert Graves. I would highly recommend this for anyone studying WWI era history or literature, but I truly believe everyone should read this.

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## **Timons Esaias says**

There is a fiction and poetry of World War One (much of the fiction written by the poets) that matches the Iliad for richness and power. And like the Iliad, those works are open to re-working and re-interpreting by later generations. (Not a year goes by that there isn't a major retelling of some part of Iliad/Odyssey somewhere in the world.) I see this book as a strong entry in what could be a very fruitful tradition.

I loved this. The WWI poets, especially the British poets, wrote some immortal stuff, and these graphic (comics) versions are lovely settings for many of the best. "Dulce et Decorum Est" is here, and "Route March" and "Channel Firing" and "The General" and "The Next War." I like that we have quite a variety of illustrators, and that many of them thought outside the box.

If I were teaching the literature of war, or of WWI in particular, I'd be tempted to use this as a text.

Brilliant idea.

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## **Mark Flowers says**

Starred review from SLJ (<http://blogs.slj.com/adult4teen/2014/...>)

Plus read my interview with George Pratt, here: <http://blogs.slj.com/adult4teen/2014/...>

There are various dates given as the first day of World War I, from the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, to the first shots fired by Austro-Hungarian soldiers on July 28 to the August 4th declaration of war by the British Empire, signalling the truly world-wide stretch of the conflict. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that 100 years ago today, thousands of soldiers were being killed in the first weeks of one of the largest wars in world history. Among those fighting in August 1914 was Siegfried Sassoon, one of the best of the “Trench Poets”—mostly British writers and poets who fought in the trenches of the Western Front and wrote about their experiences, mostly in poetry but also in prose.

I first encountered the Trench Poets at age 19, in a course on Early 20th Century British Literature at UCLA, while a less epic, but still horrifying war was being waged in Iraq and Afghanistan (and, if President Bush was to be believed, throughout the world). I was immediately taken with these poets, especially Wilfred Owen and his magnum opus “Dulce et Decorum Est,” a blisteringly anti-war poem which nonetheless manages to convey the longing of boys for combat. “Gas! Gas! Quick, boy!—An ecstasy of fumbling” remains one the best and most disturbing lines of poetry I’ve read. Metaphors and imagery taken from sex (like that “ecstasy of fumbling”) and nature permeate the poetry of the Trench Poets, as if they are trying to ward off the horrors of the mechanized war by comparing it to the most natural things they can think of.

Today’s review is of an incredible collection of the poetry of the Trench Poets—along with some bawdy soldier’s songs—illustrated by some of the great graphic novelists and comic artists around. As I state in my review below, the illustrators have used a range of styles and angles on how to illustrate poems which are already complete in themselves. But it is very rare that any of them fail to add something to the already powerful words. These are perfect poems for teenagers trying to make sense of war and destruction, especially those teens who sense war’s inherent futility, in which so many of the Trench Poets believed. And the illustrations should be a perfect entree for teen into this important work.

For anyone whose interest is piqued by this review, come back on Friday for an interview with George Pratt, illustrator of three of the four Wilfred Owen poems included in the collection.

\* DUFFY, Chris, ed. *Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics*. illus. by Various. 144p. First Second. Jul. 2014. Tr \$25.99. ISBN 9781626720657. LC 2014029047.

In this haunting graphic novel, editor Duffy has collected 25 poems written during World War I—most by the so-called “Trench Poets,” men who fought and in some cases died in the trenches of Western Europe—and asked some of today’s finest comic artists to illustrate them. While the vast majority of the poems can be categorized as anti-war, their tones and styles range from the lyrical, contemplative verse of Thomas Hardy (at 74 years old decidedly not a trench poet) to the densely bitter barrages of Wilfred Owen. And the illustrations show a similar range of styles. Most of the artists opt for fairly traditional panelled

cartoons, though the art can range from grittily realistic to more traditional comic mannerisms. And some artists, such as George Pratt and Stephen R. Bissette abandon panels entirely to create darkly expressionistic backgrounds for their spreads. In addition to the primary poems, Duffy includes several soldiers' songs—popular, often bawdy, and irreverent songs sung by soldiers in the war—all illustrated in a jokey comic style by Hunt Emerson. The result of this hodgepodge of techniques and tones is nothing short of a masterpiece: at once a reimagining and reinterpretation of some of the great poetry of the early 20th Century for those who have already encountered it, and an ideal introduction to the facts and the literature of World War I for teens who have not.—Mark Flowers, John F. Kennedy Library, Vallejo, CA

