

153 FUTILITY

Move him into the sun –
 Gently its touch awoke him once,
 At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
 Always it woke him, even in France,
 5 Until this morning and this snow.
 If anything might rouse him now
 The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds –
 Woke once the clays of a cold star.
 10 Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides
 Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
 Was it for this the clay grew tall?
 – O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
 To break earth's sleep at all?

Written at Ripon in May 1918.

TITLE Cp. Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lvi, l. 25: 'O life as futile, then, as frail!' For a discussion of the influence of Tennyson's elegy on WO's, see DH, *Wilfred Owen (Writers and Their Work, 1975)*, 32–3.

3 half-sown: Previous editors read 'unsown'.

7 old sun: Cp. Donne, 'The Sun Rising', l. 1: 'Busy old fool, unruly sun'.

8–9 Cp. John Davidson, 'Thirty Bob a Week', ll. 71–2: 'A little sleeping seed, I woke – I did, indeed – / A million years before the blooming sun.' Also Sir Walter Scott, Hymn 487, *The English Hymnal*, ll. 9–12:

O, on that day, that wrathful day,
 When man to judgement wakes from clay,
 Be thou the trembling sinner's stay,
 Though heaven and earth shall pass away!

MSS, p. 319

Wilfred Owen, The Complete Poems
and Fragments, ed. Jon Stallworthy,
 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus,
 Hogarth Press, and Oxford University
 Press, 1983)