

Compare and
contrast the writers'
attitudes to war in
three poems of your
choice ...



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The First World War was the most destructive ever known. Nearly a million British men were killed and it affected every town and village. The 18-40 male age group was dramatically diminished, which meant nearly a whole generation was wiped out. During the war people got increasing information about the war conditions and the patriotic excitement disappeared. This affected the number of men enlisting. People's attitudes to war depended on their experiences. Men who were fighting would have a different approach, because they experienced the poor conditions, horrific injuries and bitter weather.

Many women would have had a more positive view on the war; because of the advantage they were in terms of employment. No one wanted any war like World War One to happen again. It caused vast devastation and misery and caused more slaughter than any other war. War dehumanised men that managed to survive the war, their lives were no longer normal. Wilfred Owen, Jessie Pope and Siegfried Sassoon all wrote emotional poetry considering the war, but they saw different aspects of it.

Wilfred Owen enlisted in the army during the war and therefore saw disturbing and horrifying scenes in his time away in the trenches, unlike Pope who was not involved in trench warfare, but saw life during the war as a beneficial time for women of Britain. Like Owen, Sassoon experienced war, and it affected his family greatly. Early in the war Sassoon's brother Hamo was mortally wounded at Gallipoli. Sassoon punished himself for his brother's death by involving himself in brave, sometimes suicidal deeds against the Germans.

A short leave from the front helped to calm him and later as the war dragged on, he experienced a sense of hatred towards war. This attitude works its way into his poetry. During a spell of convalescence, in which he was treated for shell shock at Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh, he met and befriended the poet Wilfred Owen who was being treated for the same illness. After experiencing the horrors of the First World War and suffering from his brother's death, Sassoon was anti-war and thought it was a futile waste of life.

Sassoon's early war poetry gives the reader the impression that war was a risky venture that involves confidence and initiative; his later poetry attacks the entire nature of war and those who profit by it. Wilfred Owen was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Artists' Rifles; he joined the Manchester Regiment in France in January, 1917. Whilst in France, Wilfred Owen began writing poems about his war experiences. He was injured in March 1917 and sent home. Siegfried Sassoon inspired Owen to make a career out of poetry.

Owen was fit for duty in August and returned to the front. On November the 4th, just 7 days before the armistice, Owen was killed by a German machine gun attack. Owen was against war. He saw the reality and devastation caused by it and how it could ruin millions of family's lives and determine individuals' futures. He believed young men had false expectations, and because of that they were forced into a dead end of little return. Jessie Pope was born in 1868 in Leicester. She was a regular contributor to 'Punch', 'The Daily Mail' and 'The Daily Express'.

She thought women were restricted and that the war gave them a chance to show what they could do and achieve. Her attitude is that women will have to go back to being mother figures and let the men take over again when they return from war. Pope's attitude to war was positive, she believed it was beneficial for women, and only focused on the positive elements of the war. All three poets give graphic and distinct imagery throughout their poems. With the poor conditions in the trenches and the appalling state of life men had to experience, soldiers had to adopt a very basic existence.

The trenches were only just tall enough to cover the soldiers' heads and it was not in the least comfortable. In 'The Dug-out' Sassoon's words, 'legs ungainly huddled,' gives the image of thousands of men clustered together with their limbs in awkward positions. The soldiers give the impression of being out of balance and clumsy. He describes only one soldier, but that one man symbolises all the other men who suffered the same. They are described as 'huddled' which appears wrong as they thought they would be going on a grand adventure, not a miserable trip where they would be freezing and fighting for warmth.

Similarly in 'Exposure' written by Wilfred Owen, the phrase, 'Ranks on shivering ranks of grey,' gives the image of thousands of men hunched together shivering from the cold. The word, 'grey,' is a depressing word and the dullest colour; this describes the soldier's current lives in the trenches. However, Jessie Pope does not mention the negative sides of war and looks towards life changing topics. This suggests all three poets show an element of reality in their poems. The line, 'There's the girl who does a milk-round in the rain,' describes just one of the jobs women undertook.

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It gives the reader the impression that women were bolder than ever before and did their jobs even in depressing weather conditions. With all the propaganda during the war, the public thought taking part in it would be an exciting time. No one suspected the soldiers would have a, ' sullen, cold exhausted face. ' Men were constantly tired during battle and always trying to get warm. The word ' sullen' portrays the idea of dull and slow moving men. This gives the image of soldiers acting like zombies, gloomy, slow and not fully connected with the active world.

Similarly in ' Exposure' the horrific weather is described. The words, ' Merciless iced east winds that knife us,' this gives the image of fast, freezing cold winds rushing through the trenches carrying long icicles injuring the soldiers like knives. This line shows that the cold did more damage in the war than the actual fighting itself. Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon use imagery to create an attitude of hate to war, and uses words such as ' merciless', ' glozed' and ' sullen. ' On the other hand Jessie Pope's attitude to war was more optimistic.

