

## Poems

### In Flanders Fields

By John McCrae

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.

The name of John McCrae (1872-1918) may seem out of place in the distinguished company of World War I poets, but he is remembered for what is probably the single best-known and popular poem from the war, "In Flanders Fields." He was a Canadian physician and fought on the Western Front in 1914, but was then transferred to the medical corps and assigned to a hospital in France. He died of pneumonia while on active duty in 1918. His volume of poetry, *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*, was published in 1919.

## **Anthem for Doomed Youth**

By Wilfred Owen

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born on March 18, 1893. He was on the Continent teaching until he visited a hospital for the wounded and then decided, in September, 1915, to return to England and enlist. "I came out in order to help these boys-- directly by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can. I have done the first" (October, 1918).

Owen was injured in March 1917 and sent home; he was fit for duty in August, 1918, and returned to the front. November 4, just seven days before the Armistice, he was caught in a German machine gun attack and killed. He was twenty-five when he died. The bells were ringing on November 11, 1918, in Shrewsbury to celebrate the Armistice when the doorbell rang at his parent's home, bringing them the telegram telling them their son was dead.

## **The Soldier**

By Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Rupert Brooke was born into a well-to-do, academic family. He was a good student and athlete, and a popular young man who eventually numbered among his friends E. M. Forster, Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, and Edward Thomas. Even as a student he was familiar in literary circles and came to know many important political, literary and social figures before the war.

Brooke actually saw little combat during the war; he contracted blood-poisoning from a small neglected injury and died in April, 1915, in the Aegean. Brooke's reputation, aside from the myth of the fallen "golden warrior" that his friends set about creating almost immediately after his death, rests on the five war sonnets of 1914. Some of his earlier poetry--"Fish," "Helen and Menelaus," and "Heaven"--however, shows us a much different side of Brooke's talent and temperament. Some critics doubt that he would have written the sonnets later in the war had he lived. They show an enthusiasm that most soldiers and poets eventually lost. How Brooke's poetry would have changed in tone and imagery we can only guess. Fair or not, Brooke is remembered as a "war poet" who inspired patriotism in the early months of the Great War. Jon Stallworthy comments on the unfairness of this assessment, but acknowledges that Brooke assumed a symbolic role that eventually turned into the myth of a young and beautiful fallen warrior.

## **Dulce et Decorum Est**

By Wilfred Owen

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 gas-shells dropping softly 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 flound'ring 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.

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# **The Things That Make a Soldier Great**

By Edgar A. Guest

The things that make a soldier great and send him out to die,  
To face the flaming cannon's mouth, nor ever question why,  
Are lilacs by a little porch, the row of tulips red,  
The peonies and pansies, too, the old petunia bed,  
The grass plot where his children play, the roses on the wall:  
'Tis these that make a soldier great. He's fighting for them all.

'Tis not the pomp and pride of kings that make a soldier brave,  
'Tis not allegiance to the flag that over him may wave;  
For soldiers never fight so well on land or on the foam  
As when behind the cause they see the little place called home.  
Endanger but that humble street whereon his children run—  
You make a soldier of the man who never bore a gun.

What is it through the battle smoke the valiant soldier sees?  
The little garden far away, the budding apple trees,  
The little patch of ground back there, the children at their play,  
Perhaps a tiny mound behind the simple church of gray.  
The golden thread of courage isn't linked to castle dome  
But to the spot, where'er it be—the humble spot called home.

And now the lilacs bud again and all is lovely there,  
And homesick soldiers far away know spring is in the air;  
The tulips come to bloom again, the grass once more is green,  
And every man can see the spot where all his joys have been.  
He sees his children smile at him, he hears the bugle call,  
And only death can stop him now—he's fighting for them all.