

# Distant Fields/ANZAC Parade



## SUMMARY

During an ANZAC Day Parade, ex-soldiers wore medals and ribbons on their chests and found the occasion difficult. They replayed their wartime experiences in their minds and looked ready to answer a military roll call.

Once the memorial flowers had been laid down, a deathly silence settled over the place. The veterans walked by, row after row.

As if old film clips of the war were playing above the tree-lined road, the speaker's father lifted the speaker onto his shoulders to get a better view.

The speaker's uncles marched by, following the parade leader and walking in time to the pulse-like sound of the drum.

When Mass was finished, someone played a bugle. Life went on, as people's breath floated up toward the bird-filled sky.

individual, familial, and societal level. The speaker's vivid memories of the parade, as well as the respectful "quiet" of the scene, suggest how war's impact resonates beyond the battlefield. The speaker recalls being lifted onto their father's shoulders to see the parade more clearly. This detail illustrates a cross-generational connection, as the father teaches the child the importance of commemorating those who fought. This detail also highlights the speaker's youthful innocence, which contrasts with the old soldiers' loss of innocence. The soldiers' terrible experience, the poem implies, helped make this innocent childhood possible. In fact, the speaker's own uncles march in the parade, establishing the speaker's personal/familial link to war. The uncles march to a "heart-beat drum," an image that evokes war's continuing emotional impact on soldiers and their families.

Though the poem's intense atmosphere speaks to the trauma of war, it ends on a fragile image of hope. Life, in one form or another, goes on—partly due to the sacrifices of those who fought. Those gathered at the parade attend "Mass" (a Catholic ceremony), then listen to the "bugle" (a trumpet-like instrument often used in military settings, especially to play the mourning call "Taps"). In other words, they share a ritual of prayer and remembrance. As they do so, a "single breath" (apparently the exhalation of the crowd) rises towards the sky, suggesting a kind of lightness, relief, and peace. This breath also symbolizes life itself, or the continuity of "life unto life." This image doesn't erase the pain of the veterans or the need to honor their service, but it does suggest that their service helped allow normal life to continue.



## THEMES



### THE LEGACY OF WAR

"Distant Fields" describes an ANZAC Day parade, a yearly march commemorating Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought in war (especially the two world wars). The speaker remembers going to such a parade with their father as a child and watching their uncles march with fellow veterans. This family connection illustrates the lasting impact and legacy of war, which shapes both those who served and those who grow up in the wake of their service. The poem underscores the importance of remembering veterans' sacrifice and honors the lives of those who helped make other life possible.

For the veterans marching in the parade, the day's rituals remind them of their service, showing how war leaves a permanent impression on those who go through it. The ex-soldiers wear medals and ribbons, which evoke the pride and glory of war. But these decorations are bittersweet because they also honor the fallen, serving as reminders of the war's lasting trauma. The march vividly reminds them of their war experience, which has never really left them. The war is "still going on inside their heads," and they stand as if waiting for an actual military "roll call." By emphasizing the long-term impact of war on soldiers, this image makes their service seem all the more noble.

But the poem isn't just about those marching: it's also about those on the sidelines, watching the parade. In deftly sketched details, the speaker shows how war touches communities on an

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-4

*Medalled, ribboned chests, ...  
... for roll call.*

The poem's title gives readers some important context: the speaker is remembering a military parade conducted by Australian and New Zealand veterans (ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). The ceremony commemorates all those who have served these countries in war—both those who gave their lives and those who survived.

The title is also the poem's only reference to "Distant Fields." These are the far-off places where the veterans fought, made

more faraway-seeming by their absence from the poem. To the veterans, those battlefields still seem near at hand (the war experience impacted them so profoundly that it's "still going on inside their heads"). Yet, in reality, the fields are located in distant countries *and* in the distant past.

The poem makes no introductory remarks, instead focusing immediately on the veterans. They have "Medalled, ribboned chests" (line 1) because they're wearing their military decorations. The /d/ [consonance](#) in "Medalled, ribboned" is subtle but strong, perhaps suggesting the inner strength and pride these veterans retain.