She uses words such as, ' soft and warm,' ' marching' and ' show their grit. ' These words describe women as determined and give the reader the impression that the soldiers will come marching back, proud and victorious. She does not see the reality of war and that many men were buried under piles of other innocent bodies. The language used in all the poems gives vivid descriptions to the reader. ' War Girls' includes many strong and loud sounds, such as, ' clips,' ' cries,' and ' whistles. ' These words are used to help describe girls during the war. The sounds are positive, this reflects Pope's attitude to war.

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An unusual colour used in the last line of each stanza is, ' khaki' which describes the distinct colour of the soldier's uniform. Pope does not describe them as torn or blood-stained. The language is intended to make you feel that war was productive. ' Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back,' is repeated at the end of each verse. This is done to emphasize that the soldiers will come back and normality will return with them. Pope also uses the repetition of, ' and the girl,' this keeps the growing number of jobs she describes women undertook, flowing throughout the poem.

She reminds the reader how much women's lives changed because of the war. Throughout the rest of the verses she describes all the work women did, and in the last line she describes how women felt at the end of the war, which was mistreated and forgotten. This gives the reader the idea that after all the work that has been completed by women, would be stopped and everyday life will return to normal when the soldiers came back.

Contrastingly Sassoon starts, ' The Dug-Out,' with a rhetorical question. The man is in dismay and disbelief at the conditions.

He wants to know why the soldier put himself through it and asks why he is suffering. This supports Sassoon's attitude, that he thought war was a futile waste of life. Similarly Owen uses rhetorical questions in ' Exposure. ' An example is, ' What are we doing here? ' This is when the soldiers finally realize what they signed themselves up for. It wasn't a grand adventure that would impress the ladies when they got home; it was a hell hole, full of lice with death surrounding them. This was not their dream. Owen cleverly combines language.

I find the word, ' glozed' very effective. It gives the feeling of confusion and dream periods. Sounds are not written as clear as in ' War Girls. ' Owen hides sound within a collection of words, for example, ' agonies of men. ' The reader can picture the screaming the men made if they were injured, and makes them feel sympathetic towards them. Owens use of personification gives the reader the impression of being a real person. The line, ' poignant misery of dawn,' gives the impression that dawn is miserable and has a sense of sadness, pity, and regret.

Dawn is supposed to signify a new birth of a new day. If the dawn is miserable then there is no hope for the rest of the day. Wilfred Owen uses hidden messages and attention-grabbing combinations of words and questions, which contrast with Jessie Pope's vivid straight to the point descriptions. Siegfried Sassoon uses emotional language which represents millions of men's feelings all over the world.

The structure in all three poems is cleverly put together and gives out a message to the reader which is reflected in the poem. 'The Dug-Out,' only has one stanza which is made up of eight lines. It has a partial rhyme but Siegfried Sassoon has written it carefully so it has no definite rhythm. The punctuation forms the structure of the poem and tells the reader when to show emphasise on adjectives. The punctuation is there to make the reader pause and gives an opportunity for them to reflect on what has come before. He wants the reader to reflect so they can fully understand the message he is betraying. It enables the reader to speak quietly and stop striving forward with the poem.

Sassoon does not develop his ideas during the poem, and sticks to an anti-war view. Sassoon uses italics in the last two lines of 'The Dug-Out,' to emphasize a point using a different technique, and gets across the impression of a dream in a motion like sleeping. In the poem it is the thoughts of the man. The man's thoughts gives the reader the impression it's just his thoughts alone, but realistically it's the feelings of many men in the trenches. Contrastingly 'War Girls,' is made up of two stanzas and twenty lines in length.

Jessie Pope shows a development in her argument, and a change in views. She gave the poem a definite rhythm and masses of energy and momentum. She does this by keeping the punctuation minimal and the lines at good lengths to create a steady rhythm. The rhythm represents how women drove themselves forward during the war. They took over men's normal every day responsibilities and still had their own. The first four lines describe what women did during the war and the following lines of each stanza describe how women were seen in society.

Similarly to 'The Dug-Out', 'Exposure' had a partial rhyming scheme. The last word of the first and fourth line has the same sound, for example 'us' and 'nervous.' The last word of the second and third line also rhymes, for example, 'brambles' and 'rumbles.' The last line of each stanza is different and does not rhyme, this helps to bring his emphasise on the message of 'Exposure.' It forces the reader not to have any momentum, and shows the reality of war as boredom, misery, and the rhythm reflects this. This point of view is the soldiers at the lowest spell of their existence.

Overall, the three poets have differing attitudes to war because of their own experiences in childhood and later in life. Wilfred Owen had a contrasting view to Jessie Pope because he had witnessed the dreadfulness of death and fighting. Siegfried Sassoon also had on-hand experience to war, as he suffered shell-shock and lost one of his brothers. Gender also comes into the equation; Jessie Pope was not allowed to fight, because she was a woman and therefore did not have the chance to experience trench life.

She could only do the best a woman was able to do at the time. Unlike Owen and Sassoon, who had as much trench life as they could handle, and they only saw the down side to war. They did not experience the benefits. This means all three poets views depended on what they saw and did, they did not experience all areas of the war and no one could. On the whole Sassoon and Owen have differing attitudes to Pope, but their experience of life and their gender are the motives for this.