

Different wars, similar outcome



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Wars that lay buried in history and wars present in the world today unite through the most common and blatant reality of war: violence resulting in imminent death. Literature often presents different perspectives of these wars that ultimately tie together and bring forth the actuality of war. Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" present a precise example of different pieces of literature that connect through the common theme of war. *The Wars* and "Dulce et Decorum Est" offer the unconcealed and harsh violence of war and through vivid imagery, these authors depict life at war.

Additionally, both of these works contain the four basic elements of life - earth, water, fire, and air - to reveal that these four basic elements can represent death as well. Moreover, the theme of appearance versus reality impacts both works profoundly through the ruthless truth of war as compared to the credulous beliefs of war. Through these ways, a novel and a poem unify to unveil the truth about war and convince audiences of the violent reality of warfare. The violent nature of war is visibly illustrated in both *The Wars* and "Dulce et Decorum Est".

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Death, the impending result of such violence, is an underlying theme that highlights both literary works and assists audiences in grasping the severe veracity of war itself. In Findley's *The Wars*, death assists in emphasizing the overall violence imprinted by the war. "Half an hour later, Rodwell wandered into No Man's Land and put a bullet through his ears." (Findley, 135)

Similarly, Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" incorporates death to underline

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the extreme violence caused by war, when in line 15 and 16, the author watches in his " helpless sigh [as] he plunges at [him], guttering, choking, and drowning. (Owen, 15, 16) The presence of violence is also evident in both works between characters and victims of war.

Robert Ross, the main character from *The Wars*, experiences this violence firsthand when, alone and defenceless, he experiences the brutality of war through rape. " His legs were forced apart so far he thought they were going to be broken. Mouths began to suck at his privates. Hands and fingers probed and poked at every part of his body. Someone struck him in the face. " (Findley, 174) In Owen's poem, this brutality is described through the " white eyes" of the " writhing" victim of the war (Owen, 19). His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin; if [one] could hear, at every jolt, the blood come gargling from the forth-corrupted lungs... " (Owen, 20-22) This dramatic picture painted by both authors displays the terrible and violent effects of war as well as the fatal outcome violence trails behind. The violent results of war are represented through the use of the four elements of life in both works - earth, water, fire, and air. Both Findley and Owen describe the devastating outcome that these four elements that usually symbolize life can bring.

Fire implies deep suffering and overall destruction in the battlefield, and as *The Wars* narrates, fire can become a damaging weapon. " The nights lit up with flames of a terrible new weapon... it was something called a flame thrower... fire storms raged along the front. Men exploded where they stood... homes fell with their bones on fire... She believed her country was being destroyed by fire. " (Findley, 131-132, 136) Likewise, " Dulce et

Decorum Est" describes fire as "haunting flares" and as damaging "like a man in fire"(Owen, 3, 12).

Fire, however, differs greatly from the earth, which embodies a trap in combat that slowly confines its victims. In *The Wars*, earth is portrayed as a grave in which its victims "drowned in mud. Their graves, it seemed, just dug themselves and pulled down." (Findley, 70) Correspondingly, Owen's portrayal of soldiers crossing through this earth is a picture painted with hardships, violence, and suffering. "Bent double, like old beggars undersacks, knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through the sludge... any had lost their boots, but limped on, blood-shod." (Owen, 1-2, 5-6) Another element that forms a part of war is water and through Owen's depiction, audiences can see how this element can serve as a life-ending source. "

As under a green sea, [he] saw him drowning." (Owen, 14) *The Wars* also demonstrates that water can be a powerful element that is capable of engulfing completely its surroundings during times of conflict and war. "On either side, the ditches are filled with fetid water. Everything is waterlogged. Even bits of grass won't float." (Findley, 69) The final element used in both *The Wars* and "Dulce et Decorum Est" is air and in both works, this holds great value and significance. Owen illustrates that during war, air can serve as a deadly killer that tragically ends one's life. "Gas! GAS! Quick boys! - An ecstasy of fumbling fitting the clumsy helmets just in time... through the misty panes... I saw him drowning... guttering, choking, drowning." (Owen, 9-10, 13, 14, 16) *The Wars* also portrays the fatalities that the usual life-

nourishing air can bring forth in times of fighting and loss. " The smoke from the brazier burned his eyes.

He was fearful of the fumes from the coke. Men had died in their sleep down the line in a dugout with no ventilation. (Findley, 90) When all these four elements of life are brought together during times of tension and wars, they can slowly, painfully, and tragically end lives. As seen in *The Wars* and "*Dulce et Decorum Est*", these elements possess enough power to kill the lives of many in just an instant in the battlefield, leaving behind nothing more than fallen corpses and overall suffering. Wars and battles signify great suffering along with substantial loss.

Findley and Owen successfully represent these two major themes of war and more importantly, both works are able to illustrate the most unforeseen theme of war: appearance versus reality. Owen flawlessly exemplifies this theme by revealing the cold reality of war and the violence that is " obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud. " (Owen, 23) "*Dulce et Decorum Est*" brings forth the powerful message that the realities of war are far more destructive than thought by anyone before and if people knew of the unrestrained truth, "[they] would not tell with such high zest the old lie: dulce et decorum est pro patria mori. (Owen, 26-28) This saying, that it is sweet and right to die for your own country, is viewed as a lie to the author's eyes most likely because he knows the cruel reality of war and not the much talked about and happy reality of war. This happier reality of war is portrayed in *The Wars* through Robert and his desire to go to war, thinking it was an escape. " Robert envied him because he could go away when this was over and surround himself with space. " (Findley, 19) What looked like an escape from <https://assignbuster.com/different-wars-similar-outcome/>

the violent death of Robert's sister, however, was in reality a doorway to a brutal path of violence resulting in his own demise.

The open space this character dreamed about became his prison and later on lead to his violent death. " There were flames all around him... looking down at Robert after the flames had been extinguished, he was barely able to recognize that Robert had a face" (Findley, 192). Robert as well as the character in " Dulce et Decorum Est" both see the charm of war melt before their eyes and both come to the realization from first-hand experience the cruel realities of war. The callous reality of war is seen throughout the world, whether it is represented through present day wars or wars that complete part of history.

Literature presents diverse viewpoints of war that unite through extreme violence resulting in significant deaths. Owen's " Dulce et Decorum Est" and Findley's The Wars portray ideal examples of literature connected through the lucid actuality of war. Both works provide a vivid and gruesome description of the massive violence perceived in war. This immense violence carried out in war is represented through the four elements of life - earth, water, fire, and air - which are characterized in the battlefield of each literary work as elements that represent death as well.

Furthermore, the theme of appearance versus reality influences both The Wars and " Dulce et Decorum Est" intensely through the cruel truth of war as compared to the unsuspecting and naive beliefs of war. Overall, both literary works serve their purpose in depicting the horrid reality about war and both accurately portray the war in a way that audiences can clearly see the

violent actuality of war. Unknowingly, these two pieces of literature connect and foil one another in the description of wars and their violent veracity.