



THE PITY OF WAR POETS AT THE FRONT

Wilfred Owen & Siegfried Sassoon

MADE TO COMMEMORATE THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

*“I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . .”*

WILFRED OWEN

THE PITY OF WAR POETS AT THE FRONT

- Features three time Emmy-award-winning historian Professor Jay Winter and Dr Santana Das. Professor Winter won no less than three Emmy Awards for his production of the outstanding 1997 BBC *Great War Series*. Dr Das has recently edited the *Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War*.
- Explores important new themes concerning cultural memory, changes in attitudes to war, sites of memory, the nature of remembrance and the hidden reality of the physical pain of warfare.
- Features the finest archive footage available in the world and powerful recitations of the greatest poetry of the First World War.

SYNOPSIS

The experience of fighting in the First World War changed British culture more radically than any other historical event in the twentieth century. The witnesses and the great influencers of the change were young fighting men.

The force for this cultural change came from the power of words – written by the British war poets. 16 are honoured in Westminster Abbey.

The Pity of War: Poets at the Front concentrates on two men who were the greatest of friends. One lived, one died. Siegfried Sassoon lived but could never forget the war, the deaths - and the manner of the deaths he saw. Nor could he forget his friend, Wilfred Owen, who was killed in the last week of the war. Both men's words have lived on - incorporated into the collective memory and consciousness of the British people.



The programme evokes the visceral shock and horror of Sassoon and Owen at the incomprehension of the non-combatants at “home” of what was being experienced at the Front – and above all the scale and nature of the deaths and pain experienced.

The jingoism and glory of Empire are not just challenged – they are overthrown by the power of the war poets’ writing – writing derived from their own horrific experience and that of the comrades around them. The programme describes how the actual reality of war is unknown to non-combatants.

The enemy is the warlike spirit of the non-combatants on both sides. The fighting men are transfigured into Christ-like figures and emblems. The poets’ loathing is for the hypocrisy of the spirit of waging war.

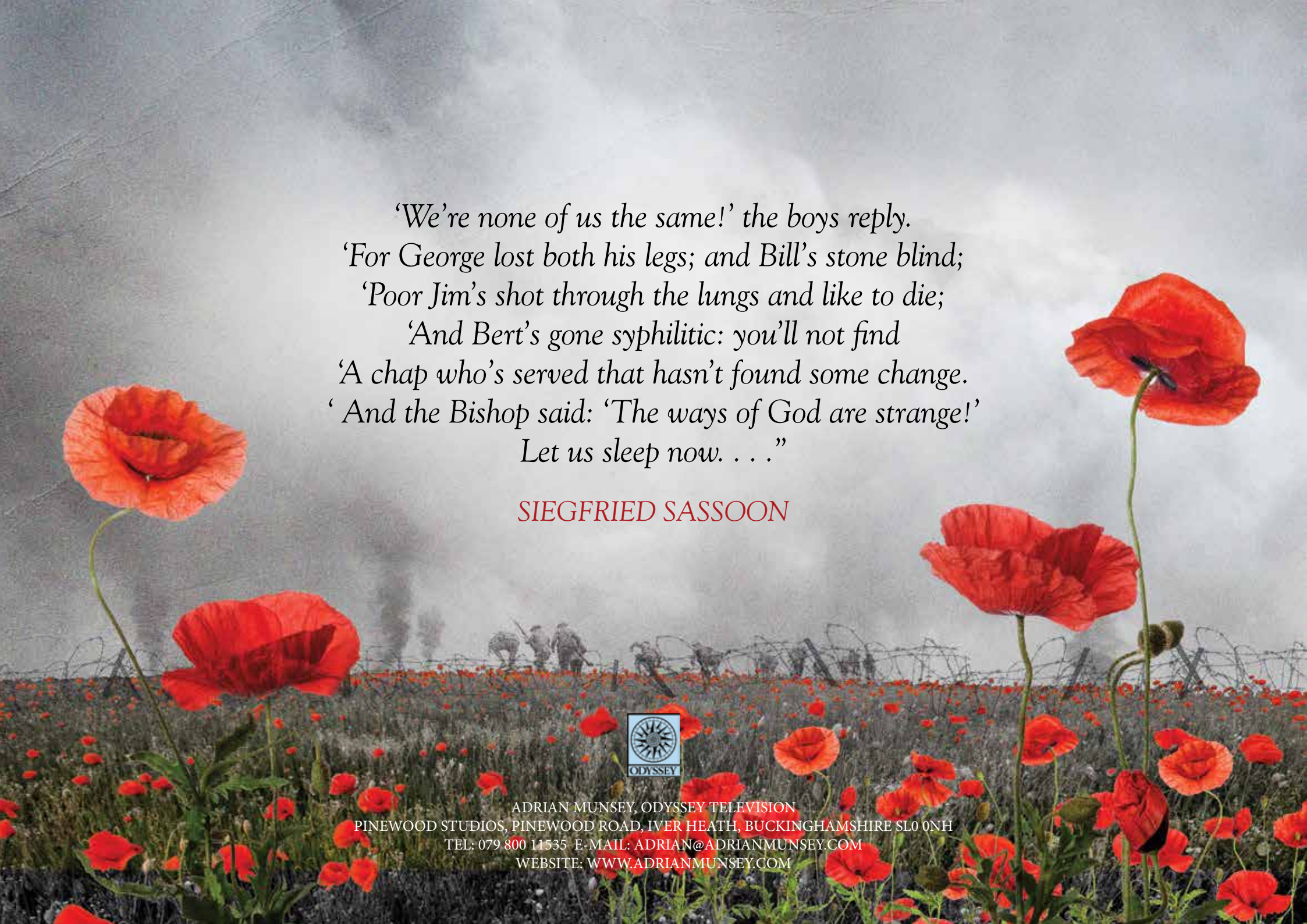
The sense of comradeship of Sassoon and Owen had with their comrades led them to go back to the Front after their therapeutic rehabilitation at Craiglockhart Hospital. The

sense of alienation from those who did not fight - including the women who admired ‘heroes’ and who gave white feathers to those they deemed cowards - is matched by their respect and love for the comrades who fought and died with them. Nor can they forget that they themselves killed.

Using archive footage, illustrative material and interviews with historians, critics and commentators, this 50 minute programme explores the poetry of the First World War, focussing on the lives and work of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. The lived experience and poetry of Sassoon, Owen and their fellow poets is evoked – what they saw, what they felt, what they did – and the poetry they wrote.

The raw power of the writing remains. It is this that has removed the notion of glorying in war from British culture. This permanent legacy both remains with us and haunts us as we approach the centenary of the end of the First World War.





*'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.
'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find
'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.
'And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!
Let us sleep now. . . .''*

SIEGFRIED SASSOON



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