

The poet Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) was a soldier during World War I. In 1915 he joined the British Army, as did his brother Hamo, who was killed during the Gallipoli Campaign in the same year. Sassoon fought in France and during the hard years of conflict, his poetry became more and more critical against war. In 1917 he was seriously wounded by a bullet. While he was recovering, he wrote this letter to his Commanding Officer accusing the government of prolonging the war unnecessarily. By writing the letter, he risked being condemned to prison (or to death) by court martial, but the trial never took place due to his physical condition.

In the letter, the poet expresses his sense of responsibility towards all soldiers, describing their suffering and denouncing the folly and uselessness of war.

I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance¹ of military authority, because I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. I believe that the purposes for which I and my fellow soldiers entered upon this war should have been so clearly stated as to have made it impossible to change them, and that, had this been done, the objects which actuated us would now be attainable by negotiations. I have seen and endured the suffering of the troops, and I can go no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust. I am not protesting against the conduct of the war, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed. On behalf of those who are suffering now I make this protest against the deception which is being practised on them; also I believe that I may help to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realise.

1. **wilful defiance:** intentional resistance

Other suggestions:

- Responsibility as concern for one's family: James Joyce, *Evelyn* (1914)
- Responsibility as scientists: Robert T. Kurosaka, *A Lot to Learn* (1992)
- Responsibility as teachers towards students: Graham Swift, *Waterland* (1983), Chapter 8
- Responsibility as concern for one's children: Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (2003), Chapter 2
- Responsibility as ethical obligation towards others: Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun* (2009), Part II, Tuesday, August 30