

Dulce et decorum est and the charge of the light brigade

Food & Diet



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Both 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'The charge of the Light Brigade' are about the death of soldiers in battle, but both these poems portray this experience in two very different ways.

'Dulce et Decorum Est' is based on the first world war, and Wilfred Owen speaks about his own experience of his tribulations in the war. Owen disagreed in the glorification of war, and was against the propaganda and lies that were being released to the public. He felt he had an obligation to tell people the truth behind the war, and how the patriotism that was said to be included in a soldier dying for his country was a lie.

He talks of how hard life was in the war, and it was very difficult to live the life of a soldier.

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' however is the opposite, as it glorifies war, despite the fact that due to an error by someone, six hundred soldiers died. His poem is based on the Crimean war, and more precisely, the battle of balaclava. Tennyson was a civilian and was not a soldier, unlike Owen. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' was written as a morale booster for soldiers and civilians alike. This poem increased the morale of the soldiers fighting in the battle.

However, he was not an eyewitness in this battle, unlike Owen.

The poem celebrates the bravery and courageousness of the 600 soldiers' that were sent into battle with no real chance of winning, and showing how audacious they were to go into that battle

The repetitive use of words throughout the poem augments the excitement in the poem.

‘ Half a league, Half a league, Half a league onwards’

This shows that the repetitive use of words gives us the impression of the bravery of the troops to go into the battleground.

Also, in stanza 1, we are again told of the uncertain chance of the 600 becoming victorious, as it says

‘ Into the valley of death rode the six hundred.’

This shows the unlikely ness of the six hundred winning.

In this first stanza alone, we can see that Tennyson is creating an image of nobility for the soldier’s and he uses very melodramatic and emotive description, but he never goes into gory detail of the death of the soldiers, as this would take away the nobility of dying for your country in a way.

Stanza 2 starts off in a very dramatic fashion as the command ‘ Forward, the Light brigade!’ To show how brave these men are, and to convey the action that is about to happen. We are told that due to someone’s mistake, these men were going into this battle and into certain death, but rhetorical repetition is used to show how then men didn’t quest the order, but done their job and fought for their country.

‘ Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why.

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Theirs but to do and die'

Also, Tennyson conveys the obedience of the soldiers' and their unquestioning manner. Again, the valley of death is used to show that the soldiers' were riding into their death. Rhetorical repetition is again used as the six hundred are in the middle of the action, and the rhetorical repetition is used to show the severity of the war.

Cannons to right of them.

Cannons to left of them.

Cannons in front of them'

These show how unequal this war was, and how the six hundred were desperately outnumbered.

Alliteration is used in this stanza also

' Stormed with shot and shell'

Similarities are made to a storm, as a storm is relentless and causes massive amounts of damage. Also, the use of the letter ' S' at the start of a most of the words in a line in stanza 3 gives a quickening verse, to convey the amount of action that is happening, and the ferocity and quickness of what's happening. This use of words is a sibilant sound, showing that the men are getting even closer to death.

The use of ' Jaws of death' and ' Mouth of hell' shows the viciousness of the battle.

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At the end of each stanza, the use of the six hundred is used to show the magnitude of the loss of lives, and the amount of people that gave their lives for their country, but by the end of the play, they have gained the title 'noble six hundred' as they are celebrated as heroes.

In stanza 4, we are told of the bravery of the six hundred as they fought their heart out to the death.

'Flash'd all their sabres bare.

Flash'd as they turn'd in air,

Sabring the gunners there,'

This shows the true bravery of the soldiers with use of many 'verbs of action.'

The rhetorical repetition used in stanza 3 is again used in stanza 5, to show how the men were in the middle of the action, and the sibilant sound again is used to quicken the verse. We see the six hundred retreat from the so-called 'Jaws of death' as if they are coming back from death.

More punctuation is used in this stanza to show the men reflecting about the battle, and reflecting on how they made a legendary charge.

In the final stanza, a state of immortality is created around the soldiers bravery and their bravery is emphasized, and says how their glorious attack on the enemies was patriotic and very brave.

'When can their glory fade?

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O the wild charge they made! ...

Honour the charge they made

Honour the Light Brigade,

Noble six hundred! $\ddot{i}_{\dot{e}}^{\frac{1}{2}}$

This stanza is like a final statement referring to the heroism and valour, and how they gave it their all. You see how they are now called the 'noble six hundred'

However, In Wilfred Owens' 'Dulce et Decorum Est', we are asked to question the certain statements referring to the nobility and glory of dying for your country. Owen talks of his own experience in the war, and how hard life can be in the war.

Owen feels that it is not glorious dying for ones country, and throughout the poem, we can see this message emphasized. Straight away as the poem opens, we are shocked by what we read as this isn't what we expect our so-called 'noble' soldiers to be like.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,

This line portrays the opposite of what many people thought the soldiers were like, as soldiers were portrayed as tall, proud, prestigious people, but here we see they are bent over coughing and clearly not healthy, and in no state to fight. The soldiers here are not described as patriots, but as beggars.

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We can see the nobility of these soldiers being taken away:

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,

But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;

We see here that the marching, which is associated with soldiers, is not happening as the soldiers are exhausted, and are compared to hags struggling through the mud. We are shown that life in the army takes away a soldiers' youth and vitality, and the lifestyle of the war degrades the soldiers. We see that they are quite the opposite to Tennyson's ' noble six hundred.' The first stanza shows how there wasn't much action for these soldiers, who even ignored the noise of shells dropping, and the first stanza is a very quiet, in active stanza.

