

American Literature Readings 2



UNIT 2

“I Have a Rendezvous with Death”

Alan Seeger

✱ **About the Selection** Poet Alan Seeger (1888–1916) died before any of his poems were published. He was born in New York and was a student at Harvard, graduating in 1910. Seeger moved to France and enlisted in the French Foreign Legion before the United States entered World War I. He was killed at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

GUIDED READING

As you read, compare the tone of the poem with the patriotic tone of “Over There.” Then answer the questions that follow.

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand,
And lead me into his dark land,
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year;
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

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READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is a rendezvous? What two types of rendezvous does the poet include in the poem?
2. When does the soldier predict his rendezvous with Death will occur? Why is the timing ironic?
3. At what three places does the soldier predict his rendezvous with Death will occur?
4. **CRITICAL THINKING** Compare the tone of this poem with the song lyrics “Over There.” How do they differ?

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“Over There”

George M. Cohan

■ About the Selection As the United States entered World War I, rousing songs helped bolster the spirits of soldiers and civilians alike. In 1917 composer George M. Cohan (1878–1942) wrote “Over There,” the most popular patriotic song of the war. He also wrote about 20 plays and musicals, greatly shaping the Broadway scene of the era. Cohan was later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for writing “Over There” and “You’re a Grand Old Flag,” another enthusiastic war song.

GUIDED READING

As you read the lyrics, think about their purpose and how they might have helped the country’s war efforts. Then answer the questions that follow.

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Take it on the run, on the run, on the run;
Hear them calling you and me;
Ev’ry son of liberty.
Hurry right away, no delay, go today,
Make your daddy glad, to have had such a lad,
Tell your sweetheart not to pine,
To be proud her boy’s in line.

CHORUS:

Over there, over there,
Send the word, send the word over there,
That the Yanks are coming,
The Yanks are coming,
The drums rum-tumming ev’ry where—
So prepare, say a pray’r,
Send the word, send the word to beware,
We’ll be over, we’re coming over,
And we won’t come back till it’s over over there.

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Johnnie show the Hun, you’re a son-of-a-gun,

Hoist the flag and let her fly,
Like true heroes, do or die.
Pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit,
Soldiers to the ranks from the towns and the tanks,
Make your mother proud of you,
And to liberty be true.

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READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Who is “Johnnie” in the song lyrics?
2. According to the song, how will family members feel when Johnnie gets his gun?
3. **CRITICAL THINKING** How does the songwriter imply that American troops will save the day?