**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.

Right from the first line the intelligent reader understands the poem is a quotation from Wilfred Owen’s Dulce est Decorum est.

Carol Ann Duffy was asked to create a poem to mark the final passing of the last World War One Survivor Harry Allingham and here she movingly rewinds the mindless slaughter and reveals the expansiveness of futures which were sacrificed over hellish yards of mud. The ‘width ‘of the words deployed  in Duffy’s new poem yields up  for the readers of today, the vistas lost, the horizons destroyed.  The use of the sound ‘t’ in the poem conveys the inhuman,  mechanisation of carrying out one’s ‘duty’, through  obeying orders ,  leading to the near obliteration of a generation.

This poem however, with its injection of ‘another way’ through the resourceful, imaginative  shift generated by the ‘If’ allows for [resurrection](http://www.tusitala.org.uk/blog/carol-ann-duffy-before-you-were-mine-an-analysis-revisited/) . This is the life of the imagination and memory when we do resurrect people and [lost time](http://www.tusitala.org.uk/blog/aqa-carol-ann-duffys-hour-loves-timely-bargaining/), through the [compassionate anarchy of dream](http://www.tusitala.org.uk/blog/owens-strange-meeting-a-lastness-was-palpably-present/). When the reader remembers ‘you’, you are not dead, you live in my head, I can see you and hear you and therefore you cannot be gone.

Duffy’s language reflects this [exploration of timing](http://www.tusitala.org.uk/blog/carol-ann-duffy-premonitions-two/), through the tension  between ‘faith’ and ‘faithlessness’. [Timing is](http://www.tusitala.org.uk/blog/carol-ann-duffy-premonitions-anchoring-hope-and-tenderness/)central to healing, as both Mrs Lazarus and [Demeter](http://www.tusitala.org.uk/blog/carol-ann-duffys-demeter-inspired-this-shapes/) reveal. Here, Duffy acknowledges the creative responsibility of the writer to show emotions and events, compassionately. For the reader cannot undo history, but as this poem shows, the reader can remember what was possible and in remembering ‘imagine’ with care,  unfinished lives whose potential **gifts were destroyed by war.**

The final pathos of the poet having no need to testify to the horrors of  war, to the events of the past and even the present is palpable. Wilfred Owen’s most famous poem frames this recreation of lost lives and his voice haunts all the poem.  Finally it is as if  Owen himself escapes his final amnesty day sacrifice and can smile too, glad to be alive, to survive and thrive.