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## **Jennifer says**

World War I is a bit of a black hole for most people, both historically and literarily. This brief and lovely collection edited by Chris Duffy sets about to shine a little light on those dark times, featuring twenty-seven poems or songs by thirteen of the so-called Trench Poets. Each poem is interpreted by a cartoonist, only a couple of whom pull double duty, offering a fantastic spread of voices and images dealing with the three phases of the war: the patriotic build-up, the time spent in the trenches, and the bleak aftermath.

Readers may recognize a couple of the writers on the roster - Kipling, Hardy - but unless you've spent some serious time with Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, most of the others will likely be new to you. Personally, I'm in a long-term love affair with Wilfred Owen, two of whose works receive a bleakly gorgeous impressionistic treatment by George Pratt here. A brief notes section at the conclusion of the volume offers you biographical information about the poets and artists, as well as annotations on the poems (not indicated anywhere in the poems themselves, so perhaps not as helpful as they could have been) and observations by the artists on the poems they worked on.

*Above the Dreamless Dead* is poetry at its best and most wrenching, with a visual presentation that makes it possibly the most lovely and accessible early 20th century literary gut-punch I've ever experienced. Would that more poetry got such great exposure.

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## **David Schaafsma says**

This year is the 100th anniversary of the Great War, the "war to end all wars," ha. And who of us knows much about it? Jane Addams, once the most famous woman in America, was vilified for taking a position that the war could have been avoided, of course she was right, and she was later hollowly vindicated, in a way, by being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. If you are a student of literature, maybe especially British literature, you are aware of the trench poets of that war, those who wrote poems literally out of the trenches. Who are my favorites in this collection? What I think are the "usual suspects," Wilfred Owen, and Siegfried Sassoon, but there are others that are terrific: Rupert Brooke, Thomas Hardy, Kipling, Edith Sitwell. I was lukewarm about this collection at first, thinking that collections are almost always uneven, and seeing some of the creaky, stuffy turn of that century language of some of the early poems in the collection. And then I thought that some of the early art revealed a little disconnect with the poems. I thought: we are a 100 years from this war, and some young artists seem to be an odd fit with the poems and the formal language for the horrors of that war. How do we bridge that gap?

But it was the art that time and again won me over, wedded thoughtfully and creatively with the words and

horror. Some of my favorite artists shape this, editor Chris Duffy's, collection: Luke Pearson, Kevin Huizenga, Eddie Campbell, Peter Kuper, Isabel Greenberg, George Pratt, Lilli Carre, Danica Novgorodoff, Anders Nilsen. And the artists, finally, do not disappoint. In case you doubt this, based on the evidence of the art/poem collaborations themselves, look to the notes where the artists briefly discuss the process they went through with their work, all of them reading and re-reading the poems, doing research on the poets and the war and the poems. I hesitate to mention my faves, because as the momentum of the book gained steam for me, I had a long list including but not limited to Campbell's adaptation of excerpts from The Great Push (not a poem!) but Patrick MacGill, Nilsen's rendering of Hardy's "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'", Lloyd's tribute to Sassoon's "Repression of War Experience (which seems also a tribute to Will Eisner's artistic vision), The End by Owen and Novgodoroff, Greenberg's adaptation of Sassoon's lovely "Everyone Sang" and Carre's equally heartbreaking "The Dancers" which includes the line that titles the collection

And some of this art work is an homage to the time, capturing what might have been comics styles of the time, and some helps us bridge the gap to wars of today, and wars almost inevitably to come. I went from an unfair "meh" to "moving," at last, profoundly touched and saddened by these visceral accounts in poetry and art. And fell in love with some of my have WWI poets again, and found some new ones I appreciated.

Eddie Campbell says, self-deprecatingly: "'it's a bit preposterous us thinking we can illustrate the stuff that we know nothing of--sitting here in our air-conditioned rooms trying to imagine the horror of being knee deep in mud with your feet rotting off," and I wasn't there either, nor ever served in the military, but it's important for them and for all of us to imagine the horrors of war before we so easily commit to yet another and another again and again. That's the value of art, and imagination, and being human. I think they pull it off beautifully so we can use this in our own necessary anti-war efforts.

