

"In Flanders Fields"

Written in by John McCrae (1915)

After witnessing the carnage of WWI John McCrae wrote "In Flanders Fields." McCrae, a Canadian, was a medical officer in the Boer War and World War I.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

A sonnet is a 14-line poem, usually in iambic pentameter (5 metric feet, 10 syllables), but this poem is tetrameter, a line of poetry with 4 metric feet, 8 syllables.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare the mood in the first two stanzas with that in the third.
2. Is this a pro-war poem? If so why; if not, why not?
3. Who is the speaker in this poem?
4. What does the speaker want his listeners to do?

"Dulce Et Decorum Est"

Written by Wilfred Owen

After witnessing the horrors of trench and gas warfare as a British soldier in WWI, Wilfred Owen wrote this poem.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of disappointed shells that dropped behind.

GAS! Gas! Quick, boys!-- An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And floundering like a man in fire or lime.--
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,--
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the most powerful images in the poem?
2. What are examples of simile in the poem?
3. What does the Latin phrase mean? Why does the author consider it a "lie"?
4. How would the Latin phrase change in its meaning if we read it without the context of the rest of the poem?