The day stirs the emotions of the veterans as they remember what they went through in war (most have served in WWI and WWII). "An effort/ Carrie[s] through" their chests (lines 1 and 2)—that is, there's something *difficult* about the parade for these veterans (they may also be quite old!). The phrasing seems to emphasize that this effort is *collective*: a burden shared by the rows of ex-soldiers. The [enjambment](#) between lines 1 and 2 subtly reinforces the collective nature of the effort, as though the syntax itself pauses (under the strain of "effort") and the second line steps in to complete it:

Medalled, ribboned chests, an **effort**  
carried through them,

For these veterans, "the war [is] still going on inside their heads" (line 3). Life on the front was so intense that, while these men left the war, the war never quite left them. The commemorative ceremony reminds them of their war experience: marching with their comrades, wearing uniforms, and so on. They feel they're waiting for "roll call," perhaps still remembering their day-to-day military experience—although the roll call could also be a ceremonial part of the ANZAC Day commemoration.

In a way, then, the veterans perhaps *remain* ready to fight for their country. Most of them can't, of course, but the part of them that was willing to do so remains strong. Because the roll call could be a detail from the past or present, it suggests the way these veterans represent a link between two eras. Through the medals, the war "inside their heads," and the "roll call," the poem speaks to the long-term impact of war on those who fight it.

### LINES 5-7

*Where all the ...  
... line after line.*

The transition from the first to the second stanza is abrupt and slightly jarring. This second stanza uses indirect, even mysterious, [imagery](#) rather than spelling out exactly what's happening:

Where all the flowers had gone

came a quiet of ash,  
line after line after line.

The stanza draws power from the fact it can be read both literally and [metaphorically](#). The "flowers" could be actual blossoms that participants in the ceremony have placed (on the ground, at a monument, etc.) in honor of the dead, before the crowd falls "quiet" as veterans march past in "line after line." The flowers could also be the ceremonial poppies traditionally worn on ANZAC Day (and Armistice Day).

But the "flowers" might also be metaphors for the once-flourishing youth of the soldiers who were cut down in their prime. Line 5 might even be an [allusion](#) to the folk song "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" In this song, plucked flowers represent young men lost to war.

The crowd's silence is then described as a "quiet of ash" (which is definitely a metaphor). Ash is associated with death (e.g., cremation), and here calls to mind the sorrow of war—including all the soldiers who didn't come home from the battlefield. "Ash" might also be a reference to the Bible, in which humanity was created out of dust and returns to dust after death. In context, the word suggests that the crowd is *deathly* quiet.

Metaphorically, then, the flourishing vitality of the lost soldiers has been replaced by the "ash" of death. Line 7's "line after line after line" might even [symbolically](#) evoke tombstones in a graveyard.

The [diacope](#) in line 7 then suggests war's vast and wasteful scale, which creates "**line after line**" of living veterans or dead soldiers. Notice, too, how the [enjambment](#) after "gone" creates a sudden blank space, suggesting absence:

Where all the flowers had **gone**  
came a quiet of ash,

Gentle /l/ [consonance](#) in "all," "flowers," and the [repeated](#) "line" adds to this stanza's quiet, reverent tone.

### LINES 8-9

*As if the ...  
... shoulders to see.*

The third [stanza](#), though as brief as the others, reveals more about the speaker. The speaker recalls being lifted onto their father's shoulders in order to see the ANZAC Day parade better. Apparently, then, the poem is based on a childhood memory.

The speaker says that their father lifts them up "As if the grainy footage played above the leafy street" (line 8). This line is [enjambed](#) into the next (line 9), making the sentence feel stretched as if it, too, is straining to see:

As if the grainy footage played above the leafy street

my father lifted me [...]

This "grainy footage" probably refers to film from the First and/or Second World War, which was mostly shot in patchy black and white. Perhaps a version of the past—the documentary footage that is the speaker's main reference point for these long-ago wars—replays in the speaker's mind as the parade goes by in the present. The "leafy street" suggests a pretty, peaceful, perhaps suburban avenue—a [setting](#) that contrasts sharply with the battlefields where the soldiers fought.

The mention of "my father" also highlights the nature of commemoration itself. A society that wants to honor its past must share this responsibility across generations. In this case, the father teaches the speaker to treat ANZAC Day as an important ritual and to bear witness to past sacrifices (as the poem itself does).

### LINES 10-11

*My uncles looked ...  
... the heart-beat drum.*

Lines 10-11 reveal that the speaker's uncles are part of the parade—that is, they are veterans rather than spectators.

