

Dulce et decorum est essay

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' For the Fallen' and ' Dulce Et Decorum Est' are two very different poems indirectly expressing Wilfred Owen and Laurence Binyon's views on war. The contrast of the poems is mainly down to when they were written as Binyon wrote his poem at the very beginning of the war, meaning the poem has a very propagandist and optimistic outlook on the war. He also wrote it before he visited the front in 1916. However Owen wrote his poem near to the end of the war, in hospital, after fighting on the western front.

Many of his close friends had died during the war, which probably influenced a lot of the anger in his poems. It is clear in Owen's poem that he feels there is absolutely no honour in dying for one's country. He describes a fellow soldier killed in a gas attack, ' flound'ring like a man in fire or lime' followed by, ' behind the wagon that we flung him in. ' The second quote gives the impression that this soldier is just one of many thousands of unnamed individuals who were killed and carted off without any funeral.

It gives a message to propagandists and people who think war is glorious, that it is nothing of the sort. Also Owen's title ' Dulce Et Decorum Est', means: ' It is sweet and fitting'. However the poem completely undermines the title saying the opposite and ending with ' The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori. ' Owen uses heavy irony in the title and could also be directing this quote at officers who originally led many soldiers to their death. By contrast, Binyon describes the death of the soldiers at war very differently: ' Death august and royal'.

Binyon personifies death and makes it honourable, dignifying the death of the soldiers. Binyon also describes the dead soldiers ' As the stars are known to the Night,' which implies that they are always there, even if they are not

seen in the day, but remembered in their family's dream every night. Furthermore the title: 'For the Fallen' is a euphemism, which like the poem avoids the fact that the soldiers actually died in many gruesome ways during battle. The images that Binyon and Owen create through their language in their poems are very different.

Owen's descriptions are extremely graphic and create very strong images: 'You could hear, at every jolt, the blood Come gargling from the froth corrupted lungs.' One can almost see and hear the reality of war through all these descriptions. Owen also manages to create a few quite unnatural and sometimes impossible images: 'Dim, through misty panes and thick green light, As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.' The word 'drowning' gives us an image of someone drowning in air, which is impossible.

By doing this, Owen shows the extreme horror of having to watch someone die in a gas attack. Binyon's imagery, by contrast, is much more idealised and glorifies the soldiers. There are many references to stars and the heavens: 'immortal spheres', 'As the stars are known to the night', 'the heavenly plain'. In the penultimate line the word 'stars' is even repeated: 'As the stars that are starry in the time of our time of darkness'. By comparing the soldiers to stars, Binyon is erasing any negative references to the horrors of war and creating an image of heaven instead.

The use of tone in the two poems is very contrasting as while Binyon adopts a very dignified, patriotic and mournful tone, Owen, on the contrary uses quite a pessimistic and sometimes aggressive tone. Owen does this by using spondees at the beginning of lines: 'Bent Double', 'Knock-kneed', and 'Gas! Gas!' By putting two stressed syllables at the start of lines, Owen is avoiding

a gentle iambic rhythm, and instead creating more of a chaotic effect which is helped by the sudden change to present tense. Owen also uses many words like: ‘ sludge’, ‘ blood’ and ‘ zest’.

This sort of vocabulary adds to the poem’s slightly aggressive tone, with the use of quite hard-hitting and monosyllabic words. However, Binyon, on the contrary is much more formal and uses a mixture of latin and anglo-saxon vocabulary creating both a warm but at the same time, respectful tone. Binyon also plays with word order, using inverted syntax: ‘ They mingle not’, and ‘ At the going down of the sun’. This gives the poem a greater sense of authority and importance, and even sometimes sounds slightly biblical: ‘ Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit’.

In ‘ For the Fallen’, the form is relatively simple with short four-line verses with the last line always slightly shorter. This could relate to the soldiers lives being cut short but interestingly, these last lines can also be of significance by themselves, describing the soldiers who died: ‘ Fallen in the cause of the free’, ‘ They fell with their faces to the foe’, ‘ To the end, to the end, they remain. ’ The poem is also made up of antonymic lines, the structure being A, B, C, B. The rhyming 2nd and 4th lines represent the harmony of the poem, while the non-rhyming 1st and 3rd represent the disharmony.

There are also antonyms within certain lines: ‘ music’ and ‘ desolation’, ‘ glory’ and ‘ tears’. The rhythm of the poem is quite irregular, possibly to emphasise the fact that the subject of the poem is too important to give a ‘ rum-ti-tum’ rhythm. Unlike ‘ For the Fallen’, which is an elegy, ‘ Dulce Et Decorum Est’ is a narrative. The verses are longer in Owen’s poem, the first two stanzas 8 lines, and the last 12 lines. The four extra lines in the last

stanza almost come across as a personal message from Owen himself: ' My friend, you would not tell with such high zest... Also, the last line of the poem, a bit like the ends of Binyon's verses, is cut short representing the soldier's lives being cut short: ' Pro patria mori. ' Not only this, but the fact that the poem ends with the word ' mori'-death- again refers to the soldiers' lives. The poem is also set out like a story as it starts by setting the scene, which is followed by the climax in the 2nd stanza, and then the ending. Owen uses alternate rhyme which knits all the lines together, making them flow.

The rhyme scheme also draws attention to the specific rhyming words at the end of each line which, if read alone, describe the events taking place e. g. ' trudge', ' blind', ' stumbling', ' drowning', ' blood'. Owen uses repetition to emphasise certain words: ' Gas! Gas! ', ' All went lame; all blind'. The repetition of ' gas' creates much more urgency than if it was just written once. Also, the repetition of ' all' really makes the reader realise that Owen is trying to not just say it was one or two people who were hurt, but everyone.

Owen also uses caesura: ' Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots But limped on, blood-shod. All... ' The full-stops in the middle of the lines disrupt the rhythm and maybe draw attention to the fact that the marching is not orderly. Binyon, like Owen, uses some repetition: ' Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit', ' To the end, to the end they remain'. The repetition, in this case, with its lulling rhythm, adds to the overall proud and majestic feel of the poem. Another word that Binyon repeats almost constantly through the poem is ' they'.

This, in contrast to Owen who specifically describes one person dying in gory detail, unifies all the soldiers into one. Both 'For the Fallen' and 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', in their own ways, describe soldiers who went to war. However, the two poems are opposite to each other in almost every way, as the points above show. Binyon shows us the glory of patriotism and self sacrifice while Owen shows the brutal reality of what it was truly like in the battlefield. These two poems show us how differently war can be described and interpreted.