Owen tells this stanza using the words ' we' and ' our', showing again that Owen was involved in the war and this incident. We see that the soldier's main aim is to get to safety, and not to defend their country, as they are numb with the experience of the war. We see that they are ' marching asleep', so they are vulnerable to attacks, and are not ready to defend themselves. A constant use of punctuation is used to make the stanza seem longer, and to extend the pauses between the lines. This is used to show how long it takes the men to get back to the trenches, and how fatigued the soldiers are.

The second stanza is quite different to the first, as it is full of action, and we are dropped in the deep end with the soldiers, in the middle of the action

GAS! GAS! Quick, boys!-An ecstasy of fumbling,

Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,

We see how uncoordinated the soldiers are and show signs of clumsiness as they try to put their helmets on, The use of 'ecstasy' and 'fumbling' is a good way of showing of how dormant their life was and then they were engulfed by a wave of adrenaline. We see the use of small words, monosyllables, to make the stanza seem quicker. This effect is used to convey the quickness of what's going on, and how the pace has changed dramatically from the first stanza. Owen describes the adrenalin rush that the soldiers get from this bit of action, as most of the time these soldiers spend most of their time on the front line, in the trenches, with not a lot happening.

However, one man doesn't get his gas mask on in time, and he is helplessly struggling, and we see Owen say how he couldn't do anything to save him. The vivid use of adjectives explaining the death of the soldier conveys the pain of the death, and Owen goes in to very descriptive detail over the terrifying and excruciating pain that the man is experiencing. The soldier's death is compared to drowning, being burnt and being killed by lime. The chlorine gas is like a mixture of these as it is like the man is drowning in the gas, and the gas is burning his skin, and inhaling the gas would be like dying due to inhalation of lime.

The death of the poisonous gas is compared to 3 different types of deaths in one to try and convey the sheer pain involved in that death. This death is not

a glorious or noble death, and he uses vivid imagery to try and horrify and disgust the readers, as he wants them to try and feel how traumatizing it would be to see someone dying due to the gas. Long words are used to make the mans death seem long. There is an ironic paradox here, as although it is the shortest stanza in the poem, it is the one that affects Owens' mind the worst and affected the other soldiers as well.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight

He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.'

Owen talks of smothering dreams, as he thinks of the gas smothering the man, and killing him. This shows how intense his dreams are. The people that say it is honourable to die for your country wouldn't say this if they saw someone die they way that soldier did. Although this was a horrible death, it was in the end just a statistic, not a life but a number. This shows how the soldiers de-humanize the mans' death. This again shows that these soldiers do not get an honourable death, but are discarded as if nothing has happened.

Here, we can see that Onomatopoeia is used, meaning the sounds of the words suggest their meanings.

The end of the line conveys the mans' death, and Owen is trying to get the readers to create a mental pictures in their heads of what he saw.

Owen tries to make the mans death and horrific as possible, so the people can, in a way, re-live what happened

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,

Bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —

The end of that last line signifies the mans death as there is a pause at the end.

In this whole stanza, there is only one full stop and therefore one sentence.

The poet's anger is shown near the end of the poem, as he shows he is enraged by the suffering and inhumanities going on in the war. At line 24, he reaches the peak of his anger, and from there on he calms down. He ends the poem on a note of irony, a sarcastic comment if you will, by calling the people who think it is noble and honourable to die for your country friends, even though he wouldn't really regard them as friends.

This poem is a more personal and humanized poem, compared to Tennysons' 'six hundred.' We are asked to imagine like we are part of the battle, like we are there, so we can see what really happens during war.

The Charge of the Light Brigade is like an endorsement of war, like a moral booster for people, whereas 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is more a truthful poem, and graphical poem, as it highlights what really happens out in the battleground, and how soldiers are really treated, and how it is not noble to die for your country.

These poems are set in two different wars, and the detail in both these poems are very different. While 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' is praising the soldiers and saying how honourable it was for them to die in battle, while 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is doing the opposite, as it is saying it isn't honourable and noble to die for your country, as you are not regarded as a person, but as a statistic and a number. Tennyson's poem glamorised the art of war. The poem has no real detail in it, and centres itself around the six hundred, and doesn't go into detail of their deaths.

On the other hand, Wilfred Owen's poem had a little more reality in it, as it accounted the death of a soldier, and the poem showed how the soldiers had to react to the death of the soldier. This poem has a sensitive touch to it as it focuses on the death of one particular soldier, while the other poem focuses on 600, which has no real sensitivity to it.

Tennyson's poem was about the Battle of Balaclava, yet it had no detail about that battle whatsoever.

Society's outlook on war was very much the same as Tennyson's poem, as they didn't know what was the grim reality of the war, and didn't know what went on in the war, and the inhumane tortures soldiers had to deal with.

Owen felt the way he did as he had seen the atrocities of what had happened during the war, and he didn't appreciate people who didn't know anything about the war saying that it was honourable to die for your country as it was just a propaganda front put on.

I feel that Wilfred Owen's poem gives a better insight into the war and a better view on what war is really like. His poem gives a more of a truthful feel to it, whereas Tennyson's poem is a glamorised poem used to boost the morale of soldiers and civilians alike, and was really a poem in which not a lot of detail was put into it, and which only showed society's views.