Like the "father" in the previous line, this detail reinforces the poem's focus on family ties and the long-term impact of war. The uncles are just a few among many veterans, marching as they stare at "the back of the one in front" (the parade leader, or perhaps the marcher directly in front of them). But they're a living link between the speaker and past wars, reminding the reader that the experience of younger generations is shaped by those who came before them.

As the veterans march, the sound of the verse echoes the sound of the "drum":

marching to the heart-beat drum.

[Assonance](#) and [consonance](#)—particularly, the repeated /ar/ sounds in "marching" and "heart" and the three /t/s in "to the heart-beat"—accentuate the rhythm of line 11, adding to its emphatic, drum-like sound. The speaker [metaphorically](#) compares the drum to a "heart-beat," indicating both its steady rhythm and the fact that it stirs the emotions. This detail, in turn, makes the parade itself seem more poignant.

### LINES 12-14

*At end of ...  
... the bird-light zone.*

In the final stanza, the poem makes another abrupt jump. Now, the ANZAC Day celebration is pretty much complete. The march has taken place, and the Mass has just finished. Mass is a Catholic ceremony that commemorates Jesus' sacrifice for humankind; here, it's a reflection of the sacrifice of those who served in war. Mass is also an expression of unity and

community—important aspects of ANZAC Day as well.

Once Mass is finished, a "bugle" plays. Or rather, it *rises*: a subtle [metaphor](#) suggesting how the music floats into the sky, as if connected with something beyond earthly life. In the military, bugles have historically been used to communicate messages, rouse the spirits of soldiers before combat, and mourn the dead (as when playing "Taps" at funerals). In this ceremony, the bugle notes "r[i]se" above the crowd—like the souls of the dead rising to heaven, perhaps, or the spirits of the crowd lifting.

In line 13, the poem quotes from the Bible—specifically, 2 Corinthians 2:16: "life unto life." The biblical passage discusses the role of Christians on earth: "To [non-believers] we are the savour [fragrance] of death unto death; and to [believers] the savour [fragrance] of life unto life." This [allusion](#) doesn't need to be interpreted along specifically Christian lines; rather, it speaks to the fleeting nature of life on earth. Part of the ANZAC Day ceremony is the idea that life is precious, and those who protect it for others should be honored. "Life unto life" also implies a continuation of life—and, perhaps, a way of life—for which the veterans are partly responsible.

The poem's final [image](#) is also metaphorical:

a single breath  
took flight into the bird-light zone.

This "breath" seems to be the collective sigh of the crowd, which deeply feels the emotion of the occasion. It's also a symbol of life itself, which continues in the wake of war (partly due to the soldiers' sacrifices). "The bird-light zone" is a poetic description of the sky: an image of soaring freedom and peace. However, "zone" could also have militaristic connotations, introducing just a hint of unease at the end of the poem.

The [enjambment](#) after "breath" creates a sense of space opening up, or the verse itself pausing for breath. The final lines are full of /i/ [assonance](#): "life"/"life"/"flight"/"light" ("flight"/"light" is also an example of [internal rhyme](#)). The shared vowel links *life* itself with *flight* and *lightness*, perhaps suggesting that the ceremony has left the crowd with feelings of relief and appreciation for their own lives.



## SYMBOLS



### FLOWERS

The "flowers" in the second stanza are [symbolically](#) associated with mourning, as well as with the (lost) youth and vitality of the soldiers being mourned.

On a literal level, the flowers could suggest two (related) items:

- Live flowers (wreaths, bouquets, etc.) laid down in honor of dead soldiers.

- The artificial "remembrance poppies" commonly worn on ANZAC Day.

Of course, both of these items are themselves symbolic: they're symbols of life, displayed to commemorate the dead. (Poppies are particularly associated with the casualties of World War I, in part due to the famous poem "[In Flanders Fields](#).")

Flowers are also symbolically associated with youth, including youth lost to war, as in clichéd phrases such as "The flower of the nation's youth was cut down in its prime." The wording of line 5 particularly echoes the anti-war song "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" (1955), by Pete Seeger, which associates flowers with generations of dead soldiers.

Altogether, lines 5-7 suggest at least two interpretations:

- A deathly (ash-like) quiet settled over the scene full of ceremonial flowers, where line after line of veterans passed by.
- Death came for many of the flourishing youths who fought in war, producing line after line of graves.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-7:** "Where all the flowers had gone / came a quiet of ash, / line after line after line."



