For the Fallen

POEM TEXT

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 our tears.

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

They shall grow not 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 of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
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 that shall 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.

SUMMARY

England, personified as a mother to her citizens, proudly gives grateful thanks to and grieves over the British soldiers—England's metaphorical children—who have died in Europe during WWI. The soldiers were part of England's own body and part of her soul as well. Now, the soldiers have died while fighting for freedom.

The drums, perhaps of a funeral procession or march for the soldiers, beat ceremoniously. Death itself, personified as nobility, also pays respects to these soldiers by mourning them. Death's mournful song reaches even the planets in the sky above. Thus, despite England's collective misery over the death of the soldiers, there still exists beautiful music and song. The honor that the soldiers achieved through their sacrifice brings a radiance upon the tears that the rest of England sheds for them.

The soldiers sang as they went into battle with the enemy. The soldiers were youthful. Their arms and legs were steady add unfaltering as they walked into battle. Their eyes remained sharp and focused. Every part of the soldiers appeared firm and radiant. The soldiers were loyal and committed until their deaths, despite knowing the chances of them living were slim. Indeed, as the soldiers died, they bravely faced their enemies.

The soldiers will never grow old like the rest of England. The soldiers will not be worn down by the aging process or passing time. As each day ends and begins again, the rest of England will forever remember the dead soldiers.

The soldiers will never get together with their happy friends. The soldiers will never sit around tables in their own homes. They will never work during the day as the living do. Indeed, the dead soldiers are put to rest beyond the ocean boundaries that surround England.

Yet, despite all this, the soldiers will always remain in the place where English citizens' innermost longing and deepest hopes reside. The soldiers will feel like an unseen, but never-ending source of inspiration and nobility within each citizen. In this way, the soldiers will exist in the hearts of the English people, like the stars exist in the night sky.

The soldiers will continue to exist like the stars that shine long after the rest of England is dead, and which move steadily across the heavens up above. And just like the stars that remain bright and everlasting in physical and emotional darkness, the dead soldiers will continue to exist and shine until the very end of time.

THEMES

PATRIOTISM AND SACRIFICE

"For the Fallen" memorializes British soldiers who died in battle during WWI. The poem acknowledges the profound loss of the soldiers' lives while also emphasizing

the nobility of their sacrifice. Dying for one's country and the ideals of freedom, the poem implies, is the ultimate act of patriotism.

England is in the poem personified as a "mother" figure mourning the death of "her children"—British soldiers who died in WWI. The relationship between England and the soldiers is thus presented as an intimate, familial bond, an idea that in turn emphasizes the profound emotional loss the soldiers' deaths represent to the country as well as the importance of remembering these men.

Moreover, these soldiers are not just England's "children"; they are "Flesh of her flesh." The loss of the soldiers, therefore, is a loss of part of England *itself*—an idea that again emphasizes the immense pain of the soldiers' sacrifice, which is so great as to feel like a physical wound. The soldiers are also described as the "spirit of [England's] spirit." The soldiers are thus not just a part of England's *body*, but also of her *soul*. These lines speak to a unified national identity being protected by the soldiers. Altogether, this language is the poem's way of respecting the gravity of the soldiers' loss and implicitly justifying their deaths by making the human beings inextricable from the cause and country they fought for.

Indeed, the poem argues that these soldiers didn't die in vain because they sacrificed their lives for the noble cause of protecting England and its freedoms. The soldiers' deaths are thus "august and royal." The adjective "august" describes an individual who is dignified and eminent and typically is used to describe royalty or nobility. The implication is that the nobility of the soldiers' *cause* lends nobility to their *deaths*, raising them to the level of royalty.

Adding to this idea, the speaker insists that the soldiers were "staunch to the end against odds uncounted," meaning they remained brave and unafraid to the very end. The implication is that the soldiers' belief in their cause—in protecting their home country and the ideals of freedom—was powerful enough to stave away fear of death. This is another image meant to hammer home the noble and principled nature of the soldiers' patriotic sacrifice, and, as such, the importance of honoring them.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12

IMMORTALITY AND REMEMBRANCE

"For the Fallen" is an elegy for the British soldiers who died during in WWI. On one level, the poem takes care to highlight the patriotism that fueled the soldiers' sacrifice, arguing that they gave their lives in the name of protecting their beloved homeland and England's ideals of freedom. But the poem not only justifies the soldiers' deaths in the name of patriotism; it also suggests that their sacrifice essentially makes them immortal in the eyes of history. That is, because the soldiers gave their lives to protect England, they will live on in England's memory.

The poem makes clear that the soldiers' deaths have not been in vain, but rather were necessary in order to protect their country and cause. The soldiers are "Fallen in the cause of the free"; they have sacrificed themselves not for any selfish reason, but for a deeply noble one. The nobility of this sacrifice, in turn, forever brands them in England's cultural consciousness.

The speaker further declares that the soldiers "shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old," and that England "will remember them" in the full of their youth at the time of death. This adds yet more tragedy to their loss, while also, somewhat ironically suggesting that the soldiers' premature deaths has allowed them to remain forever young in the country's memory. Of course, the poem also relays how these soldiers will never get to see their families again, and will never return to the world they gave their lives to defend.

The poem insists, however, that this does not mean these soldiers will be forgotten. Instead, they live on in the deepest "desires" and "hopes" of British citizens, their sacrifice securing them a place of honor in "the innermost heart of their own land." The speaker also compares the soldiers to the "stars that shall be bright when we are dust," an allusion to the idea that people return to "dust" upon death. Just as stars will outlast human life, so too will the glory and nobility of the soldiers' sacrifice transcend human memory itself.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 4
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 17-28
- Line 25

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

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.

The first two lines of "For the Fallen" establish the emotional stakes of the poem. England, personified as a "proud" and grateful "mother" figure, mourns dead British soldiers—treated in this metaphor as the country's children. By establishing a familial relationship between the dead and England, the poem emphasizes the grief that England feels at their deaths. Additionally, the British citizens have died "across the sea" and

not on English land. Therefore, England's inability to recover the bodies of "her children" compounds her grief.

Furthermore, the dead are not simply children; rather, as described in line 3, they are "Flesh of her flesh." In losing the soldiers, or "her flesh," England herself suffers a physical wound. Additionally, the phrase "flesh of her flesh" is a Biblical allusion to God's creation of Eve out of Adam's rib. The allusion stresses that dead are as important to England as Eve was to Adam. In the same vein, the second half of line 3 describes the dead as "spirit of [England's] spirit." The dead are not just a part of England's *body*, then, but also a part of her *soul*. Consequently, the loss of the British citizens is an emotional, physical, and also existential wound. The caesura in the middle of line 3, in the form of a comma, slows down the reading of the line, stressing the importance and solemnity of these two declarations.

Also note how, in the first four lines, the dead are described in relation to England as "her children," "her dead," "her flesh," and "her spirit." The repetition of the possessive "her" highlights the intimate relationship between England and the dead, never letting the reader forget that these fallen soldiers are part of the nation they fought for.

Line 4 then provides more details into the identities of those who have died. The ones who England mourns for so deeply are not just any British citizens. Rather, they are those who have "Fallen in the cause of the free." In other words, the dead are British soldiers who have died fighting for their country in another land. The poem thus takes a patriotic view of war and argues for the nobility and necessity of sacrifice in the name of England's ideals.

