

Amnesia

Do not ask me what it was like over there,
My deeds, such as they were, are not the stuff of pride.
Fighting in the trenches was a brutal affair,
Our small triumphs unworthy of those who died.

We plumbed new depths of existence in the front line –
Unwashed for days, lice-infested, trench-foot, dysentery,
Surrounded by the sickly-sweet stench all the time
Of our unburied dead; there was no dignity
In the trenches, all standards gone, we learned to despise
Ourselves and those who compelled us to live that way.
Tension was nerve-wracking – we learned to recognize
The soft plop of a gas-shell landing on clay,
The whine of a Moaning Minnie, the howitzers growl.

We learned also not to hear the cries of those who lay
In No Man's Land, wounded, dying, their piteous howl
Fading by degrees as death claimed them, one by one.
Death became our friend, offering an early release
From the horrors of it all, our duty done.
We did not mourn the dead, rather we envied their peace.

Who would want to re-visit such a living hell?
To re-visit is to re-live; we are sworn
To forget such things; we recall our friends who fell
In the fighting, as is right; we are the re-born.

Yet there are many times I feel guilty to have survived
When so many of my brothers-in-arms perished;

No – there is no pleasure in memories revived,
Save for those whose memories I have cherished.

Felim O'Neill