## POETIC DEVICES

### ALLUSION

The poem makes three subtle but poignant [allusions](#). Two of these appear in the second stanza:

Where all the flowers had gone  
came a quiet of ash,  
line after line after line.

Line 5 seems to allude to a [folk song](#) written by Pete Seeger in the 1950s. Its title question—"Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"—really asks, "Where have all the young men gone (those that have died in war)?" The reference to the song thus reflects the loss of life in war and the trauma it leaves behind in communities back home.

In the following line, "ash" has biblical echoes that seem intentional (especially as the poem mentions Mass later on). The word [connotes](#) both the fragility of life—the ashes/dust that human beings were made from—and the finality of death (*returning* to ashes/dust). "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," as the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* famously puts it. Here, the word gestures toward the vast death toll of war, while the full phrase—"a quiet of ash"—describes the silent reverence of the crowd.

After the march comes "Mass" (a Catholic ceremony) and another biblical allusion, this time to 2 Corinthians 2:16. In this passage, those who spread Christ's message are [metaphorically](#) said to spread a sweet scent: "the savour of life unto life" (King James Version). Here, the phrase takes on a more general, twofold meaning:

1. Those who give *their* life in service allow *other* life (e.g., new generations) to continue.
2. Life goes on, one moment to the next.

Thus, the phrase both subtly praises the veterans and highlights the continuity of life.

#### Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "Where all the flowers had gone"
- **Line 6:** "ash"
- **Line 13:** "life unto life"

### SIMILE

The poem uses a [simile](#) in the third stanza:

As if the grainy footage played above the leafy street  
my father lifted me on to his shoulders to see.

The syntax here is a little ambiguous. The speaker seems to be recalling a childhood memory: being held up on their father's shoulders while watching an ANZAC Day parade. The experience is *as if* "grainy footage" from the long-ago war(s) plays above the street where they're watching. Perhaps this suggests an intermingling of past and present, with the speaker imagining clips of the soldiers in action playing above the same soldiers now marching down the road years later. It's also possible that the poem is partly inspired by old war footage.

Regardless, this moment suggests that memories of the war—whether personally recalled, passed down as stories, or seen on film—matter deeply to this family. By helping the speaker see what's happening in the parade, the father teaches the importance of honoring their community's veterans.

#### Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "As if the grainy footage played above the leafy street / my father lifted me on to his shoulders to see."

### ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) occurs throughout the fourth [stanza](#): short /uh/ sounds link "uncles," "one," front," and "drum," while the same /a/ sound appears in "marching" and "heart." In all these cases, assonance adds emphasis to already stressed syllables, drawing out the rhythm of the "marching" and the "drum" these lines

describe.

The poem also uses assonance in lines 13-14:

[...] life unto life, a single breath  
took flight into the bird-light zone.

The four long /i/ sounds, chiming one after another, enhance the sense of closure in these final lines. This assonance also draws a link between:

- The continuation of "life" in "life unto life" (moment by moment, and generation after generation);
- The [metaphorical](#) "flight" of the crowd's breath, which could be a kind of collective sigh;
- The sky, here described as "the bird-light zone" and carrying [connotations](#) of heaven and the afterlife.

The linked vowel sounds might even subtly suggest the way the parade itself draws the community together. That is, the sonic connection might hint at social connection. The chime between "flight" and "bird-light" is also an example of [internal rhyme](#), which perhaps suggests a certain lightness and musicality (think of "bird"-song) as the poem pans away from earth to sky.

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 10:** "uncles," "one," "front"
- **Line 11:** "marching," "heart," "drum"
- **Line 13:** "life," "life"
- **Line 14:** "flight," "bird-light"

## CONSONANCE

The poem's delicate [consonance](#) subtly enhances its [metaphors](#) and [images](#). In the first line, for example, a solid /d/ sound helps suggest the sturdiness of the veterans with their "Medalled, ribboned chests." The second stanza (as well as line 4's "roll call") is full of gentle /l/ sounds:

Where all the flowers had gone  
came a quiet of ash,  
line after line after line.

These sounds are pleasant to the ear, but they're also pretty muted, in keeping with the hushed, reverent atmosphere of the parade itself.

In line 11, the speaker observes the veterans "marching to the heart-beat drum." Along with [assonance](#) ("marching"/"heart"), these /m/ and /t/ sounds add emphasis to a line about the emphatic booming of a drum.

