

Analyse the poet's attitude to war and death

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



In the following essay I will be comparing and analysing the poet's attitudes to death. I intend to investigate the structures and the language utilised by the poets. I will analyse four poems, 'Dulce et Decorum est' (Wilfred Owen), 'The Leveller' (Robert Graves), 'The Death-Bed' (Siegfried Sassoon) and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (Wilfred Owen). Firstly I will analyse the poem by Wilfred Owen named 'Dulce et Decorum est'.

'The poem 'Dulce et decorum est' has a very negative viewpoint regarding the war, and many of Owen's passages support his ideas. Owen had first-hand experience on the front line and was made an officer in the Great War. He met fellow poet Siegfried Sassoon in hospital where they compared poetry. Owen was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery and he died, ironically, one week before the Armistice. The poem is aimed at a group of soldiers who were on their way to rest. The poem illustrates the death of a soldier who is remained anonymous.

I will first talk about the structure of the poem. This poem has a very regular rhyme scheme and follows a structure of 'ABAB'. In addition, it also has a fairly strict rhythm with around 10-12 syllables per line. The rhyme and rhythm delivers the poet's message with regularity and also all of the stanzas are approximately the same length. There are a variety of images used in order that the poet can show the reader his opinions.

In the very first line of the poem he shows his hatred for war; "Bent double, like old beggars under sacks; Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge..." Owen describes the soldiers as 'old beggars', which is not something that people would compare with soldiers.

The military orderliness of the soldiers has disappeared as they depart away from the front line in order to take a break. The poem has already started with a grim tone. The soldiers walk in a melancholy and miserable way. He also uses imagery to great effect by describing the gas-shells of mustard gas;" And floundering like a man in fire or lime.

Dim through the misty panes and thick green light..." The 'thick green light' is describing the thick layer of mustard gas that is ahead of Owen.

He repeats the colours 'green' and 'lime' to emphasise the colour of the gas. The letter 'i' is repeated in the last two words, this slows down the pace of the poem. This literary device is called assonance (the repetition of internal letters). At the beginning of the second stanza there is a sudden change of mood than the first stanza;" Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!- an ecstasy of fumbling; Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time..

." The tone is much more exciting and lively whereas the first stanza is more slower and more miserable. The second stanza begins with an imperative by the group's sergeant, and is the only spoken voice in the poem. Wilfred Owen also insults the military hierarchy and is not afraid to do so. The phrase 'clumsy helmets' criticises the lack of efficient resources provided by the government.

Owen shows the reader his opinion by illustrating the 'horrors' of the war, not propaganda-like images as were shown to recruit members. The poet appeals directly to the reader in the final stanza;" If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace Behind the wagon that we flung him in..." Owen

makes the poem more personal to the reader, he does this in order to make the poem have a great effect on the reader. He puts the reader in a hypothetical situation.

The word 'flung' creates the effect that the soldiers are not careful with the man's body and it seems as if he is not important. In the second half of the stanza, Owen reveals his message to the reader regarding the children who fight for patriotism. He questions the latin phrase, which translates as 'It is sweet and glorious to die for one's country'. He gives the word 'lie' a capital letter, which gives it greater emphasis and more importance. To conclude this poem, the whole poem is a direct attack on those in power who advocate war.

He states that there is a significant distinction between being honourable and being glorious. 'The Leveller' by Robert Graves is about death itself and the poem concentrates of the different effects it has on different people.

Graves also had experience on the front line and he met fellow poet Siegfried Sassoon whilst they were in hospital. The poem has a very regular rhythm with around 8-9 syllables per line. The stanzas are all four lines long and it also has a very strict rhyme scheme, as it is 'AABB' throughout the whole poem. The poem contains rhyming couplets, which makes us read it with regularity.

The poem is about two very different people after they have been hit with a shell. These two people are described unlike in 'Dulce et Decorum est'.

There is one inexperienced soldier and there is also one who is an experienced mercenary soldier. A mercenary soldier is somebody who fights

for a living. There is hardly any imagery in this poem as it is mostly a story-telling poem. However, the fourth stanza describes the different effect death has on the two people;" Groaned ' Mother! Mother' like a child, While that poor innocent in man's clothesDied cursing God with brutal oaths.

" This stanza shows that there is a huge contrast in the ways that the two people are dying. The experienced mercenary soldier is crying for his mother, when people expect him to have a ' patriotic' death. However, the youth soldier dies in a very contrasting way than we would expect him to. This illustrates Graves' opinion of death, it proves that death has different effects on different people, and that death doesn't discriminate people.

The last stanza of the poem contains very deep irony;" He died a hero's death: and we...Deeply regret his death: we shallAll deeply miss so true a pal." This is very ironic because it was not a heroic death.