"For the Fallen" is, ultimately, an elegy for dead British soldiers. As is fitting for an elegy, there is a ceremonial regularity to the form. The poem is composed of seven quatrains, or four-line stanzas. Within each quatrain, the first three lines are of similar syllabic length, while the fourth line is shorter. Additionally, the majority of the lines are end-stopped, slowing down the reading of the lines and providing a stately rhythm to the poem.

Binyon is more unconventional, however, in terms of meter. Although there are moments of conventional meter, Binyon often plays against these meters from line to line and in unconventional ways. Take, for example, line 2:

> England | mourns for | her dead | across | the sea.

The line begins with two trochees (DUM-da) but soon shifts to iambic meter (da-DUM). Similarly, line 4 also starts out with trochaic meter:

> Fallen | in the | cause of | the free.

Trochaic, or falling, meter is often used to address somber and grim subjects, like the death of patriotic soldiers. By using both trochaic and iambic meter, however, the poem suggests a complication of that mournful mood. Indeed, although the first stanza establishes England's deep grief, the first stanza also hints at England's "pr[ide]," a more positive emotion, at the soldiers' sacrifice.

LINES 5-8

> *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 our tears.*

The second stanza of "For the Fallen" envisions a ceremonial funeral procession for the dead soldiers, paying due respect to the nobility, valor, and glory of their sacrifice. The drums beat solemnly, suggesting the mood of the funeral as stately, dignified, and somber. By contrast, the word "thrill" has more positive connotations, indicating excitement and even pleasure. The contrast between "[s]olemn" and "thrill" suggests the complexities of England's grief. Although England solemnly mourns the soldiers, England is still inspired by and proud of the dead soldiers' ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Indeed, the remainder of the stanza affirms the glory the soldiers receive as a result of their patriotic sacrifice. In the second half of line 5, even Death itself, "august and royal" pays respects to the soldiers. The adjectives "august" and "royal" are typically applied to nobility. Death, therefore, is not personified as a terrifying figure but rather as someone noble and dignified. That Death itself would pay respects to the soldiers indicates the nobility of the soldiers as well.

In line 6, Death pays respects by singing "sorrow up into immortal spheres." Death, like England, feels "sorrow" at the soldiers' death. However, this sorrow is complicated by Death's act of singing, something that usually brings pleasure to the listener. Moreover, Death's song reaches the "immortal spheres," or planets, up in the heavens. This celestial setting further elevates the ceremonial funerary service for the soldiers who, the poem implies, gain recognition even in the heavens for their service.

Line 6 is written in in iambic pentameter, meaning there are five poetic feet with an unstressed-stressed, or da-DUM rhythm:

> Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,

The regularity in meter at this moment reflects the steady rhythm of Death's music and suggests the steady march of the funeral procession.

The idea of music in the "immortal spheres" is further an allusion to the philosophical concept of the "music of the spheres," which suggests that the movements of the celestial "spheres," or planets, produce a kind of harmony. Harmony implies concord and balance. Therefore, although the death of

the soldiers is a great tragedy, there is a righteousness and rightness to their sacrifice for the cause of freedom.

Consequently, line 7 and line 8 again underscore the complexity of England's emotions felt at the soldiers' death. While England feels great grief at their deaths, there is also "music in the midst of desolation" and "glory that shines upon our tears." The contrast between "music" and "glory" and "desolation" and "tears" reflects the simultaneous pride and grief that England feels.

Line 8 also suggests the identity of the speaker more explicitly than in the first stanza in the phrase "our tears." The speaker, therefore, is also one of those who mourn the soldiers' deaths. Indeed, the speaker seems to represent the English people as a whole through the use of the plural pronoun "our." In doing so, the speaker implies that all of England experiences such unity of emotion.

LINES 9-12

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

In the third stanza of "For the Fallen," the speaker imagines the soldiers on the battlefield and highlights the soldiers' valor and bravery in war. First, in the beginning of line 9, the speaker states that the soldiers go into battle "with songs." This image of the soldiers singing on the battlefield implies their courage and bravery. The speaker next declares that the soldiers "were young." This declaration emphasizes that the soldiers' lives were cut off at the height of their youth.

In line 10, the speaker describes the soldiers' youthfulness. Their arms and legs were "[s]traight," and therefore firm, indicating their courage and fearlessness. The soldiers were not only brave; they were also "true of eye." Being "true of eye" indicates their accuracy in attacks and implies that the soldiers were great warriors as well. Overall, the soldiers were "steady and aglow." The steadiness of the soldiers emphasize again their fearlessness and valor, while the adjective "aglow" suggests an otherworldly and celestial radiance of body and spirit. The two caesuras created through commas in the line slow down the reading of the line and separate the images from one another, emphasizing the distinction and importance of each image. This effect is heightened by the asyndeton and parataxis of this stanza, as the speaker layers the soldiers' qualities without conjunctions between the phrases:

> They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
> Straight of limb ...

All of these qualities are thus weighted equally; all of these qualities are important to remember when memorializing the soldiers. The anaphora of the word "they" throughout this stanza adds to the repetitiveness of the poem, refusing to let the reader lose sight of the soldiers.

In the last two lines of the stanza, the speaker affirms the soldiers' bravery once more. The soldiers were "staunch to the end against odds uncounted." Despite facing certain death, the soldiers remained "staunch" and brave. In line 11, the consonance of hard /t/ and /d/ sounds in "staunch," "to," "end," "against," "odds," and "uncounted" emphasizes the firm, unyielding courage of the British soldiers.

Indeed, the British soldiers remain brave even at the moment of their deaths. The soldiers "fell with their faces to the foe." The soldiers face their enemies, and their deaths, unflinchingly, thereby demonstrating their fearlessness. The alliteration of soft /f/ sounds in "fell," "faces," and "foe" soften the moment of their deaths. The speaker does not depict the soldiers' deaths as painful, ugly, or harsh. Rather, the speaker romanticizes the deaths. "For the Fallen," therefore presents an idealized interpretation of war, suggesting that sacrificing one's life for one's country in war is a brave, noble, and patriotic act.

LINES 13-16

They shall grow not 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.

Here the speaker says that the dead soldiers will not continue to age and grow old like the rest of England. On one hand, this declaration evokes sorrow; the soldiers have died in the midst of their youth and have lost the years ahead of them. The interruption created by the caesura in the middle of the line mirrors the interruption that death creates in the soldiers' lives. The repetition of the words "grow" and "old" at the end of the two clauses, an example of epistrophe, increases the emotional weight of the line.

Yet, on the other hand, as line 14 states more explicitly, "Age shall not weary [the soldiers], nor the years condemn." To weary someone is to wear them down or exhaust them—whether emotionally, physically, or spiritually. To condemn someone is to punish them, often with death. Therefore, in dying young, the soldiers will never be hurt by the aging process or punished by the passing years. Consequently, the soldiers will remain youthful forever, like immortal gods. Ironically, then, they achieve a sort of freedom in death. The repetition of "shall" at the beginning of lines 13 and 14 is an example of anaphora. This use of anaphora emphasizes the relationship between the two lines, as well as the contrast in their ideas.

