

World War I Poetry

Sara Teasdale and Jessie Pope



ABOUT THE READING Social history is often recorded by writers. During World War I poets also captured the meaning of this important time.

Sara Teasdale and Jessie Pope were two of the many female poets of this time period. Their work expresses a view of history from the perspective of women on the home front.

VOCABULARY

swallows small birds

tremulous timid or fearful

procession a group, moving along in an orderly manner



As you read the passages below, think about how these poems described historical events from a woman's viewpoint.

“There Will Come Soft Rains”

by Sara Teasdale

There will come soft rains and the smell of the
ground,
And **swallows** calling with their shimmering
sound;
And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild-plum trees in **tremulous** white;
Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;
And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

In which lines does Teasdale express nature's apathy or disinterest?

Source: *Women's Poetry of the First World War*, by Nosheen Khan. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988.

“The Call”

by Jessie Pope

Who’s for the trench—
Are you, my laddie?
Who’ll follow French—
Will you, my laddie?
Who’s fretting to begin?
Who’s going out to win?
And who wants to save his skin—
Do you, my laddie?
Who’s for the khaki suit—
Are you, my laddie?
Who longs to charge and shoot—
Do you, my laddie?
Who’s keen on getting fit,
Who means to show his grit,
And who’d rather wait a bit—
Would you, my laddie?
earn the Empire’s thanks—
Will you, my laddie?
Who’ll swell the victor’s ranks—
Will you, my laddie?
When that **procession** comes,
Banners and rolling drums—
Who’ll stand and bite his thumbs—
Will you, my laddie?

The term “laddie” refers to a boy or young man.

Pope’s poem is meant to capture the patriotism soldiers might feel when going into battle.

To whom might the poet be referring in the last two lines?

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Ideas What is the main idea of each poem?

2. Critical Thinking In Sara Teasdale’s poem “There Will Come Soft Rains,” what opinion does “nature” have about the war? Provide examples from the poem to support your answer.

3. Inference Line 17 of “The Call” refers to “the Empire’s thanks.” What can you infer about Jessie Pope from the use of the word *Empire*?

4. Activity In Jessie Pope’s “The Call,” the last stanza describes a victory parade, in which soldiers are celebrating their return from war. Create a poster or bulletin for a victory parade that might have taken place after World War I.