The sergeant also probably has no idea who they are and he personalises them as his ' pal'. This signifies that they are empty words and that the sergeant has not put any thought into them. To conclude, ' The Leveller' is about death itself. It describes the two people involved, whereas in ' Dulce et Decorum est' the person involved remains anonymous.

Robert Graves' poem is about fatalism and he gives the readers a savage reminder that not everyone is fighting for the same reason. Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen generally have the same views, they both have experienced war and both of them disapprove of it. The next poem I intend to analyse is ' Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen. The following

poem is a comparison between the elaborate ceremonial of a Victorian-style funeral and the way in which men go to death on the Western Front.

The poem is a sonnet and each line has five stressed syllables. The rhyme scheme is fairly strict, following the pattern of ' ABABCDCD EFFEFGG'. There is a lot of imagery throughout the poem. It contains comparisons between the war and Victorian funerals.

There is a lot of symbolism, which connects with Victorian funerals;"-Only the monstrous anger of the guns. Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle..." In the above lines, many literary devices are already used.

Firstly, personification is used to portray the pace of the guns, it gives the guns human characteristics. Alliteration is also, this device slows down the pace of the poem, putting greater emphasis on the second line. The ' stuttering rifle rattle' counterparts with a passing funeral bell. There is also some symbolism in the last two lines of the first stanza;" The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells; And bugles calling for them from the sad shires." Another symbol is regarding the ' wailing shells'.

This compares with a church choir in a very elaborate Victorian funeral. To conclude, ' Anthem for Doomed Youth' connects better with ' Dulce et Decorum est' rather than ' The Leveller' because in both poems Owen talks about the waste of young and innocent lives. Owen feels that the people who die in the war deserve a better funeral. Finally I will analyse the structure and imagery of ' The Death Bed' by Siegfried Sassoon. Sassoon was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery, and like Wilfred Owen he was also anti-war.

However, Sassoon had a more extreme point of view than Owen as he demonstrated when he refused to receive a Military Cross.

Owen and Sassoon had previously met each other in a hospital, where they compared their poetry. There is no lines that rhyme with each other, however the poem is fairly rhythmic right the way through the poem. The lines are all roughly the same length so there is more rhythm. The poem is about an anonymous man who is on the verge of death and Sassoon describes the pain he suffers as the morphine wears away; "He drowsed and was aware of silenced heaped round him, unshaken as the steadfast falls;" Sassoon does not give the anonymous man a name, as this man represents millions dying in the same way. The poem contains enjambement, this is poetry sentences that carry on to the next line.

He is later given morphine, which is a powerful drug that is given when a person is on the verge of death; "Through crimson gloom to darkness; and forgot the opiate throb and ache that was his wound." The medics are providing this man with morphine, so that the rest of his life is pain-free. The morphine soothes the pain and the soldier begins to feel at ease. The soldier is not fighting against death, but is giving in to it, and begins to wear away. However, as the morphine starts to wear off the soldier continues to feel the raw pain of the wound again.

"He stirred, shifting his body; then the pain leapt like a prowling beast, and gripping and tore..." Sassoon compares that the pain is like a furious and savage animal gripping at the soldier. As the morphine wears away, the fifth stanza is much more lively.

He once again feels the agony and the throbbing of the wound. The reader sympathises when the morphine wears off, the reader feels personally connected with the dying soldier. In the sixth stanza the reader is spoken to directly; "Light many lamps and gather round his bed. Lend him your eyes, warm blood, and will to live.

..” In this penultimate stanza, there is a variety of imperatives used that are directed at the reader. The first word of the line can be compared with life or hope, it is something that we would refer to as. The reader is invited to empathise with the man and the reader feels as though they have a connection with the man. In the final stanza it states, “ But death replied: ‘ I choose him.

” Sassoon does not provide the word ‘ death’ with a capital letter because he does not want to increase death’s importance. I believe that the poem is about innocent lives being taken away. In addition, it is also about millions of soldiers being denied the right to die peacefully. I feel that it is a juxtaposition of silence and sound as the soldier slips away. I think that this poem links with both of Wilfred Owens’ poems due to that fact that both of them talk about the waste of innocent and young lives.

I believe that it can also be related to ‘ The Leveller’ because it relates to death and both poems personify death in fairly similar ways. In conclusion, I believe I have revealed the poets’ attitudes to war and death. All of the poets have strong attitudes against the war, but others like Siegfried Sassoon have a more extreme opinion than other. All poems had similar messages to the readers, they were contrasting to the propaganda-like images, which were

shown to families at home. Personally, I enjoyed 'Dulce et Decorum est' the most because I liked the sarcasm at the end of the poem, when he informed us about the Latin motto. I was also fond of the rhyme scheme because it was regular through the whole poem and it was easy to read the poem.