In lines 15-16, the speaker makes both a promise to the soldiers and a resolution for the rest of England. From sunset to sunrise, the speaker declares, "We will remember them." The use of "we" makes clear that this act of memorialization for the soldiers is not an act performed simply on an individual level, but on a collective basis; the whole country will remember the

soldiers, together.

LINES 17-20

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

In the previous stanza, the speaker suggested that in dying, the soldiers have been preserved in their youth, freed from the wearying effects of old age. This may seem like a blessing in a way, but here the speaker returns to a more somber tone by reflecting on everything the soldiers' lose in death, in addition to the chance to grow old.

The speaker lists the communities the soldiers will no longer be able to a part of. In line 17, for example, the speaker declares that the soldiers will "mingle not with their laughing comrades again." To mingle is to socialize pleasantly with others, in this case "laughing comrades." Laughter indicates happiness and social bonding, while a "comrade" is a close friend and companion. Socializing, friendship, and happiness—these are all things that the soldiers will never be able to experience again.

In line 18, the soldiers "sit no more at familiar tables of home." In other words, the soldiers will never be able to sit and enjoy a meal with family. The assonant long /o/ sounds in "no" and "home" resonate with the sorrow of the line. Not only will the dead soldiers never be able to socialize with friends again, but the soldiers will never be able to see their families either, nor feel the familiar comforts of home since they died in war. Line 18, therefore, is an escalation of line 17.

In line 19, the soldiers will also "have no lot in our labour." On first read, the idea that the soldiers may never have to "labour," or work, might seem like another blessing. To "labour," after all, often suggests working with great effort and exertion. This "labour" is, however, "our labour." In other words, a collective labor that *all* of England participates in. The soldiers, therefore, will never be able to be a part of this community again. Moreover, this labor is a labor "of the day-time," a reminder that the soldiers will never be able to experience a good day's work or the pleasant daytime ever again. The alliteration of smooth /l/ sounds in "lot" and "labour" enhances the sonic qualities of the line and stresses the experiences that the soldiers have lost out on.

The structure of the last line of the stanza varies from the first three lines. Rather than stating what the soldiers are unable to do or participate in with the words "not" or "no," line 20 describes what the soldiers are currently doing. Namely, the soldiers currently "sleep beyond England's foam." The soldiers have died fighting abroad, and therefore they "sleep," or rest, in death, beyond the oceanic boundaries of England. Sleeping is a peaceful, gentle, and desirable act. This description of the soldiers' state of death is, similar to line 12, an idealized and peaceful imagining. There is, however, still a sense of loss within the line. "[F]oam" is a pleasant mass of frothy bubbles. The imagery of "England's foam" is, therefore, evocative of gentle tenderness. The soldiers, however, are not able to rest within this tenderness, but must rest instead in a foreign land.

Lines 17-20 all begin with "They," while lines 17-19 include the word "not" or the variation "no." This anaphora with variation provides structure to the list of losses the soldiers experience as a result of their premature deaths. This use of anaphora also links and builds on the individual losses within each line. These losses, in turn, emphasize the sacrifices the soldiers have made for freedom and their country.

LINES 21-24

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;

Line 21 begins as a direct response to the previous stanza with the conjunction "But," which contrasts the ideas between the two stanzas. Although, as described in the fifth stanza, the soldiers' premature deaths bring about so much loss, the soldiers still remain "where ... desires are and ... hopes profound." In other words, their memory lives on.

Desires and hopes are positive emotions that may help one through difficult and despairing times. In particular, "hopes profound" and deep and powerfully-felt hopes that may counteract deep and "profound" despair. The assonance of deep /o/ sounds in "hopes" and "profound" resonates with the depth of the emotions described in the line. These emotions can exist within individuals and communities. In this case, the speaker again uses the collective pronoun "our" to refer to these "desires" and "hopes." These "desires" and "hopes," then, are felt by England on a collective level, as a whole. The soldiers therefore continue to exist alongside these feelings of "desires" and "hopes." Indeed, the line implies the soldiers serve a similar function of these feelings by counteracting any despair and hopelessness felt by the nation.

In line 22, the speaker continues to elaborate on the soldiers' presence "[f]elt" on an emotional level by the rest of England. Using a simile, the speaker compares the feeling of the soldiers to the feeling of "a well-spring," a never-ending source of something desirable such as water. In the soldiers' case, the soldiers are a never-ending source of emotional support and inspiration for the rest of England. Specifically, the soldiers are a "well-spring" "hidden from sight." The dead soldiers no longer have a physical presence; therefore, the soldiers cannot be seen. Rather, the soldiers exist on a spiritual level, within the emotional heart of the nation.

Indeed, as the next line states, the soldiers' spiritual presence is acknowledged in "the innermost heart of their own land." The heart is commonly thought of as the source of human emotions. Therefore, the "innermost heart" is the source of the most

profound emotions. The soldiers, consequently, inspire the most powerful of emotions in England.

Through the use of a simile in the last line of the stanza, the speaker elaborates on the nature of the emotions that the soldiers inspire. The relationship between the soldiers and England's heart is like the relationship between "stars" to "the Night." Stars are embedded and inextricably linked to the night, as they appear in the night sky. Stars are also forever present in the night sky. Therefore, the soldiers are also an inherent and forever present part of England's heart. The consonance of soft /n/ sounds in "known" and "Night" enhances the sonic qualities of the line and emphasizes the ideas within the line. Although the soldiers have died on a foreign land, their spiritual presence still exists within England.

LINES 25-28

As the stars that shall 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 poem ends with a declaration of reverence and gratitude for the dead soldiers. Line 25 opens with another comparison of the soldiers to the stars through the use of a simile. The soldiers, the speaker states, are like "the stars that shall be bright when we are dust." This is a Biblical allusion to the phrase "dust to dust," which suggests that people are made from dust and return to dust upon death.

The speaker also associates the soldiers with the celestial glow of the stars, which exists long after humans turn to "dust," or die. The image of the stars' brightness builds on that of the soldiers being "aglow" on the battlefield in the third stanza. The continued brightness of the stars is also an affirmation of their continued existence, which appears immortal in comparison to the lifespan of other human beings. The speaker, therefore, assigns this aspect of immortality to the soldiers through this comparison to the stars.

Moreover, in line 26, the stars that the soldiers are compared to move "in marches upon the heavenly plain." One "marches" on the battlefield. The use of the verb "march" to describe the movement of the stars thus further emphasizes the similarities between the stars and the dead soldiers. When seen from Earth, the stars upon appear to move in the night sky or the "heavenly plain." Following the logic of the simile, the dead soldiers also exist in the heavens. The simile, therefore, deifies the dead soldiers and transforms them into celestial beings.

In line 27, the speaker makes another comparison between the soldiers and the stars through the use of a simile. Indeed, the repetition of the phrase "[a]s the stars" in lines 24, 25, and 27 is an example of anaphora. The use of anaphora across the three lines provides structure to the list of comparisons and again highlights the similarities between the stars and the soldiers.