The last line, meanwhile, is full of /l/ and /t/ sounds:

took flight into the bird-light zone.

These sounds again add emphasis and musicality (heightened by the "flight"/"light" [internal rhyme](#)). This time, the sounds trip along more lightly, perhaps suggesting "bird"-song, as the focus shifts away from war and toward the continuation of life.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Medalled, ribboned"
- **Line 4:** "roll call"
- **Line 5:** "all," "flowers"
- **Line 7:** "line," "line," "line"
- **Line 11:** "marching," "to," "heart-beat," "drum"
- **Lines 14-14:** "took / flight / into"
- **Line 14:** "bird-light"

## ENJAMBMENT

[Enjambment](#) adds brief touches of dramatic suspense to the poem. It can also add emphasis to the last word of a line, the first of the next line, or both.

Look, for example, at the enjambment between the first two lines of "Distant Fields/ANZAC Parade," which describe the veterans marching by:

Medalled, ribboned chests, an effort  
carried through them,

Though the day is to some extent celebratory, it's also a difficult occasion for the veterans, as it reminds them of their wartime experiences. This difficulty is an "effort" they carry—and the enjambment here both stresses the "effort" and makes it seem weightier. (Readers have to make their own effort to complete the phrase by reading on to the next line.)

Lines 8-9 contain a similar effect:

As if the grainy footage played above the leafy street  
my father lifted me on to his shoulders to see.

This long, comma-less sentence has to pause for just a moment at the end of line 8, as if reflecting the father's effort to lift the speaker.

After "gone" (line 5), enjambment creates sudden white space on the right-hand margin, reflecting a sense of absence. And in the last two lines, enjambment evokes the flight of that "breath":

a single breath  
took flight into the bird-light zone.

#### Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "effort / carried"



- **Lines 5-6:** "gone / came"
- **Lines 8-9:** "street / my"
- **Lines 13-14:** "breath / took"

## METAPHOR

The poem uses [metaphors](#) sparingly and phrases them concisely—as if avoiding anything too fanciful because its subject is so solemn.

The first metaphor appears in the second [stanza](#):

Where all the flowers had gone  
came a quiet of ash,  
line after line after line.

These lines appear to describe the weighty silence after ANZAC Day participants have set out commemorative wreaths and flowers. Ash is often associated with death, as in the phrase "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." The "quiet of ash," then, is a mournful hush acknowledging all the soldiers who didn't survive their wars.

In line 11, the veterans march in time to "the heart-beat drum." This fairly traditional metaphor links the human pulse with the rhythmic sound of drums. It suggests both the steady rhythm of the drum in the parade and the way its sound stirs the emotions (figuratively, moves the heart).

The last stanza contains metaphors of flight and freedom:

At end of Mass the bugle rose,  
life unto life, a single breath  
took flight into the bird-light zone.

The call of the bugle marks the end of the ANZAC Day ceremony. Its *rising* towards the sky has religious, [symbolic](#) overtones, especially given the Catholic "Mass" that has just taken place. It evokes souls rising toward heaven or spirits lifting as the ceremony ends. Similarly, the "single breath" that "[t]akes] flight" seems to have the freedom of a "bird"; it escapes the horrors of the human world, ending the poem on a hopeful note.

### Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "a quiet of ash"
- **Line 11:** "the heart-beat drum"
- **Line 12:** "the bugle rose"
- **Lines 13-14:** "a single breath / took flight into the bird-light zone."

## REPETITION

[Repetition](#) occurs in lines 7 and 13, both times creating a sense of continuation.

In line 7, veterans parade by the spectators in "line after line after line." The repetition of both "line" and "after" in close succession (an example of [diacope](#)) suggests the sheer number of veterans taking part in this ceremony. It highlights both the scale and the significance of the event, as if the number of participants might be endless. But it also brings to mind all the soldiers who *didn't* make it back. In a kind of mirror image, it might even evoke the layout of a graveyard, with line after line of tombstones reflecting the waste of human life in war.

Line 13 also uses diacope:

At end of Mass the bugle rose,  
life unto life, a single breath  
took flight into the bird-light zone.

