

Carol Anne Duffy's 'Last Post'

Carol Anne Duffy is a good poet, and the Laureateship seems to have given her a new lease of poetic life. She has just released a new poem, marking the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch; it has a strong central idea - a war film played backwards:

Last Post Carol Ann Duffy

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.
If poetry could tell it backwards, true, begin
that moment shrapnel scythed you to the stinking mud . . .
but you get up, amazed, watch bled bad blood
run upwards from the slime into its wounds;
see lines and lines of British boys rewind
back to their trenches, kiss the photographs from home –
mothers, sweethearts, sisters, younger brothers
not entering the story now
to die and die and die.
Dulce – No – Decorum – No – Pro patria mori.
You walk away.
You walk away; drop your gun (fixed bayonet)
like all your mates do too –
Harry, Tommy, Wilfred, Edward, Bert –
and light a cigarette.
There's coffee in the square,
warm French bread
and all those thousands dead
are shaking dried mud from their hair
and queuing up for home. Freshly alive,
a lad plays Tipperary to the crowd, released
from History; the glistening, healthy horses fit for heroes, kings.
You lean against a wall,
your several million lives still possible
and crammed with love, work, children, talent, English beer, good
food.
You see the poet tuck away his pocket-book and smile.
then it would.

Adapted from <<https://greatwarfiction.wordpress.com/2009/07/31/carol-anne-duffys-last-post/>>