In line 27, the soldiers as like "the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness." Specific qualities of "starr[iness]" may include a celestial radiance, a seemingly immortal lifespan, and an ethereal beauty, among other positive attributes. By sacrificing their lives in the name of duty and freedom, the soldiers take on all of these positive, godlike qualities.

Furthermore, the "darkness" of line 27 is "our darkness," therefore a national darkness. The speaker seems to suggest this "darkness" that afflicts England is an emotional affliction rather than a physical one. England is, after all, not only grieving the loss of the soldiers, but also in the midst of war. Nevertheless, the poem makes clear, the sacrifices the soldiers have made will provide inspiration and hope to all England through this difficult time.

Additionally, the dead soldiers will not only help England in this period of war, but also "to the end ... remain." In line 16, the speaker established that the soldiers will remain alive through the act of England memorializing them. In stanzas 6 and 7, the speaker establishes the immortality of the soldiers in their own right through comparisons to the stars. Thus, in the last line, the speaker affirms that the soldiers will not only continue to exist after the rest of England has turned to "dust" and died, but even beyond until, perhaps, the end of time.

The repetition of the phrase "to the end," an example of epizeuxis, provides powerful emphasis on the immortality of the soldiers. In return for their patriotic sacrifice, the poem makes clear, the soldiers, the poem makes clear, gain immortality and a heavenly, godlike nobility that transcends human memory.

SYMBOLS

STARS

Stars are celestial bodies that appear brightly-illuminated in the sky at night. Stars can live for billions of years. As such, they appear eternal and immortal in relation to humans. In "For the Fallen," the dead British soldiers are compared to stars, symbolically taking on the stars' radiant, celestial, and immortal qualities.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker states that the dead soldiers will be known to the rest of England "[a]s the stars are known to the Night." The presence of stars is ubiquitous to the night. Therefore, the speaker implies, the dead soldiers will be intimately and eternally remembered by the rest of the England; they will *always* be "known."

Moreover, in line 25, stars shine "bright[ly]" long after humans turn to "dust" or die. Therefore, although the soldiers have died in battle, they remain immortal through the rest of England's act of remembrance. The speaker also notes that the stars "march[] upon the heavenly plain." The act of "march[ing]" is a

martial act, and one that the soldiers certainly performed in battle. The speaker implies that just as the stars move across the heavens, the dead soldiers have their place in the heavens as well due to their patriotic sacrifice.

In the final two lines of the poem, the speaker once again points to the stars' brightness during "the time of [their] darkness." Darkness, the speaker seems to suggest, is not just a physical state of darkness, but an emotional one. After all, "For the Fallen" was written in the first few months of WWI, a war that would drag on for many years and cause previously unimaginable suffering and death. The speaker believes, however, that the dead soldiers will serve as a source of "light," or inspiration, in the midst of this emotional darkness.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 23-28:** "To the innermost heart of their own land they are known / As the stars are known to the Night; / As the stars that shall 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."

POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

Personification occurs three times in "For the Fallen"—in stanza's 1, 2, and 7. In each case, Binyon uses personification in order to emphasize the depth of emotions felt for the soldiers within the poem.

In the first stanza, for example, Binyon personifies England as a "proud" "mother" to the soldiers who are "her children." Maternal love is often considered one of the most powerful and tender emotions. Therefore, through personification, Binyon uses the relationship between mother and children to highlight the intimacy between England and the soldiers. This in turn emphasizes the grief that England, a mother, feels at the soldiers' deaths. Moreover, England, as a mother, is not even able to recover the bodies of her children who have died "across the sea." All of these details of the relationship between England and the soldiers enhance the sorrow in the beginning of the poem.

In line 5, Death is personified as an "august and royal" figure who pays respects to the dead soldiers by singing a song. The adjectives "august" and "royal" depict figures of nobility, such as kings and queens. Therefore, Death is not presented as a terrifying monster, but as nobility. The fact that nobility and, moreover, Death itself, would pay honor the soldiers in death suggests the nobility of the soldiers themselves. The personification, therefore, elevates the status of the soldiers, intensifying the speaker's grief and reverence for them.

In the final stanza, the speaker uses a simile to compare the soldiers to stars. In line 26, the stars "[m]ov[e] in marches upon the heavenly plain." To "march" is to move in a regular, militaristic rhythm. Additionally, battles are often fought on "plain[s]," or flat landmasses. Consequently, the stars are personified as moving across the "heavenly plain," or night sky, like soldiers. The personification of stars as soldiers further emphasizes the similarities between the stars and soldiers. Not only are the dead soldiers as radiant, noble, inspiring, heavenly, and immortal as the stars, but the stars themselves are inherently similar to the noble soldiers too.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children, / England mourns for her dead across the sea."
- **Lines 3-4:** "Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit, / Fallen in the cause of the free."
- **Lines 5-6:** "Death august and royal / Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,"
- **Line 25:** "As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,"
- **Line 26:** "Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;"

REPETITION

Repetition occurs frequently in various forms throughout "For the Fallen." In each case, Binyon uses repetition to emphasize certain words or ideas and intensify the emotions within the line.

In the first stanza, Binyon establishes the relationship between England and the dead soldiers as that between a "mother" and "her children." The repetition of the possessive pronoun "her" in lines 2-3 highlight the intimate, familial relationship between England and the dead soldiers. Additionally, in line 3, Binyon builds on this relationship by stating that the soldiers were not only England's "children," they were also "Flesh of her flesh" and "spirit of her spirit." Therefore, the loss of the soldiers is a physical and spiritual wound as well as a familial one. The repetition of "flesh" and "spirit," an example of diacope, emphasizes the connection between England the soldiers and, it follows, sense of loss and pain that England feels upon the soldiers' deaths.

In the third stanza, the speaker describes the appearance and character of the English soldiers as they went to battle. Each of the qualities the speaker describes emphasizes the soldiers' fearlessness, strength, and youth. The repetition of the word "they" at the beginning of the sentences and phrases in the stanza, an example of anaphora, provides structure to the list, distinguishing each quality mentioned in the stanza and keeping readers' focused on the soldiers themselves.

Binyon also uses epistrophe in order to emphasize certain ideas and feelings. In stanza 4, the speaker affirms the eternal

youthfulness of the soldiers in death. The soldiers "shall grow not old," while the rest of England will "grow old." The repetition of "grow" and "old" in the ends of the clauses in line 13 emphasize the difference between "[t]hey," the soldiers, and "we," the rest of England, in terms of aging. The soldiers, the use of epistrophe stresses, are not normal humans; rather, they are immortal and ageless.

In the final two stanzas of the poem, the speaker compares the dead soldiers to the stars through the use of simile. The soldiers, the speaker observes, will be "known" to England like the stars are "known to the Night." Therefore, the soldiers will be remembered and acknowledged forever by the rest of England. Moreover, the soldiers will be "bright" like the stars long after the rest of England is dead. This comparison thus highlights their celestial radiance and continued existence beyond human lifespans.

Additionally, the soldiers are like "stars that are starry in the time of [England's] darkness." Through this polyptoton, the speaker insists that the soldiers will provide inspiration and hope through any emotional "darkness" or despair that England might experience. The repetition of "[a]s the stars" in the beginning of lines 24, 25, and 27, meanwhile, another example of anaphora, creates a list across the two stanzas that highlights the similarities between the soldiers and the stars.

