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War and Peace: A collection of classic poetry and prose; Life and Death: A collection of classic poetry and prose

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

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All royalties from the sale of these two books will go to the children's charity NCH, whose logo is on the covers, and the books have clear signs of a well-intentioned but rather vaguely directed fund-raising exercise. When covers give greater prominence to the well-known writers of brief personal introductions (two pages from Pullman, only one from Morpurgo) than to the editor who has done the actual work, the books are selling on the lure of an eye-catching name rather than their contents. Sure enough, the collections prove to be inoffensive but extremely ordinary. Presumably to save on fees and hence boost profits, no work by authors still in copyright is included, so the most recent poems are those of the First World War poets, who of course died young. There are no poems by those such as Graves or Sassoon who survived. What is left in each book is a thematic collection of famous poems, divided into roughly half a dozen sub-groupings. Prose passages are very few, so among those few the repetitions are odd. Why two from both **The Old Curiosity Shop** and Thoreau's **Walking**, except perhaps that the editor had recently read them? There are some less obvious and more interesting choices, but in the main these are simply collections of the best-known poems in the language. However well-known, of course, for every reader there is a first time, and it may be convenient for some teachers to have the literature's highlights readily collected, but books should have a better reason for existence than good causes and familiar offerings.

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