

Wilfred owen and siegfried sassoon



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Wilfred Owen was born in 1893 in Oswestry, Shropshire. He was a son of a railway worker and poetry had been encouraged by his mother since boyhood. Owen returned to France in August 1918 and won the Military Cross in September. He was sadly killed on the 4th of November 1918, one week before the war ended. On the 11th of November when the war ended at eleven am, news of his death reached his family. Siegfried Sassoon also won the Military Cross for courage and fought at several battles. He came from a wealthy, banking family, a very different background from Wilfred Owen.

Owen and Sassoon met when they were both receiving treatment at Craiglockhart Hospital, Edinburgh. Both had experiences of the World War One and this inspired them to write poetry. The poetry was to be about the horrors of the war – the needless suffering, the false definition of ‘glorious war’ and the lack of understanding from the civilians at home. The poems I have chosen to compare are ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ by Wilfred Owen and ‘Memorial Tablet’ by Siegfried Sassoon. This is because these two poems interested me the most out of the four we discussed as a group.

The first poem I am going to look at is ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’. This poem is the best-known poem of the First World War and was written to his mother from Craiglockhart. The title ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ are the first words of a Latin saying. It means ‘It is sweet and right’. This saying was widely understood and used on soldier’s graves. The title is ironic and was meant to shock the civilians at home who truly believed that war was wonderful and dignified. The structure of the poem falls into four sections and are not regular stanzas.

The first two are in sonnet form and alternate lines rhyme – ‘sacks, backs and sludge, trudge’. The first stanza sets the scene of the soldiers limping back from the front. The similes ‘like old beggars under sacks’ and ‘coughing like hags’ create a vivid image of the conditions the men were in and how they felt. There is a contrast between age in the second simile – ‘hags’. This is referring to old women yet the soldiers were young. On the second line ‘we cursed through sludge’ shows that the thick mud is causing their journey to take longer. The word ‘sludge’ is a form of onomatopoeia.

This is effective as it emphasises the great difficulty the men had trying to walk. They were weary and were no longer focused – ‘men marched asleep’. They cannot walk straight as they have lost their boots and were ‘blood-shod’. Physically and mentally they are worn. They are tired, deaf and used to the sound of the shells that they do not respond to what is around them – ‘outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind’. The second stanza is a contrast to the first as the pace of the first stanza is very slow and many one syllable words are used where as the second stanza is fast and uses short, sharp sentences – ‘Gas.

Quick, boys’. The stanza focuses on one man who fails to get his gas mask on in time – ‘but someone still was yelling out and stumbling’. Owen uses a simile to describe the panic which overcame the man – ‘floundering like a man in fire or lime...’. This is effective because it shows just how the man was reacting when told to put on the gas mask by the officer. The last two lines of the second stanza describe the witnessing of the soldier dying in agony – ‘Dim, through the misty panes’ (steamed up mask) and ‘I saw him drowning’.

The third stanza is short and focuses on how the incident affected him, having nightmares of what he witnessed and how he could not do anything to help – ‘ Helpless sight, He plunges at me’. This shows that the man is feeling guilty and is something that he will never forget. In stanza one it foreshadowed a more haunting experience – ‘ haunting flares’. The fourth and final stanza focuses on the harsh reality of the horrifying war and Owen desperately tries to stop young men going to war – ‘ If in some smothering dreams’.

Owen goes on to describe the suffering that the man who died endured. Owen goes into great detail to make the civilians at home understand how people suffered when at war – ‘ His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;’ This simile is aimed to shock Owen’s audience and is achieved as many soon realise that no man should be ‘ flung’ into a wagon when he died a traumatic death and that the victims of war suffered a great deal. Owen also associates war with hell by using the simile ‘ like a devil’s sick of sin’. Again, this shows the reality of war therefore is powerful.

The metaphors ‘ Obscene as cancer’ and ‘ bitter as the cud’ are effective in the extreme and shows the harsh realities of what innocent people endure. ‘ My friend’ could be addressed to Owen’s audience and Owen urges them to tell their children who so desperately want the supposed ‘ glory’ the simple lie – ‘ Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori’. Wilfred Owen uses graphic, vivid imagery with many metaphors and similes that tend to be more hauntingly poetic. Wilfred Owen’s bitterness and anger reflects on his poetry therefore his message to the complacent civilians who supported the war apparent.

The second poem I am going to look at is Memorial Tablet by Siegfried Sassoon. This poem is in the form of a sonnet. Again, Siegfried Sassoon wrote this poem in response to the horrors of the First World War. It represents a view of an ordinary soldier speaking from the grave. The structure of the poem is split into two stanzas, a sestet and an octet. It has a simple rhyming scheme that is varied by interrupting its chanting singsong rhythm. The 'broken' effect is deliberate and is done to give the effect of the articulate soldier.