The biblical meaning of this phrase is discussed in the [Allusion](#) section. The repetition here implies the continuity of "life" from one moment to the next, and from one generation to another. It suggests that all human life is interconnected, and that younger people witnessing the parade owe a debt of gratitude to the veterans who sacrificed on their behalf.

### Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "line after line after line."
- **Line 13:** "life unto life,"

## ASYNDETON

Both the first and final stanzas use [asyndeton](#): the omission of coordinating conjunctions (such as "and" or "but") for concision and dramatic effect.

For example, readers might normally expect an "and" to join lines 2 and 3, but the poet leaves it out. The omission adds greater immediacy to a series of images that's already presented with extreme concision (for example, the stanza lacks a main verb; it's a sentence fragment, not a full sentence). These effects force the reader to absorb a number of images in quick succession, without much guidance from the syntax.

There would also normally be an "and" after the comma in line 13, but again, it's omitted for stylistic and thematic purposes. Without the conjunction, it seems as if everything in the stanza (the bugle's rising notes, the continuation of "life unto life," the rising of a "single breath") is happening more or less at once, as part of the same process. This immediacy probably reflects how the speaker—a young child at the time of the parade—experiences and understands the event.

### Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "carried through them, / the war still going on inside their heads,"
- **Line 13:** "life unto life, a single breath"



## VOCABULARY

**Medalled, Ribboned** (Line 1) - The veterans are wearing military decorations (medals and ribbons) on their chests.

**Roll Call** (Lines 3-4) - A ritual in which names are announced out loud. In a military context, this could be to determine which soldiers are in attendance or to announce a list of casualties.

**Mass** (Lines 12-12) - A Catholic rite of worship (here observed in connection with the commemorative ceremony).

**Bugle** (Line 12) - A simple, trumpet-like instrument often used in military ceremonies.

**Unto** (Lines 12-13) - Archaic word for "to."

**Bird-light zone** (Lines 13-14) - A poetic description of the sky (a "zone" that's as "light" as the birds flying through it).



## FORM, METER, &amp; RHYME

## FORM

The poem uses various [stanza](#) forms: the first stanza is a [quatrain](#) (four-line stanza), the second and fifth are tercets (three-line stanzas), and the third and fourth are [couplets](#) (two-line stanzas). This gives the poem a fragmented, unpredictable quality, allowing for some abrupt transitions from one stanza to the next. (Each stanza is also [end-stopped](#) with a period, making each seem somewhat self-contained—which is in keeping with the contained emotions of the poem.)

The poem also works loosely within the tradition of the [sonnet](#) form. It has 14 lines, like a conventional sonnet. It's also structured around themes of remembrance and love (specifically, love of country and familial love), which are common in the form. But in other ways, it's a non-traditional sonnet: it's written in [free verse](#) (has no [meter](#) or [rhyme scheme](#)), doesn't contain a volta (turn or shift around the ninth line), etc. This combination of traditional and newer approaches helps reinforce one of the poem's themes: the links and differences between generations.

## METER

This poem uses [free verse](#), meaning that it doesn't follow a regular [meter](#).

The poet is very aware of rhythmic effects, though. For example, the [dactylic](#) (DUM-da-da) rhythm of line 7 helps convey the repetitive sight and sound of the parading veterans:

line after line after line.

Listen, too, to the rhythm of line 11:

marching to the heart-beat drum.

The three strong stresses that end the line—*boom, boom, boom*—evoke the booming of the drum, as well as the "heart-beat" to which the drum is [metaphorically](#) compared.

## RHYME SCHEME

Though the poem is the length of a [sonnet](#) (14 lines), it's written in [free verse](#), so it doesn't have a [rhyme scheme](#). The lack of rhyme gives the poem a plain, unadorned quality, as though it's cautious—due to its stark subject matter—not to be overly "poetic."

In fact, the poem's only rhyme is an internal one in the last line: "took **flight** into the bird-**light** zone." Though it's a subtle effect, this touch of graceful musicality fits the closing image of "bird[s]" and sky.



## SPEAKER

The poem has a first-person speaker, as revealed in line 9, which refers to "my" and "me:"

As if the grainy footage played above the leafy street  
my father lifted me on to his shoulders to see.

This is followed by a reference to "My uncles" in line 10. In these moments, the poem establishes that it's based on a lasting childhood memory. The speaker has a family link to the parade—their uncles are among the marching veterans—and so has a strong emotional connection to the event.

