

Unseen extract 6: *Good-bye To All That*

Read the extract carefully. It is taken from *Good-bye To All That*, an autobiography by Robert Graves (1895–1985) first published in 1929. Graves enlisted in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in August 1914 and was drafted to France, where he was seriously wounded at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Sample question

Read the extract carefully. Explore the significance of relationships between officers and troops in this extract.

Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Graves shapes meanings.

Extract

There was a draft of ten young officers with me. As Captain Charles Edmonds notes in his book *A Subaltern's War*, young officers at this time were expected to be 'roistering blades with wine and women'. These ten did their best. Three of them got venereal disease at Rouen. In each case, I believe, it was the first time that they had been with women. They were strictly brought-up Welsh boys of the professional classes and knew nothing about prophylactics. One of them was sharing a hut with me. He came in very late and very drunk one night from the Drapeau Blanc, a well-known blue-lamp brothel, woke me up and began telling me what a wonderful time he had had. 'He had never known before,' he said, 'what a wonderful thing sex was.' I said irritably and with some disgust: 'The Drapeau Blanc? Then I hope to God you washed yourself.' He was very Welsh and on his dignity. 'What do you mean, Captain? I did wass my fa-ace and ha-ands.' There were no restraints in France as in England; these boys had money to spend and knew that they had a good chance of being killed within a few weeks anyhow. They did not want to die virginal. So venereal hospitals at the base were always crowded. (The troops took a lewd delight in exaggerating the proportion of army chaplains to combatant officers treated there.) The Drapeau Blanc saved the life of scores of them by incapacitating them for future trench service.

The instructors at the Bull Ring were full of bullet-and-bayonet enthusiasm which they tried to pass on to the drafts. The drafts were now, for the most part, either forcibly enlisted men or wounded men returning, and at this dead season of the year it was difficult for anyone to feel enthusiastic on arrival in France. The training principle had recently been revised. Infantry Training, 1914, had laid it down politely that the soldier's ultimate aim was to put out of action or

render ineffective the armed forces of the enemy. This statement was now not considered direct enough for a war of attrition. Troops were taught instead that their duty was to HATE the Germans and KILL as many of them as possible. In bayonet-practice the men were ordered to make horrible grimaces and utter blood curdling yells as they charged. The bayonet-fighting instructors' faces were permanently set in a ghastly grin. 'Hurt him, now! In at his belly! Tear his guts out!' they would scream as the men charged the dummies. 'Now that upper swing at his privates with the butt. Ruin his chances for life. No more little Fritzes!...Naaaoh! Anyone would think you loved the bloody swine, patting and stroking 'em like that. BITE HIM, I SAY! STICK YOUR TEETH IN HIM AND WORRY HIM! EAT HIS HEART OUT!'

Once more I was glad to be sent up to the trenches.

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