The poem is written in Sassoon's colloquial style – 'bleeding years', 'went west' are just two of many examples of colloquial language. The first stanza describes the soldiers' enlistment, fighting and death. Made short almost to mirror how unimportant his life was. The first line shows how the Squire pressurised the soldier to fight for his country. The Squire is hypocritical and forceful towards the soldier as he urges the soldier to fight for his country knowing that him himself will be safe at home – 'nagged and bullied'.

Lord Derby's Scheme was a scheme for volunteers rather than recruits therefore it shows that the Squire had some control over the soldier – 'Under Lord Derby's Scheme' and 'for Squire' in line eleven. The second line sums up the horror of how he died and what he associated war with – 'I died in hell'. Moreover, the last three lines describe how he died. His wound was slight and he was hobbling back to first aid when a shell hit the duckboards, which threw him into the mud where he drowned. The final line – 'lost the light' is a powerful example of irony.

He could be metaphorically speaking of life and by losing the light he had died. He could also be criticizing the generals' incompetence. Lines two, three, four and five are examples of enjambment, which is done to give the poem a more informal approach. The second stanza is an octet and describes the soldier as a ghost, viewing a service held by the Squire at a local church. During the service, the Squire is looking at his gold plated name on the memorial tablet upon the wall – 'he gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare'.

This shows that the Squire is thinking of those that fought but still had no intention of fighting himself. Furthermore, the third line has a powerful example of irony 'though low done upon the list, I'm there'. The soldier is implying that he was not important enough to be on top of the list and all he had for a reward was his name on the memorial tablet. Sassoon also uses colloquial speech in line five – 'bleeding years'. This could suggest that he was literally bleeding for two years, witnessing the unnecessary casualties, the needless suffering and the mistakes of the generals.

It also could imply that he was using slang such as 'bloody'. In line twelve the soldier says he suffered anguish. This could be referring to the dreadful conditions in the trenches and the effect it had on him mentally and physically. All of which, the Squire was unaware of. He is angry with Squire as he died unnecessarily. Additionally, in line thirteen; the soldier came home on leave once before he 'went west'. This is a slang expression for death. The alliteration 'went west' emphasises the reality of what happened.

The final line is a rhetorical question and again the alliteration - 'greater glory' emphasises the irony of war. The colloquial manner is very effective as it convinces the reader that it is the soldier speaking and helps the poem flow. Both Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen had one aim. This aim was to make civilians at home realise that fighting at war was not a glorious experience but more of a terrifying and needless one. Owen and Sassoon both passionately deliver this message through writing poetry but in two very different ways.

Owen tends to use more hauntingly poetic techniques and graphic, vivid imagery - 'His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;' Owen also uses many similes and metaphors - 'like a man in fire or lime' and 'obscene as cancer'. These are effective as they shock the reader and make the vivid imagery a memorable one. The particular techniques used by Owen in this poem emphasise his messages. His use of speech and present tense - 'behind the wagon that we flung him in, and watch the white eyes...' give his poems urgency and directness.

Owen also uses three of the five senses used by a living person - sound, touch and sight - 'if you could hear, at every jolt, the blood...' / 'behind the wagon that we flung him in, and 'watch the white eyes writhing in his face,' This increases the vivid imagery. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' brings across touching themes and images, which stay in the mind. He tells his experiences and opinions of war using a very successful poetry technique that really allows the reader to connect with war and realise how appalling these experiences must have been.

Siegfried Sassoon's poetry was also filled with images, which dramatise the cruelty, horrors, and uselessness of war although he delivered his message differently to Owen. In 'Memorial Tablet' Sassoon uses long lines which aims to shock – 'Squire nagged and bullied till I went to fight, (Under Lord Derby's Scheme). His language is clear and resembles natural speech which in turn helps the poem flow and convinces the reader that it is the soldier speaking – 'Two bleeding years I ...'. Sassoon does not use similes or metaphors in the poem.

Instead he uses alliteration and puns – 'greater glory' / 'I died in hell (They called it Passchendale)'. This technique, although simple is effective as it delivers a blunt, concise message that is clear to the readers. Both of the poems I have looked at are very different. Owen has an elaborate technique where as Sassoon has a more simple technique and relies very much on the message. Both poems had one thing in common. This was the opinion of war and the terrifying experiences that occurred in the war. Both poems made the reader realise that war was not a wonderful experience but an unnecessary one.