However, the speaker doesn't comment on their own emotions or provide any other personal detail. In this way, the poem keeps its focus on honoring the veterans and showing the long-term impact of war.



## SETTING

As the title suggests, the poem is set on ANZAC Day. Occurring annually on April 25 and celebrated throughout Australia and New Zealand, ANZAC Day (or Anzac Day) commemorates soldiers who have served in the Australian and New Zealand armed forces. It was first established to honor those who served in the Gallipoli Campaign during World War I.

As described in the poem, the day involves a mix of emotions, part celebratory, part solemn. The parade celebrates those veterans who made it home while mourning those who didn't. The speaker seems to be watching the passing parade from a "leafy" suburban "street." (The poet may be imagining a setting similar to her hometown of Timaru, New Zealand.)

There's also a religious aspect to the ceremony (it involves a Catholic "Mass"), meaning that the setting raises questions about life, death, and the meaning of sacrifice. The final setting detail appears in the last line, which seems to zoom out from

the human world and look to the sky: the "bird-light zone." This image seems to close the poem on a note of transcendence, as if leaving behind (or hoping humanity can leave behind) war's misery.



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

Rhian Gallagher is a contemporary poet from New Zealand. Born in 1961, she spent many years in the UK, studying and working in the publishing industry. She has published four collections of poetry, the most recent being *Far-Flung* in 2020. Her poem "Embrace" took third place in the (UK) Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition, while her first collection was nominated for the Forward Prize for First Collection.

"Distant Fields" was published in her second collection, *Shift* (2012), and touches on themes that appear throughout her work: family, memory, and community. Gallagher was raised as a Roman Catholic and credits her upbringing with an appreciation of the "mystery" of words. (The "Mass" in this poem is, of course, a reference to the Catholic ceremony.) Gallagher explores this subject further in the poem "Burial," from her first book, *Salt Water Creek*, which also chronicles her move from the UK back to New Zealand.

Gallagher counts James Baxter and Janet Frame, two distinguished New Zealand writers, among her most important influences. New Zealand's inaugural Poet Laureate, Bill Manhire, has said of Gallagher that she is "one of the quiet, astonishing secrets of New Zealand writing."

Other Australian/New Zealander poets have also written about ANZAC Day specifically. Poems on this theme include "[Anzac Park](#)" by Thomas W. Shapcott, "[Anzac Day](#)" by Vincent Buckley, and Geoffrey Dutton's "[A Wreath for Anzac](#)."

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

ANZAC Day (or Anzac Day) is an annual celebration in Australia and New Zealand, commemorating veterans from both countries "who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations." The day is observed on April 25th and was initially set up in tribute to those who served in the Gallipoli Campaign (in modern-day Turkey) during World War I. April 25, 1915, was the day on which troops from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landed in Gallipoli; the brutal conflict that followed killed around ten thousand ANZAC troops.

ANZAC Day rituals include parades in cities across both countries, a National Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and the wearing of artificial

"remembrance poppies." These poppies began as a symbol of casualties in World War I (as mourned in the famous poem "[In Flanders Fields](#)"), and they may be the "flowers" referred to in line 5 of Gallagher's poem.

Because the event isn't tied exclusively to a specific war, its popularity has ebbed and flowed along with national sentiments towards the armed forces and the wars in which they've been deployed. In the era of the Vietnam War, for example, ANZAC Day almost became obsolete. Nowadays, it holds strong as a tradition again.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [An ANZAC Parade](#) – Video and coverage of an ANZAC Day service in the poet's hometown of Timaru, New Zealand. (<https://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/79275616/timaru-marks-anzac-day-with-dawn-service>)
- [An Interview with the Poet](#) – Rhian Gallagher speaks to Radio 1 91FM, a student station in New Zealand. (<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/radio-one-91fm/rhian-gallagher-university-G69fK8vIwHR/>)
- [Process and Poetry](#) – Gallagher talks about her craft (along with other speakers). (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWetMuu-ra8&t=3952s>)
- [ANZAC War Poetry](#) – A collection of poems by Australian and New Zealander poets about war and ANZAC Day. (<https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poems-theme-occasion/war-poems>)
- [A Biography of the Poet](#) – More information on Rhian Gallagher's life and work. (<https://www.read-nz.org/writer/gallagher-rhian/>)



## HOW TO CITE

### MLA

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### CHICAGO MANUAL

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