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## **Sarah says**

High school teachers, use this book! I would have loved to use this when I taught history and English. I went through a stage in my 20s when I read a lot of the World War I poets--Sassoon and Brooke mostly. But, whoa, this version rocks. So easy to incorporate into the classroom.

In the introduction, Duffy notes that many Americans don't know much about World War I, and I agree. Trench warfare was horrible and deadly--shell shock was common, and soldiers thought their commanders were idiots for fighting for months to gain 10 feet of ground.

More than ten authors are highlighted here, from all class levels. Soldier songs are used, too, and some are downright hilarious. I love how so many artists are used and it's fascinating to study how the artist chose to represent the words. So many styles of drawing, but they are all appropriate.

Sad, heartbreaking, and a must-read. War sucks. My favorites were "The Coward" by Rudyard Kipling adapted by Stephen R. Bissette and "The Next War" by Osbert Sitwell adapted by Simon Gane.

I'm wondering if this will show up on the Alex Award list?

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## **Sam says**

Now I'm not a big poetry reader and often manage to completely miss the point of such things but these poems and the illustrations that accompany them broke through that and brought the horrors, difficulties and humours of war clearly and vividly to mind. The poems were written by the troops on the ground during the First World War as they were stuck in the trenches while the illustrations came later by those not there. A point acknowledged in the introduction by Duffy but one that does not seem to have reduced the impact the illustrations have or their ability to bring the words of the troops to life. An excellent read, perfectly weighted.

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## **M says**

Editor Chris Duffy merges words and images in this unique look at World War I. Poems from the soldiers, authors, and writers from that era are paired with a contemporary artist, tasked with illustrating the messages contained within. While a unique experiment, the book's engaging premise is also its downfall. Many of the poems are capable of generating their own mental imagery, yet they become bogged down under the weight of artistic interpretation. This is especially the case with the more complex poems and detailed art. The simpler images and lyrical odes mesh easier, as each one uses the other to build into a grander design. Kudos for experimentation, but *Above the Dreamless Dead* often has its head in the clouds.

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## **Rebekah Gordon says**

What a fantastic idea! I would never have encountered most/all of these WWI poems if not for this book, and some of them are really beautiful and will stick with me for a long time. As with all anthologies, I liked some of the poem+comic chapters here better than others, especially because there were so many elements that had to all come together here to make it work, but there were a handful that did this so well they took my breath away. I especially loved that James Lloyd included a page of text after his poetry adaptation on what we once called shell-shock and now call PTSD but still haven't really developed a way to deal with. Especially when taken with the tragic and well-adapted poem in the pages before, it was really powerful.

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## **Stephanie Suke says**

This book is about the 1st world war, it shows all the struggles and problems which the soldiers faced during this time and how everything fell into place. The artwork of this graphic novel is very interesting. Every chapter is a different poem and they are all different styles of art, so you really can't get bored of it. The characters in this story aren't really consistent. They are constantly changing which makes it even more interesting. Overall I really enjoyed this story.

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## **Lori says**

Collection of poems from WWI paired with evocative illustrations that pack a punch. The words alone help the reader to understand the horrors of war (as well as some ironic and humorous events too) but when these poems are paired with the rich and varied illustrations, they really create a lasting impression and for me, gave a strong sense of immediacy (even though the poems were written almost 100 years ago, they sadly are



still relevant in our war-torn world today).

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### **David says**

3.75 I love poetry, definitely enjoy a good graphic novel and teach history, so I thought this was going to be right up my alley. I did enjoy it, but I was surprised to realize that combining the poems with a graphic novel just didn't quite work for me. The poems seemed disjointed as they were split up over different panels and the artwork really distracted me from the overall enjoyment of the poems. I think I would have enjoyed it much better if each poem was completely intact and the graphic novel followed it up to show the story on the other page(s) etc. I did enjoy this and some of the material was extremely haunting, but it was one of those books you read and think what could have been. I think many students would enjoy looking through this book and it would be a good way to introduce World War I poetry to them. One of the aspects of the book I enjoyed the most was reading about the graphic artists thought process as they approached each poem.

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### **April says**

Above The Dreamless Dead is one of those books that is worth reading no matter the format, although I think that the physical copy is worth reading for the tactile experience.

[Read the rest of my review here](#)

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