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| Sassoon, Siegfried (1886-1967) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Siegfried Sassoon was a poet, memoirist, novelist, and World War One soldier. His pre-war poetry, heavily influenced by Edward Marsh and the Georgian poets, was often criticised for derivative thought and emotional ambiguity. In 1914, Sassoon enlisted as a trooper, desiring to be one of the enlisted men. However, less than a year later, he earned his commission as a second lieutenant in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. During his convalescence from injuries incurred in the Battle of Arras (1917), Sassoon began developing objections to the war. He sent *Finished with the War: A Soldier’s Declaration* to his commanding officer; it was also read in Parliament. Just as war and protest gave Sassoon’s life purpose, they also improved the satirical power and emotional unity of his poetry. He is best known, though, for his fictionalised autobiographical trilogy, (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* [1928], *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* [1930], and *Sherston’s Progress* [1936]). |
| Born into a wealthy Jewish-Catholic family, Siegfried Loraine Sassoon became a poet, memoirist, novelist, and World War One soldier. In his pre-war poetry, he was heavily influenced by Edward Marsh and the Georgian poets (especially *fin de siècle* rhetoric, nature imagery, and sport and hunting themes). *The Daffodil Murderer* (1913), a parody of John Masefield’s *Everlasting Mercy*, was Sassoon’s first literary success. Yet his pre-war poetry was often criticised for derivative thought and emotional ambiguity — an ambiguity explained, in part, by Sassoon’s sexual inexperience and his reticence to make his own homosexuality a subject of his writing (Moeyes 24-6).  File: Sassoon1.jpg  Materials: Glyn Warren Philpot’s painting of Sassoon (1917)  Purpose of Inclusion: Illustration  Link to Material: http://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/3763  Bibliographic Details (if appropriate):  Copyright Holder: The Fitzwilliam Museum  In 1914, Sassoon enlisted as a trooper in the Sussex Yeomanry, desiring to be one of the enlisted men rather than assume an officer position. However, less than a year later, he earned his commission as a second lieutenant in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Before arriving at the Western Front, Sassoon received news that his younger brother Hamo had died at the front in Gallipoli. As an idealistic company commander, Sassoon was awarded the Military Cross in 1916 for ‘conspicuous gallantry during a raid on the enemy trenches’ (Supplement to *The London Gazette*). He fought in the Battle of the Somme (1916) and was later wounded in the Battle of Arras (1917). During his convalescence, Sassoon began developing objections to the war.  Witnessing staff ruthlessness and ineptitude, home front naivety, and the ‘sacrifice of innocents’ (Egremont xi) — and spurred on by the death of his friend David Cuthbert Thomas — he sent *Finished with the War: A Soldier’s Declaration* to his commanding officer; it was also read in Parliament. His declaration was influenced by the pacifism of Bertrand Russell, Lady Morell, and others. Sassoon was transferred to Craiglockhart War Hospital for neurasthenia (shell shock) treatment. There, he befriended the soldier-poet Wilfred Owen and the anthropologist and psychologist W. H. R. Rivers. His writing at this time (such as his poem ‘Banishment’) reflects a strong war protest tempered primarily by the feeling that he has betrayed his fellow soldiers.  File: Sassoon2.jpg  Materials: Siegfried Sassoon’s copy of his ‘Statement against the continuance of the war’  Purpose of Inclusion: Example (for the section on *Finished with the War*)  Link to Material: http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/exhibitions/Sassoon/Poor\_Heroes.html  Bibliographic Details (if appropriate):  Copyright Holder: Cambridge  Just as war and protest gave Sassoon’s life purpose, they also improved the satirical power and emotional unity of his poetry, evident in collections such as *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* (1918). He is best known, though, for his fictionalised autobiography of George Sherston (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* [1928], *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* [1930], and *Sherston’s Progress* [1936]). Between 1938-46, Sassoon reworked the Sherston narrative into a ‘real’ autobiographical trilogy, which also includes his reflections on WWII, his crumbling marriage to wife Hester, his literary output and status, a recantation of his war protest (Egremont 523), and his doubt and faith in God. In August 1957, he converted to Roman Catholicism. He died on 1 September 1967, of abdominal cancer, and was buried at St. Andrews Church in Mells, England. |
| Further reading:  (Egremont)  (Moeyes)  (Supplement to The London Gazette)  (Thorpe)  (Wilson) |