

# WAR POETRY

## What does war poetry tell us about soldiers' and communities' attitudes to and experiences of war?

Some soldiers and civilians wrote poetry as a way of expressing their feelings, attitudes, ideas and experiences of war. This poetry can help us understand the war experience of both soldiers and communities.

Here are four poems written by people who experienced the war either as a soldier, or as a part of a community from where soldiers had gone to war.

Look at these and use these analytical questions to help make sure you understand each poem. You can make this a group task if you like, each group choosing a poem to interpret.

Then decide what they help you understand about the experience of soldiers during the war, and the impacts of the war on local communities.

ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS:	MY ANSWERS
What is it about?	
What is its style?	
What is its tone?	
What emotions does it create?	
How does it create these emotions?	
What is its message?	
What does it help me understand about the experiences of a soldier, or the experience of a community at war?	



## For the Fallen

Lawrence Binyon

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,  
England mourns for her dead across the sea.  
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,  
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill:  
Death august and royal,  
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.  
There is music in the midst of desolation,  
And a glory that shines upon her tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young.  
Straight of limb, true of eyes, steady and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.

**They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.**

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;  
They sit no more at familiar tables at home;  
They have no lot in our labour of the daytime;  
They sleep beyond England's foam.  
But where our desires are and our hopes profound,

Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known,  
As the stars are known to the night.  
As the stars will be bright when we are dust,

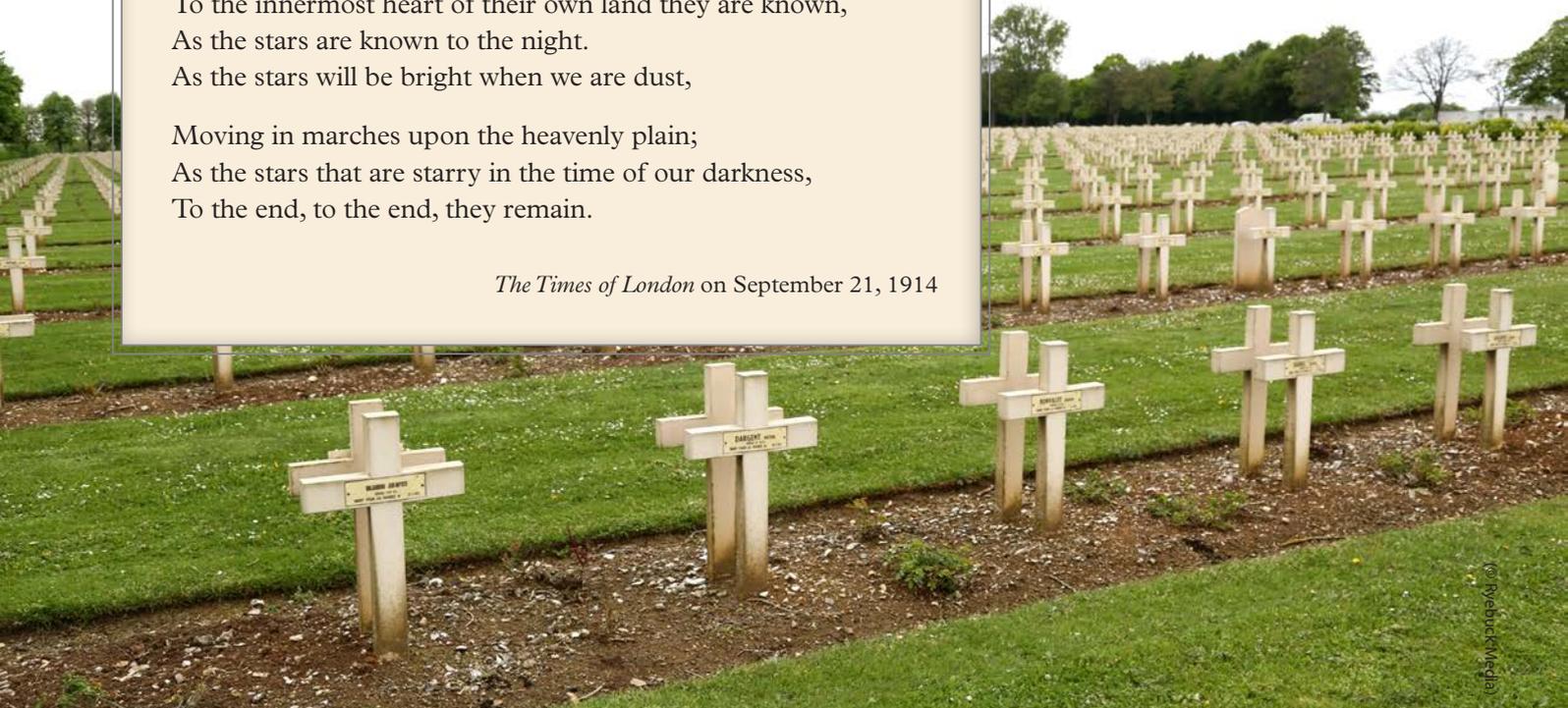
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;  
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,  
To the end, to the end, they remain.

*The Times of London* on September 21, 1914

It has now become known in Australia as the *Ode of Remembrance*, and the verse in bold is read every evening in every Returned and Services League (RSL) club, and at dawn services and other ANZAC tributes.



<http://rsl.org.au>



## In Flanders Fields

John McRae (1872-1918)

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.

