

# The soldier and anthem for doomed youth

Literature



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Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen are the respective poets of 'The Soldier' and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'. Both the poems were written during the era of the Great War, but 'The Soldier' was a poem of the War's early part, while 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' was an ode and witness of the 2nd phase (1917 onwards) of the Great War epoch. Purpose and intentions are clearly visible in both the poems. For instance, the poems' titles themselves attempt to illustrate the purpose and aims of the poets.

The varied intentions of Brooke and Owen are apparent as 'The Soldier' reminds us of a heroic soldier, while 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' of the dead soldier. Owen creates a gloomy atmosphere by using 'Anthem' and 'doomed'. The subjects of the poems differ as Brooke accounts to us of soldiers leaving home for war and sacrificing their lives for England. However, Owen's subject and entire poem is concerned with the death of youth at war. In other words, Owen's purpose can be stated as discouraging youth to choose war, while Brooke tries to persuade youth to go to war.

Owen wants to prove the audience that death at war causes obstacles, hardships and is 'dementful' from the point of view of sufferers: defenceless women and children. 'The pallor of girl's brows shall be their pall. ' All hopes have diminished after the tragic death of a soldier. The reader receives a strike when Owen portrays the soldier has not only destructed his own life, but also pulled 'girls to his grave'. The devastating effect of war is brought out here.

These views are in conflict with Brooke, who does not protest the floating, un-ending state and uselessness of war and, unlike Owen does not analyse

the ideas and feelings of havoc caused by death and the suffering of families after the news of a soldier's death reaches them. Brooke, in contrast, paints this loss as a loss of a guardian and saviour to England. This variation is probably because Brooke wrote during the earlier part of the Great War, while Owen's attention and emphasis is mostly placed on individual lives and deaths.

Owen seems to have loved life more than England, whereas Brooke was very patriotic and viewed the whole nation as a personal life which is depicted here: 'If I should die... some corner of a foreign field forever England'. The soldier here is comparing his eventual death as to become part of the English soil. Brooke's idealistic and heroic ideas could be seen as his technique to encourage the English youth to join the war, while Owen's gloomy atmosphere attempts to warn youth against joining war, and communicate the real essence of war, from his beliefs, to the audience.

Ideas, Feelings, and Tones Anthem for Doomed Youth" expresses a hopeless and disillusioned tone linked to the uselessness of war. Probably, Owen felt, fighting in the war, his end was not too far. " And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds". 'Slow' obviously portrays the impatient need for something to happen as deadlock between both sides was caused during 1917 in the Great War. Probably, Owen wanted to desperately die or return home, which is indicated in his tone. 'A drawing down of blinds' depicts a useless war, which has no conclusion. In contrast, Brooke presents the audience with a hopeful tone of war.

His tone is not so gloomy, but cheerful and elevated. It is strikingly different from Owen's and death is seen as an achievement through courage, honour and patriotism. 'In hearts at peace, under an English heaven' predicts a utopian society of peace, as a result of war. Brooke wants youth to know that this war has a deep meaning, which has a connection with sacrifice. Evident in 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' is a feeling against the hardlined, cruel, and merciless nature of war: 'What passing bells... stuttering rifles rapid rattle. '

This quote may be interpreted as: 'not enough deaths... war should continue. When an enemy soldier discovers a corpse, he has still not stopped shooting. This is obviously imitating the nature of war. However, another feeling of Owen here is that the funeral of a person is trivial; death is not so important as life. 'Passing bells' displays a funeral procession. Owen strengthens his approach here by linking 'mockeries' with funerals. Youth may be encouraged to live on rather than thinking of joining war and destructing themselves. On the other hand, death is not so trivial in 'The Soldier'. Brooke's attitude reminds us that death as sacrifice has a reason every citizen should struggle for. Gives somewhere back the thoughts given by England. '

The sacrifice made by every soldier has contributed to England's success and the soldiers will be repaid back with 'thoughts'. Death was not without a reason. While regretting for the demise of a soldier, Brooke also tries to convince the reader that this soldier has died a heroic death. 'In that richer earth a richer dust concealed' reveals that the earth on which an English soldier has died has become richer as a result of his wisdom and bravery.

Owen, unlike Brooke, uses death to depict war as a kind of final mission or stage of life which is dreary; he shows little sense of afterlife.

Everything comes to a standstill as a result of death; Owen portrays death as having no alternative. His stance on the futility of war is further strengthened here. Brooke, meanwhile, shows a great sense of the afterlife and he brings out his secret hopes through these feelings. He dreams of soldiers achieving a wonderful England of peace. 'A peace in the eternal mind, no less.' Here, the dead soul retains its pulse in England's 'eternal memory'. Brooke's deep attachment to England helps bring out an emotional effect here.

The soldier's bravery is again emphasised by Brooke when he powerfully expresses that the soldier has given up all mundane efforts to sacrifice himself in England's path. Interesting techniques are used in both poems. Brooke uses personification more often; emphasis is placed on England. England is seen as a mother: 'England bore, shaped and made aware.' This person will last longer and will be more valuable because it was nurtured and created by England. Brooke uses repetition by saying 'England' several times as he is desperate to convince the reader not to lose morale.

Owen, alternatively, throughout his poem makes use of metaphors and counterparts. His imagery, compared with Brooke's, are varied and more meaningful. He wants to compare the two lives: battlefield and home. His end question may be evaluated as: 'Which is more valuable?' Owen, unlike Brooke, doesn't use generalisation; his metaphors are specific and powerful. For example Owen represents humans dying as 'cattle'. This has great effect,

as cattle die ruthless deaths. Owen uses different viewpoints to add up to one idea on which great emphasis is placed.

Owen's language usage is more indirect and needs more understanding than Brooke's because of his (Brooke's) generalisation. The form of both poems is a sonnet. The order goes like this: octet (1st stanza) and sestet (2nd stanza). In 'The Soldier' the octet talks about the war and the sestet about the after-war. However, Owen does not differentiate between the two stanzas. He focuses on death and life. This makes his poem centred, powerful, and intense. His poem is also more fast-paced which makes it informal. Brooke's rhythm scheme makes 'The Soldier' more formal. Effectiveness of the poems is quite difficult to judge.

Both of the poems dwell on their subjects and create equally powerful accounts. In my view, I think 'The Anthem for Doomed Youth' is a more effective poem, because Owen's balanced ideas on life and death. It is very realistic and quite emotional. The poet's character can be judged from the poem. While being effective, Brooke also seems to be too idealistic. His love for his nation is immense and he hopes everyone was as patriotic as him. I liked the two poems and immensely enjoyed reading them. Both of the poems contain great substance and meaning and stir up one's conscience to think about the poet's achievements.