In the last line, the speaker affirms that the soldiers will remain "[t]o the end, to the end." The repetition of the phrase "to the end," an example of epizeuxis, affirms the eternal nature of the soldiers' existence. Binyon's use of epizeuxis emphasizes the fact that the glory and nobility of the soldiers transcend human memory and will last until the end of time.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "her dead"
- **Line 3:** "Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,"
- **Line 9:** "They," "they"
- **Line 11:** "They"
- **Line 12:** "They"
- **Line 13:** "They," "shall," "grow," "old," "grow," "old"
- **Line 14:** "shall"
- **Line 17:** "They," "not"
- **Line 18:** "They," "no"
- **Line 19:** "They," "no"
- **Line 20:** "They"
- **Line 23:** "known"
- **Line 24:** "As the stars," "known"
- **Line 25:** "As the stars"
- **Line 27:** "As the stars"
- **Line 28:** "To the end, to the end,"

CAESURA

Throughout the poem, the use of caesura helps to create a slow, stately pace. In the second stanza, for example, the speaker envision a ceremonial funeral for the soldiers who have died fighting for England. In line 5, the speaker hears:

> Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal

The caesura created through the semicolon in the middle of line 5 slows down the reading of the line, providing a measured, sedate pace that mirrors the stateliness of the funeral being described.

In the third stanza, the speaker envisions the soldiers going to battle and facing their deaths. In line 10, the speaker imagines the soldiers being "[s]traight of limb" and "true of eye." In other words, the soldiers' bodies are unwavering, indicating their fearlessness, and their aim is accurate; basically, the soldiers are great warriors. Moreover, the soldiers are "steady and aglow," suggesting determination and an otherworldly radiance. The two caesuras in line 10 separate these three phrases, granting extra time to focus on each image and understand the distinctive qualities of the soldiers. The caesura also creates a measured and militaristic rhythm in the line, mirroring the marching of the soldiers across the battlefield.

Caesuras can also emphasize words and ideas in certain lines. In line 13, for example, the speaker states that the dead soldiers "shall grow not old," unlike the rest of England who will "grow old." The caesura in line 13 separates "They," the dead soldiers, from "we," the rest of England. In doing so, the caesura emphasizes the difference between the soldiers, who have transcended their mortality, and the rest of England, who remain mortal.

In the last line of the poem, the speaker affirms once more the soldiers' eternal state of existence. The speaker declares that the soldiers will remain "To the end, to the end." The two caesuras in line 28 slow down the reading of the line and add emphasis to each of the phrases in the line.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "thanksgiving, a"
- **Line 3:** "were, spirit"
- **Line 5:** "thrill; Death"
- **Line 9:** "battle, they"
- **Line 10:** "limb, true," "eye, steady"
- **Line 13:** "old, as"
- **Line 14:** "them, nor"
- **Line 28:** "end, to," "end, they "

ALLITERATION

Alliteration appears abundantly throughout "For the Fallen." Binyon uses alliteration in order to enhance the musical qualities of the poem and draw attention to certain ideas.

In line 5, for example, the alliteration of thudding /d/ sounds in

"drums" and "Death" mirror the beating of the drums and intensify the imagery of the line. The beauty and grandeur of the funeral, in turn, honors and elevates the status of the soldiers in death. Later, in line 7, the speaker acknowledges the complexity of England's grief regarding the dead soldiers by stating that there is "music in the midst of desolation." Although England is distraught over the soldiers' deaths, England is consoled by the idea of the glory the soldiers have achieved with their noble sacrifice. The alliteration of soft /m/ sounds in "music" and "midst" mirrors the sweetness of the consolation that England feels.

Indeed, Binyon continues to use alliteration to idealize the soldiers' deaths. In stanza 3, the speaker imagines the soldiers on the battlefield and emphasizes their fearlessness, youthfulness, strength, and spiritual radiance. Even at the moment of death, the speaker affirms that the soldiers "fell with their faces to the foe." To face one's enemy even at the moment of one's death indicates great courage. The soldiers' moment of death, therefore, is not humiliating or painful, but rather a moment of pride for both the soldiers and the rest of England. The alliteration of gentle /f/ sounds in "fell," "faces," and "foe" resonate with the romanticized beauty of the soldiers' deaths.

In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker continues to assert the soldiers' otherworldly qualities by comparing them to "stars that shall be bright" when the rest of England turns to "dust." Humans turn to "dust" upon death. Stars, in comparison to the short lifespans of humans, seem to last and shine forever. Therefore, the soldiers transcend the existence of humanity and will continue to exist in "bright[ness]" or glory in their own right. The alliteration of firm /b/ sounds in "be" and "bright" emphasize the firmness of the speaker's declaration. There is no doubt, the poem makes clear, that the soldiers have transformed into celestial beings through their noble and patriotic sacrifice.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Flesh," "flesh"
- **Line 4:** "Fallen," "free"
- **Line 5:** "drums," "Death"
- **Line 6:** "Sings," "sorrow," "spheres"
- **Line 7:** "music," "midst"
- **Line 10:** "Straight," "steady"
- **Line 11:** "staunch"
- **Line 12:** "fell," "faces," "foe"
- **Line 16:** "We," "will"
- **Line 19:** "lot," "labour"
- **Line 23:** "the," "their," "they"
- **Line 24:** "known," "Night"
- **Line 25:** "be," "bright," "when," "we"
- **Line 26:** "Moving," "marches"
- **Line 27:** "stars," "starry"
- **Line 28:** "the," "the," "they"

CONSONANCE

Consonance occurs with great frequency throughout "For the Fallen." As with alliteration, Binyon uses consonance in order to enhance the musicality of the poem, to make it sound lofty and poetic as it honors the fallen soldiers. Consonance also sometimes draws readers' attention to certain words and to evoke the events being described in a line.

In the first stanza, for instance, many soft sounds build up a sense of gentleness and sorrow as the poem introduces the metaphor of England as a mother grieving her lost children. Notice the consonance of the /th/, /s/, /sh/, and /f/ sounds here, all of which can be characterized as a broad form of sibilance. The gentle /l/ sounds support this as well. As a result, the poem feels hushed and reverent from the start:

> 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.

There is a fair amount of similar sibilance in the poem, in fact, which makes sense when considering that it is an elegy—a poem meant to remember the dead. The frequent /s/ sounds throughout keep the tone appropriately solemn and quiet. Note the /s/, /f/, /z/, and /sh/ sounds of stanza 2:

> 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 our tears.

Such gentle sounds evoke the gentle beauty of this music, which is soft and peaceful.

