



This photograph (stonework from the front of the leper memorial building) reminded me of the poem “Dulce et Decorum est”, by Wilfred Owen. The statues themselves stand inlaid into the side of the old church, standing in alcoves. Around them (as seen to the right) stand statues of kings, princes, knights, bishops, etc. Dulce et Decorum est reminded me of this picture because in the poem, Owen writes about the horrors of war and how they were told “Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori”, “It is sweet and glorious to die for one’s country”. The poem emphasises how there is no honour in war and this picture shows soldiers in French, British and Belgian uniforms carved into stone, glorified as the old kings and knights standing next to them.

This picture is especially memorable because, to me, it gives us a clear picture of how the people before the war actually thought, that they would be given monuments in their honour and their praises would be sung for valour and others would remember them. Well, as the statues ironically tell, they certainly got that: Monuments for the hundreds who lay dead, anonymous, forgotten by all but those who were close to them. That is why the statues have generic faces, because although we honour their deaths, none deserve to be glorified. For there is no glory in war.

Dulce et Decorum Est

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 gas-shells dropping softly 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 or 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.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.