

= Last Post (poem) =

" Last Post " is a poem written by Carol Ann Duffy , the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom , in 2009 . It was commissioned by the BBC to mark the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch , two of the last three surviving British veterans from the First World War , and was first broadcast on the BBC Radio 4 programme Today on 30 July 2009 , the date of Allingham 's funeral .

The poem , named after the " Last Post " (the bugle call used at British ceremonies remembering those killed in war) , makes explicit references to Wilfred Owen 's poem from the First World War Dulce et Decorum Est . It imagines what would happen if time ran backwards and those killed in the war came back to life ; their lives would still be full of possibilities and filled with " love , work , children , talent , English beer , good food . " The poem was generally well received , with one commentator saying that it was " simply a damn good poem with rich imagery , cinematic movement and poignant ending . " Another said that it was " moving reversal of history " and a " fine poem " . Duffy herself was quoted as saying that she wanted to honour the tradition of poets who were soldiers .

= = Commission = =

Carol Ann Duffy was appointed as Poet Laureate in May 2009 , the first woman to be appointed to the post . She was asked by the BBC Radio 4 programme Today to write a poem to mark the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch . The poem was read by Duffy on Today on 30 July 2009 , the day of Allingham 's funeral . Allingham , who served with the Royal Naval Air Service before becoming a founder member of the Royal Air Force , died on 18 July 2009 at the age of 113 ; Patch , the last surviving man to have fought in the trenches in the war , died on 25 July 2009 at the age of 111 . Their deaths left Claude Choules , who served in the Royal Navy during the war and who lived in Australia until his death in 2011 , as the last surviving British veteran .

Duffy said that she felt that she should " honour that great tradition of poets who were also soldiers " , describing the poem as " an attempt at healing and being at one with the world " , and " a tribute and blessing , even an apology , on behalf of poetry and all poets . " She added that she " had been thinking about Afghanistan and trying to enthuse new war poetry among contemporary poets . " The poem was broadcast one week after Duffy published a selection of poems she had commissioned from poets such as Sean O 'Brien , Paul Muldoon and Daljit Nagra about the ongoing war in Afghanistan .

= = Poem = =

The poem takes its title from the bugle call used at British ceremonies remembering those killed in war , the " Last Post " . It begins with two lines from the poem Dulce et Decorum Est by the First World War poet Wilfred Owen :

The title of Owen 's poem is part of a line from the Roman poet Horace ? Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori (" It is sweet and fitting to die for one 's country ") . The phrase was inscribed over the chapel door at Sandhurst , the British military academy , in 1913 . The phrase is again referenced when Duffy writes " Dulce ? No ? Decorum ? No ? Pro patria mori . " The writer Will Heaven said that , whilst the poem denies that death in war is " sweet and proper " (dulce et decorum) , it does not deny that the soldiers died for their country (pro patria mori) .

The heart of the poem depicts events " if poetry could tell it backwards " ? soldiers who died in the war coming back to life , " lines and lines of British boys rewind / back to their trenches " . The poem imagines " all those thousands dead / are shaking dried mud from their hair / and queuing up for home " . Duffy pictures what would have happened to them if they had not died :

before adding , " You see the poet tuck away his pocket @-@ book and smile " . Erica Wagner , the literary editor of The Times , said that the poet Duffy refers to in the poem could be Owen , but could also be John McCrae , Isaac Rosenberg , or Charles Hamilton Sorley , or one of a number of other poets from the war . Wagner also noted that " Harry Patch and Henry Allingham escaped death , but

never the effect of that awful war . "

= = Reaction = =

The poem received a generally favourable critical reaction . Wagner called it a " moving reversal of history " , a " fine poem " , and " the latest in a noble line of work [about the First World War] that aspires to a kind of salvation . " Heaven said that it was a " poignant and beautiful tribute " to Allingham . It has been called " sombre yet supremely uplifting " . The poem was also noticed in the United States . Jenna Krajeski , a writer for The New Yorker , described it as " another strong at @-@ bat " , and said that the poem highlighted " the power , but also the shortcomings , of poetry " when writing about an " imaginary , impossible event " and also writing about writing about it . The American poet John Lundberg said that the poem was a " surprising success " , adding that not only was it " accessible " and " a fitting tribute to those who served in World War I , " but also " simply a damn good poem with rich imagery , cinematic movement and poignant ending . " However , Christopher Howse , a writer for the Daily Telegraph , took a different view of the poem 's merits , saying (under the title " Carol Ann Duffy falls short of Henry Allingham ") that Duffy 's verse form was " open , to the point of invisibility " .