Not all the consonance is so gentle, though. In the third stanza, note how /s/, /t/, /d/, and /n/ sounds weave their way through the lines, creating a sense of cohesiveness and unity as the speaker describes the soldiers on the battlefield:

> They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
> Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
> They were staunch to the end against odds
> uncounted;

The /s/ and /t/ sounds connect to the soldiers' noble qualities—their unfaltering limbs, aim, and bravery in the face of death. Together with the strong /d/ and /n/ sounds, the lines are filled with confidence and force, evoking the English soldiers' unshakable resolve and courage in battle.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "With," "thanksgiving," "mother," "children"
- **Line 2:** "England," "mourns," "dead," "across," "sea"
- **Line 3:** "Flesh," "flesh," "spirit," "spirit"
- **Line 4:** "Fallen," "free"
- **Line 5:** "Solemn," "drums," "thrill," "Death," "august," "royal"
- **Line 6:** "Sings," "sorrow," "into," "immortal," "spheres"
- **Line 7:** "music," "midst," "desolation"
- **Line 8:** "shines"
- **Line 9:** "They," "went," "with," "songs," "to," "the," "battle," "they"
- **Line 10:** "Straight," "true," "steady"
- **Line 11:** "They," "staunch," "to," "the," "end," "against," "odds," "uncounted"
- **Line 12:** "They," "fell," "with," "their," "faces," "the," "foe"
- **Line 14:** "condemn"
- **Line 15:** "down," "sun," "morning"
- **Line 16:** "We," "will," "remember," "them"
- **Line 17:** "They," "not," "with," "their," "again"
- **Line 18:** "sit," "more," "familiar," "tables," "home"
- **Line 19:** "They," "lot," "labour," "the," "time"
- **Line 20:** "sleep," "England's"
- **Line 21:** "desires," "and," "hopes," "profound"
- **Line 22:** "Felt," "as," "spring," "that," "sight"
- **Line 23:** "To," "the," "innermost," "heart," "their," "own," "they," "known"
- **Line 24:** "As," "stars," "known," "to," "Night"
- **Line 25:** "As," "the," "stars," "that," "be," "bright," "when," "we," "dust"
- **Line 26:** "Moving," "marches," "upon," "heavenly," "plain"
- **Line 27:** "As," "the," "stars," "that," "starry," "the," "time," "darkness"
- **Line 28:** "the," "the," "they"

ASSONANCE

Assonance appears in every stanza of "For the Fallen," and serves essentially the same purpose as the poem's use of alliteration and consonance. That is, assonance makes the poem feel intensely lyrical and musical, elevating the language in a way befitting of an elegy meant to honor fallen soldiers.

Assonance can also draw connections between words. Take the /aw/ sound of "Fallen" and "cause" in line 4, which emphasizes the idea that the soldiers died in the name of protecting freedom.

Sometimes assonance evokes the meaning of lines more generally. In the second stanza, for instance, the speaker imagines a personified Death itself mourning the soldiers and by singing "sorrow up into immortal spheres," producing a beautiful "music in the midst of desolation." Note the short /i/ sounds in "Sings," "into," "immortal," "is," "music," "in," and "midst," as well as the many /m/ and /t/ sounds. The assonance and consonance of these lines creates a sense of harmony reflective of Death's song.

In the fourth stanza, assonance seems to deepen the emotions within the lines. In line 13, the speaker acknowledges that the soldiers "shall grow not old," unlike the rest of England that is "left" to "grow old." The soldiers have died at the height of their youth on the battlefield; they have therefore lost out on many pleasant years ahead of them. The low, woeful long /o/ vowels in "grow" and "old" mirror the sorrow and grief of the line.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "mother," "her"
- **Line 2:** "mourns," "for"
- **Line 3:** "her"
- **Line 4:** "Fallen," "cause"
- **Line 6:** "Sings," "into," "immortal"
- **Line 7:** "is," "music," "in," "midst"
- **Line 9:** "went," "with"
- **Line 11:** "end," "against," "uncounted"
- **Line 12:** "They," "fell," "faces"
- **Line 13:** "grow," "old," "as," "that," "grow," "old"
- **Line 14:** "weary," "them," "years," "condemn"
- **Line 16:** "remember," "them"
- **Line 18:** "tables"
- **Line 19:** "labour," "day"
- **Line 20:** "sleep," "beyond"
- **Line 21:** "hopes," "profound"
- **Line 22:** "Felt," "well," "spring," "is," "hidden"
- **Line 23:** "innermost," "own," "known"
- **Line 24:** "stars," "are," "known," "Night"
- **Line 25:** "As," "stars," "that," "shall," "be," "bright"
- **Line 27:** "As," "stars," "that," "are," "starry," "our," "darkness"
- **Line 28:** "they," "remain"

PARATAXIS

Parataxis occurs a few times in stanzas 3 and 5. In each case, Binyon uses parataxis, sometimes in conjunction with asyndeton, in order to create a sense of stately, steady rhythm as well as a sense of accumulation, of list-building.

In stanza 3, the speaker imagines the dead British soldiers on the battlefield. The soldiers, the speaker envisions, "went with songs to the battle, they were young." The parataxis in line 9 presents suggests the soldier's qualities in a simple, straightforward, and factual manner, thereby implying the truth of the description. The lack of a conjunction—there is no "and" connecting these clauses—also makes it feel as though the speaker could continue to list off more and more of the soldiers' qualities.

And, as a matter of fact, that is exactly what happens. The rest of the stanza also emphasizes the positive qualities of the soldiers in battle, deeming them "Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow." This line is technically not parataxis (because

this clause is subordinate to the ones that come before it), but it *is* an example of the similar device of asyndeton and creates essentially the same effect here. The poem generally avoids conjunctions as it stacks accolades on top of one another, creating a sense of steady forward momentum.

Genuine parataxis returns in lines 11 and 12, as the speaker says that the soldiers "were staunch to the end against odds uncounted" and "fell with their faces to the foe. The soldiers therefore remained brave even in the face of certain death and even until the moment of their death. The parataxis in lines 11 and 12 emphasizes these details as part of a larger list of details which describe the soldiers' bravery. In doing so, the parataxis suggests there are many moments that prove the soldiers' fearlessness in battle.

Parataxis also features prominently in stanza 5. In lines 17-20, the speaker lists the various experiences that the soldiers can no longer be a part of due to their premature deaths. Moreover, as line 20 declares, the soldiers "sleep beyond England's foam" as they have died on foreign land. The parataxis presents each of these statements as straightforward realities, in turn emphasizing the multitude of the soldiers' losses and the magnitude of their noble sacrifice.

Where Parataxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "They went with songs to the battle, they were young,"
- **Lines 11-12:** "They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted; / They fell with their faces to the foe."
- **Lines 17-20:** "They mingle not with their laughing comrades again; / They sit no more at familiar tables of home; / They have no lot in our labour of the day-time; / They sleep beyond England's foam."

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment occurs just three times in "For the Fallen." Overall, the poem is heavily end-stopped, providing a stately, measured cadence that fits the somber tone of the elegy. Because the poem is so filled with end-stopping, the few instances where enjambment happens stick out and play with the rhythm of the poem.

The first instance of enjambment occurs in the second stanza. In lines 5-6, the speaker imagines a ceremonial funeral honoring the British soldiers who have died abroad whilst fighting for their country and for freedom. During this funeral ceremony:

> Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
> Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,

This personified Death, the speaker makes clear, is a "royal" or noble figure. The enjambment at the end of line 5 creates a moment of tension; readers can sense this is a funeral, and now Death has entered looking like a royal figure. It is unclear for a moment why Death is here or what this figure is about to do—but line 6 makes things clear: Death will sing in order to honor the fallen soldiers. The enjambment also draws attention to the word "royal," and thus to the nobility of Death. Therefore, the fact that an elevated, noble figure would also express "sorrow" at the soldiers' deaths further elevates the funeral ceremony and emphasizes the nobility of the soldiers *themselves*.

