

**'When you See' by David Thomson**  
**Theatre Royal Bath Engage Programme**  
**Review by Ann Cullis, February 2015**

**When You See by David Thomson**

This new play by David Thomson was presented on 3 February 2015 as a rehearsed reading by Theatre Royal Bath's Engage programme. Thomson uses as his starting point the last poem written by Charles Hamilton Sorley, 'When you see millions of the mouthless dead'. C H Sorley (1895-1915) was killed at the Battle of Loos. He went to school at Marlborough College and his early poems evoke the Wiltshire countryside and the downs where he loved to go cross-country running in all weathers. Only 20 when he died, his few poems (published posthumously) show a mature command of ideas and language. 'When you see ...' does, however, feel notably different in tone; it is an angry poem by a young man forced into direct, personal awareness of the violent death around him, and is arresting in both its images and its language.

David Thomson uses this poem to ask, what would Sorley's mother have felt as she read it? He imagines her raw grief as she struggles to reconcile her intimate knowledge of the son who had written to her just a week before, in a cheery, stoical letter from the front, with the author of 'When you see ...' – an author who seems to her 'not her son' but someone unrecognisable: for how could her son have such thoughts and visions? In an agonising, awkward encounter with his army comrade, who was with him in the days before he died and at the moment of death, she repeatedly asks 'what happened?' – what happened to change her son from the one she knew to this unfamiliar young man who could write such a poem? As Sorley's friend tells her truthfully 'what happened', she reaches understanding and also a new respect for her dead son.

'When you see ...' and other poems by C H Sorley can be found on the [www.PoemHunter.com](http://www.PoemHunter.com) website:

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/when-you-see-millions-of-the-mouthless-dead/>

Theatre Royal Bath's Engage programme is supported by the trustees of the Estate of Margot Boyd.

<http://www.theatreroyal.org.uk/page/3018/Engage>