

Langemarck

by [Jack D. Harvey](#) (August 2025)



Sunrise, Inverness Copse (Paul Nash, 1918)

A World War I battle in Belgium.

Lying on the ground,
the dead at Langemarck
tell lies
long and bitter

tell of
lost sacrifice,
future glory;
dark and cold,

young field-grey regiments,
"holy grey rows,"
broken hawks lying
on the broken ground

tell tales
long and bitter;
the guns that
mowed them down
amid the broken stumps,
the blunted trunks of trees

cold and silent.

The wind blows
on the blood and the corpses,
blows through the eternal cemeteries,
the hallowed memorial hall,
keeping count of the fallen,
the good cause, the bad generals,
rank by rank,
faithful and innocent boys,
hardened soldiers creep
in the silent fog;

the wind blows,
leaving them all
dead as stones.

We feign reluctance,
loose the doves of peace
and go to war anyway,
sweep consequences
under the rug and
across murderous fields of fire
run like maniacs,
soiling ourselves,

terrified and
whistling the thin
whistle of death;

run like lunatics
while vicious and efficient,
the machine guns
ring in our ears,
quick delicate,
the bullets zipping,
the cartridges clinking
on gun carriages
like holiday bells.

Among trundling tanks
and nosing artillery,
regiments, battalions,
slaughtered like poultry
and the singing, so they
say, the singing of
the Deutschland song,
silly as Mother Goose,
presents the public face
of Flanders' castle of the fallen;
the faces
not forgotten, never lost;
the singing boys,
the marching dead,
go on and on,
howling like wolves,
over the uncaring ground.

Langemarck, Langemarck,
who cares about your old battle,
tortured away and
misrepresented here?
Painted whore of

a landscape that never was.

Who cares to speak
at the cost of speech
the worn-out truth or
tell a few more lies?
Guild or corrupt
the graceful and sensible lily?

At Langemarck's start
the living bodies lay and
trembled on the earth,
pressing down hard;
poisonous gas and
torpid mud drowned out
the noise of guns
until all was drowned in death.

Listen, listen,
you can hear death's
clear clarion in the
report from the High
Command;
what was said
no more a lie
than the cost of
battle, the devotion
to bits of dead bodies;

these dead at Langemarck
left living love and life
to the women and children;

let them lie.

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Jack D. Harvey's poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *The Comstock Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Typishly Literary Magazine*, *New English Review*, *The Antioch Review* and elsewhere. The author has been a Pushcart nominee and over the years has been published in a few anthologies.

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