In stanza 4, the speaker mourns the years that the soldiers have lost due to their premature deaths. At the same time, the speaker complicates this grief by suggesting the soldiers' state of eternal youthfulness since they will never grow old. In the last lines of the stanza, the speaker resolves that:

> At the going down of the sun and in the morning
> We will remember them.

Enjambment draws attention to the subtle pun here, a play on the homophones "morning" and "mourning." The speaker is saying that England will always remember the soldiers, from the time the sun sets until it rises in the morning. The enjambment pushes line 15 into line 16, subtly evoking the sensation of evening inevitably moving towards a new day. The speaker is also saying that grieving for the soldiers—"mourning" them—is a way to remember and honor their sacrifice.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker compares the relationship between the soldiers and the rest of England to the relationship between the stars and the personified Night. The soldiers, the speaker declares:

> To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
> As the stars are known to the Night;

The enjambment at the end of line 23 emphasizes the word "known," and thus the idea of acknowledgment and remembrance. Taken on its own, line 23 might seem end-stopped; the sentence could end there, emphasizing that the soldiers, the speaker promises, will simply be "known," acknowledged, and remembered in the "innermost heart" of England. Through enjambment, however, the speaker expands this image. They won't just be "known" in the sense of their names being recorded. Rather, the memory of the soldiers will be an inherent and everlasting *part* of England, just as "stars" are part of the night sky.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "royal / Sings"
- **Lines 15-16:** "morning / We"

- **Lines 23-24:** “known / As”

SIMILE

"For the Fallen" contains a few similes in its final two stanzas that compare the fallen soldiers to stars in the night sky.

In lines 23-24, the speaker compares the relationship between the soldiers and England to the one between the stars and the night. The soldiers are "known," acknowledged, and remembered in the "innermost heart" of England just "[a]s the stars are known to the Night." Stars are not only an inherent part of the night, but also provide beauty and illumination. The simile, then, emphasizes that the dead soldiers are fundamentally known to the "heart," or emotional source, of England, and that they offer metaphorical light and beauty. England, consequently, feels great depth of emotions for the soldiers.

In the last stanza, the speaker builds on the simile in the previous stanza. In line 25, the speaker uses a simile to compare the soldiers' continued existence to that of the "stars that shall be bright when" the rest of England is "dust." Stars can be around for billions of years, and therefore remain "bright" long after humans turn to "dust" in death. The stars, and the memories of the soldiers, are a constant comforting presence. And although the soldiers are dead, the bravery and nobility of their sacrifice immortalizes them, offering them a place of honor above the world that will outlive the people they died for.

In line 27, the speaker uses another simile to compare the soldiers to "the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness." This "darkness" refers to emotional "darkness" and misery—specifically, to the uncertainty and anxieties England feels in the midst of the war. Therefore, just as the brightness of the stars counteracts the physical darkness of the night, so too does the presence of the fallen soldiers counteract the England's emotional grief. Moreover, these stars, and thus the soldiers, will exist until "the end." Both the stars and the soldiers, the poem makes clear, are divine in their own right and transcend human memory through their nobility and radiance.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 23-28:** “To the innermost heart of their own land they are known / As the stars are known to the Night; / As the stars that shall 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.”

ALLUSION

There are three allusions in the poem. In the first stanza, the speaker personifies England "mother" figure who grieves for dead British soldiers, "her children" and the "Flesh of her flesh."

The phrase "flesh of her flesh" is a Biblical allusion to God's creation of Even out of Adam's rib. Therefore, Eve is "flesh" of Adam's flesh. The allusion, then, emphasizes that the soldiers are as important and meaningful to England as Eve is to Adam. Just as Adam is lonely and sorrowful without Eve, so too is England at the loss of the soldiers. The allusion therefore deepens the grief depicted in the stanza.

In the second stanza, the speaker imagines a funeral honoring and paying military honors to the soldiers. Even "Death" itself would mourn the soldiers by singing "sorrow up into immortal spheres" and producing "music in the midst of desolation." Immortal spheres is a reference to the planetary bodies in the sky. The association of music with these planets is an allusion to the ancient Greek philosophical concept of the "music of the spheres." The "music of the spheres" suggests that the movements of the planets produce a harmony that ultimately reflects the harmonious nature of the universe. Therefore, although the soldier's premature deaths are tragic, their sacrifice for the cause of freedom produces harmony. The allusion emphasizes the poem's firm belief in the rightness and nobility of sacrificing one's life for one's country.

In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker compares the soldiers' continued existence to the "stars that shall be bright when we are dust." The imagery of humans turning to "dust" is a Biblical allusion to the phrase "dust to dust," which suggests that human beings are made out of dust and return to dust upon their deaths. Therefore, the soldiers are more like the celestial stars in the heavens and will continue to exist long after other mortals have died. Through their noble sacrifice, the soldiers have transcended their humanity and transformed into celestial, heavenly beings.

Also notice how the speaker uses collective pronouns such as "we" and "our" throughout the poem, as both the speaker and the reader are assumed to be a part of England. The Biblical and Greek allusions emphasize the shared Western cultural community between the speaker and the reader, deepening the emotional experience of the poem.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** “Flesh of her flesh they were”
- **Lines 5-7:** “Death august and royal / Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres, / There is music in the midst of desolation”
- **Line 25:** “when we are dust,”

VOCABULARY

Thanksgiving (Line 1) - An expression of thanks or gratitude. England, personified as a mother, gives thanks and expresses gratitude for the British soldiers that have died in WWII.

August (Line 5) - Distinguished and highly respected. Death is presented as a noble and esteemed figure who also mourns the soldiers' deaths.

Spheres (Line 6) - A round, three-dimensional figure. The "immortal spheres" refer to planets in the sky which appear immortal and everlasting in relation to humanity.

Desolation (Line 7) - Misery; sadness; bleakness. Although the soldiers' deaths result in great misery in those who mourn them, their noble sacrifices also result in music and glory.

Limb (Line 10) - Arm or leg. The soldiers arms and legs were straight and steady; in other words, the soldiers did not tremble out of fear.

Staunch (Line 11) - Firm and steadfast; loyal. The soldiers never faltered in their cause when facing their enemy.

Foe (Line 12) - Enemy. The British soldiers died bravely facing enemy soldiers.

Weary (Line 14) - Here used as a verb, meaning to tire or wear out. Age will never wear the soldiers down, as they will forever be remembered in the full of their youth at the time of death.

Condemn (Line 14) - Attack, harm. The passing years, or time, will never attack the dead soldiers, as they will be forever remembered in their youth.

Labour (Line 19) - The British spelling of "labor," which means to work. The soldiers will no longer work with the rest of England during the day, as they are dead and beyond the daily activities of the living.

Foam (Line 20) - A collection of frothy bubbles. Here, the foam refers to the foam of the ocean, as England is an island surrounded by water. The dead soldiers, therefore, will never sleep within the boundaries of England's waters.

