



A-level ENGLISH LITERATURE A

Paper 2A Texts in shared contexts: WW1 and its aftermath
June 2018

Insert

Extract from *Fear* by Gabriel Chevallier, published in 1930.
Translated by Malcolm Imrie.

Before us in every direction spread a flat, dreary, silent expanse, as far as the rainy horizon, sunk beneath low clouds. The landscape was nothing but a pulverised mire, uniformly grey, overwhelmingly desolate. Though we knew that the bleeding armies paralysed with fear were somewhere down in that valley of devastation, there was no sign of their presence or their respective positions. It looked like a barren land, recently stripped bare by some terrible flood, which had retreated leaving in its wake shipwrecks and bodies buried under a coat of dark slime. The heavy sky weighed down on us like a tombstone. It all served to remind us of the inexorable fate for which we were destined.

We finally emerged into a kind of rallying point, with wide tracks running through it. The place must have been blown apart and then re-established using a vast number of sandbags. Marching in single file, we hadn't seen each other since the previous day, and were surprised to recognise ourselves, so much had we changed. We were as pallid as the corpses that surrounded us, filthy and tired. Hunger gnawed at our bellies and the chill of morning made us shudder. I met Bertrand, who was with another unit. On his face that was worn and aged by the night's anxieties, I recognised the signs of my own anguish. Seeing him made me aware of how I looked myself. He found a few words to express the fear and the astonishment of all the new recruits:

'Is this what war is?'

'What are we doing here?' asked the men.

No one knew. We had no orders. We had been abandoned in this wasteland full of corpses, some of them sneering, holding us in the menacing gaze of their glaucous eyes, others turned away, indifferent, as if they were saying: 'We've finished with all this. Get yourself ready to die. It's your turn next.'

The yellow light of a day that seemed to falter as if it too was struck by horror, illuminated a lifeless, soundless battlefield. It felt as if everything around us and off into infinity was dead, and we did not dare raise our voices. It felt as if we had come to some place in the world which was part of a dream, that had gone beyond all the limits of reality and hope. Ahead and behind merged into limitless desolation, all covered with the same churned up grey mud. We were stranded on some ice-floe out in space, surrounded by clouds of sulphur, ravaged by sudden bursts of thunder. We prowled in these accursed limbos which at any moment now would turn into hell.

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