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## Dans les champs de Flandre

(John Mc Rae)

Dans les champs de Flandre les coquelicots ondulent  
Entre les croix rang après rang  
Qui marquent notre place ; et dans le ciel  
Les alouettes chantant encore bravement, volent  
A peine audibles dans le bruit des canons

Nous sommes les Morts ;  
Il y a quelques jours nous vivions encore,  
Nous sentions la douceur de l'aube,  
Nous regardions l'embrassement du soleil couchant  
Nous aimions et étions aimés, et maintenant nous sommes étendus  
Dans les champs de Flandre

Poursuivez notre combat avec l'adversaire  
De nos mains défaillantes nous vous lançons  
Le flambeau ; qu'il soit vôtre et que vous le teniez haut !  
Car si vous manquez de parole à nous qui mourons,  
Nous ne pourrions pas dormir, même si les coquelicots poussent  
Dans les champs de Flandre



*Memorial to the English poet  
John McRae, France*

(© Ryebuck Media)



## I Have a Rendezvous With Death

Alan Seeger

I have a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple-blossoms fill the air—  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath—  
It may be I shall pass him still.  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When Spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,  
Where hushed awakenings are dear...  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

## J'ai un rendez-vous avec la mort

Alan Seeger

J'ai un rendez-vous avec la mort  
Sur quelque barricade âprement disputée,  
Quand le printemps revient avec son ombre frémissante,  
Et quand l'air est rempli des fleurs du pommier.  
J'ai un rendez-vous avec la mort  
Quand le printemps ramène ses jours bleus.

Il se peut qu'elle me prenne la main  
Et me conduise dans son pays ténébreux  
Et ferme mes yeux et éteigne mon souffle.  
Il se peut qu'elle passe encore sans m'atteindre.  
J'ai un rendez-vous avec la mort  
Sur quelque pente d'une colline battue par les balles  
Quand le printemps reparait cette année  
Et qu'apparaissent les premières fleurs des prairies.

Dieu sait qu'il vaudrait mieux être au profond  
D'oreillers de soie et de duvet parfumé  
Où l'amour palpite dans le plus délicieux sommeil,  
Pouls contre pouls, et souffle contre souffle,  
Où les réveils apaisés sont doux.  
Mais j'ai un rendez-vous avec la mort  
A minuit dans quelque ville en flammes  
Quand le printemps d'un pas léger revient vers le nord  
cette année  
Et je suis fidèle à ma parole:  
Je ne manquerai pas ce rendez-vous là.



American poet Alan Seeger  
died in July 1918 in the  
Second Battle of the Somme.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Seeger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Seeger)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ksgq3HRNTY>

## The Six-Starred Flag of Anzac

Arthur Henry Adams (1872-1936)

The six-starred flag of Anzac  
In peaceful pride was flown  
Above a lonely continent,  
Above a people who, content  
And knowing not what warfare meant,  
To nationhood had grown.

The six-starred flag of Anzac  
Was with the century born;  
Now, younger than the boys who came  
To lift it carelessly to fame,  
It flies, though never once in shame,  
By ten great battles torn.

The six-starred flag of Anzac  
The Pyramids have seen;  
The Landing its fine challenge knew;  
Above Gallipoli it flew  
Where'er were desperate deeds to do,  
There have our six stars been.

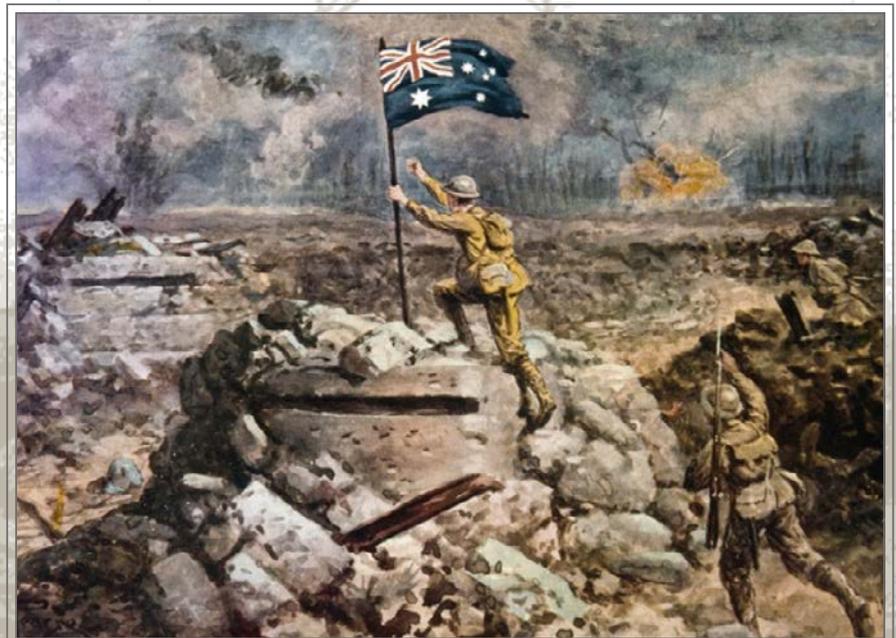
The six-starred flag of Anzac!  
In sombre pride it waves  
Where Death's battalions thick have been  
At Pozieres, Bullecourt, Messines,  
Where now the grass is growing green  
On closely-clustered graves.

The six-starred flag of Anzac  
At Menin Road unfurled  
Above the battle fluttered out  
Upon that proudly-named redoubt—  
This starry cross that comes to flout  
The devils of this world!

The six-starred flag of Anzac  
Above the battle flew.  
That youthful flag so new to Mars,  
And yet so old with battle scars,  
The six triumphant silver stars  
At last old Europe new!

*The Bulletin, Sydney, 1917*

'The Six-Starred Flag of Anzac' was published as a tribute to the capture by the Australians of the 'Anzac' redoubt during the Battle of the Menin Road, on 20 September 1917. The poem refers to the planting of an Australian flag on a blockade.



A 1917 illustration of the taking of a blockhouse and planting an Australian flag.