



A-level

ENGLISH LITERATURE A

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

June 2024

Insert

Extract from *The Patriot's Progress* by Henry Williamson, published in 1930

The sea journey in darkness became dim-realized in patches, and went on and on. Blighty at last, chaps looking out of the round glass windows, lucky chaps, got cushy Blighties. They would return! Hollow fear stirred in him, although he wouldn't go back. Long, everlasting train journey, rough again and bursting head. Mum and Dad were looking at him, Dad asking, smiling, how he was. All right, Dad. Mum, smiling and crying. "No, no, I mustn't cry," she muttered, and tried only to smile. Black grapes; why waste money on black grapes, he asked, petulantly. Green are cheaper, and just as nice. "Yes, dear," whispered Mum. Poor old Mum and Dad, they didn't know anything. "Well, did you shoot any Huns?" asked Dad, beaming and proud and rather timidly. "I didn't see one," he cried. "Didn't see one, I bet," said Dad, proud and knowing. I tell you I DIDN'T, he shrieked suddenly, and the nurse came and said he must sleep now, and Mum stroked his hair, and John Bullock's face was puckered and shaking with sobs. His father, standing by the bed, hat in hand, looked sad and bewildered.

Months and months of pain and contentment: regular grub and fags, military band outside once a week, and sometimes a theatre, riding in a toff's car. The stump healed clean. He grew fat and happy, and lost all interest in the war. Never wanted to hear of it again. It hadn't been such a bad time, taken all round: he wouldn't have missed it, really. They said you could do a lot on an artificial leg.

In his suit of hospital blue, with trouser turned up showing six inches of white lining, and red tie, John Bullock used to swing himself along on his single leg between crutches, to sit in the public park, sometimes with some of the boys, sometimes by himself. He was contented, watching the couples on the grass, and talking to children. He was out in the street on 11th November, waiting for the maroons* to go off at eleven o'clock, when an old toff stopped him and asked him how he had lost his leg. John Bullock told him. A five-nine, as we were going over. The toff soon lost interest, and when the flags were waving, he said: "Well, I suppose it's a good thing it's over, but in my opinion the Government is weak. We ought to have driven the Huns back into Berlin, and given their country a taste of what they gave France."

"Ah!" said John Bullock, shifting on his leg.

"However," said the old gentleman, giving him a cigar, as he prepared to move on, to see the fun. Whistles were blowing, people shouting and singing, motor horns honking, and a deuce of a fine old row everywhere. "We always did do things in England by halves." At this moment a very little boy ran up, waving a flag: and seeing his daddy talking to someone, he stopped. "Look, daddy, look!" cried the little boy. "The poor man hasn't got only one boot on!"

"Ssh! You mustn't notice such things!" said the toff. "This good man is a hero. Yes," he went on, "we'll see that England doesn't forget you fellows."

"We are England," said John Bullock, with a slow smile. The old gentleman could not look him in the eyes; and the little boy ceased to wave his flag, and stared sorrowfully at the poor man.

**a loud firework*

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