Well-spring (Line 22) - A never-ending source of something. The dead soldiers will remain as a never-ending source of inspiration and nobility to the British people.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"For the Fallen" is an elegy, a form that mourns the dead and is often written in a serious and solemn tone. Specifically, "For the Fallen" grieves English soldiers who have died fighting abroad for their country and the cause of freedom. As is traditional with elegies, the poem ends on a somewhat hopeful and inspiring note. In the final stanzas of the poem, the speaker is consoled by the thought of the soldiers' glory and deification after death.

The poem is composed of seven quatrains, or four-line stanzas, for a total of 28 lines. It has a steady ABCB rhyme scheme as well in every quatrain. The regularity of form throughout "For the Fallen" emphasizes the ceremonial and measured tone of the poem. This is a serious endeavor, the speaker implies, and not the time for unexpected poetic flourishes; instead, the poem comes across as tightly and controlled and respectfully restrained.

METER

"For the Fallen" is an elegy written for British soldiers who died fighting for their country. Elegiac stanzas are traditionally composed in iambic pentameter, a meter with five poetic feet with an unstressed-stressed rhythm per line. While there are *some* moments of iambic pentameter (or close to it) in this poem, the meter is too irregular to be defined as such.

Line 9, for example, has the five stressed beats of a line of iambic pentameter, but there is an anapest (da-da-DUM) in the third foot:

> They went | with songs | to the bat- | tle, they | were young,

The line starts out as a steady march, reflecting the soldiers' determination, before the anapestic hiccup of "to the bat-"; this feels like a small trip in the line, perhaps subtly reflecting the soldiers' youth and inexperience despite their bravery.

Other lines are based on falling meter, in which stressed syllables give way to unstressed syllables and create a sensation of, well, falling, of downward motion. Take line 6, which is made up of trochees (DUM-da) and essentially creates a feeling opposite to that rising meter of line 9 above:

> There is | music | in the | midst of | deso- | lation

This falling meter feels appropriately somber. Again, though, the meter does not adhere to a strict pattern overall. This keeps the poem feeling more conversational, and allows for a natural flow of emphasis and emotion throughout. While the tone is serious and reflective, it is not stilted or overly formulaic; instead, it lets the speaker express grief and pride as these emotions arise.

RHYME SCHEME

"For the Fallen" is composed of seven quatrains, each of which follows the same rhyme scheme of:

ABCB

For example, in the first stanza lines 1 and 3 do not rhyme—"children" and "spirit"—but lines 2 and 4 clearly do: "sea" and "free."

Throughout the lines, the rhyme sounds are full and clear. There are no slant rhymes or half rhymes, and instead the poem's satisfying rhyme sounds project an air of confidence and control. Indeed, the steady rhyme scheme provides a sense of structure and order that suits the solemn, measured tone of the poem. Although the first three lines of the stanza do not

appear to have any rhyme scheme, the last line reveals the underlying rhyme scheme that structures the stanza. There is a sense of tension and anticipation followed by a feeling of closure as the final line of each stanza completes the rhyme scheme.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "For the Fallen" is English, but otherwise nameless and genderless. Indeed, as evidenced through the use of "our" and "we," the speaker is not one particular individual, but rather a group of people. The speaker can be thought of as speaking on behalf of all those English citizens who remain alive to mourn the soldiers who have died fighting for their country. The use of nonspecific communal pronouns allows the poem to feel intimate and universal at once; readers are invited into the poem, and those readers could be just about anybody.

In the beginning of the poem, the speaker deeply mourns the death of the British soldiers. The speaker envisions the soldiers as the "children" of England, personified as a mother figure. In doing so, the speaker conveys the profound emotional pain that England as a whole experiences. Although the soldiers who died may have not been personally known to all of England, everyone—including the speaker—feels their loss like the loss of a loved one. The speaker, and consequently the rest of England, resolves to memorialize the soldiers through the act of remembrance. The dead soldiers, the speaker makes clear, will serve as a source of inspiration and hope through whatever "darkness," or pain, the speaker and the rest of England experiences in the midst of war.

SETTING

Broadly speaking, the setting of "For the Fallen" is set in England. It was written in 1914 to honor British soldiers fallen while fighting in World War I. That said, there are not many references to a specific time period; all that is clear is that these soldiers died defending the ideal of "freedom."

The poem also transports the reader, at times, into the "immortal spheres" of the planets and stars in the "heavenly plain" above. The transportation to a more celestial setting reflects the heavenly and immortal qualities of the dead soldiers to whom the poem pays reverence.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Binyon first published "For the Fallen" in the British daily newspaper *The Times* in September 1914. This was just two months after Britain's entry into WWI. A month earlier, Binyon had published his poems "The Fourth of August" and "To Women" in the same newspaper. All three poems focus on the righteousness of Britain's involvement in WWI, the nobility of the soldiers and their willingness to sacrifice their lives for freedom, and the sorrow and pride British civilians feel for the soldiers. All three poems also touch on maternal love or the maternal relationship between England and the soldiers. Stylistically, all three poems are composed of quatrains and maintain a stately, measured rhythm throughout that reflects the solemnity of war.

Many of Binyon's contemporaries also addressed the war during this time in their work. Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, and Robert Graves, for example, all wrote poems focusing on WWI. Literary responses to the war, however, ranged from disillusioned anger to idealized patriotism. Brooke's "The Soldier," for example, reflects a similar idealized vision of war as Binyon's "For the Fallen." In contrast, much of Owen's work depicts a stark, decidedly antiwar vision; see "Anthem for Doomed Youth" for a striking contrast with Binyon's poe.

Over time, "For the Fallen" gained in popularity and importance for honoring not just British soldiers in WWI, but soldiers who have died in any conflict fighting honorably for their country. Indeed, the fourth stanza of the poem is commonly referred to as the "Ode of Remembrance" and considered as a standalone poem in its own right. This "Ode of Remembrance" is performed during Remembrance Day and other war memorial events as a way to honor the dead.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Great Britain entered WWI on August 4, 1914. A few days later, on August 23, the British army engaged in and suffered a defeat at the Battle of Mons, Britain's first major battle against Germany. "For the Fallen," first published in September 1914, was likely a response to the Battle of Mons and the subsequent deaths of British soldiers abroad in Europe.

Many in England supported Britain's involvement in the war, viewing the war as being fought for the name of freedom and righteousness against German aggression. Binyon, too, was a supporter of Britain's involvement and viewed war in a patriotic and noble light. WWI would last for the next four years, until 1918, and eventually cause the deaths of around 700,000 British soldiers. As the war dragged on and the number of fatalities increased, "For the Fallen" gained increasing popularity and importance as an elegy that honored the dead.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Context and Inspiration — Watch a short video on the historical context and inspiration for Binyon's poem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmBTy8bY-Ps)

- Choral Adaptation — Listen to a choral adaptation of the poem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOpnRAOxpLE)
- "For the Fallen" Music Video — Watch a music video adaptation of the entire poem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjSFbto28qM)
- The Festival of Remembrance — Watch a performance of "For the Fallen" at the Festival of Remembrance. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azBmlXhbRF0)
- The Original Manuscript — Examine the original manuscript of the entire poem. (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-for-the-fallen-by-laurence-binyon)
- "For the Fallen" Read Aloud — Listen to a reading of the poem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aou-TAwG87o)

HOW TO CITE

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