

WORLD WAR I AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**Viewpoints**

Many young men who went to war with high ideals of patriotism soon became opponents of war. In these poems, two young British soldier-poets respond to their war experience. Brooke, a handsome athlete who was already a well-known poet, died early in the war. Owen, a decorated hero, was killed in action a week before the war ended. The title of his poem comes from a Latin phrase meaning “It is sweet and right to die for one’s country.” ♦ *As you read, think about each writer’s reactions. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Soldier-Poets View World War I**“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 forever 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.

Source: *Modern British Poetry*, ed. Louis Untermeyer (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964).

From “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 tired, outstripped Five-Nines [shells]
 that dropped 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 of 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.

Questions to Think About

1. What does Brooke remember about his life in England?
2. In Owen’s poem, what weapon of war do the soldiers encounter in the second verse? What do they do? What happens to one of them?
3. **Make Comparisons** Compare the two pictures of war—and of dying in war—that these poets give. If Brooke had lived long enough to serve in trench war, do you think he might have written differently?