

Dulce et decorum est,
charge of the light
brigade and who's for
the game

[Food & Diet](#)



Wilfred Owen is the narrator of 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', a poem aimed at the people who were not actively involved in the war, fighting on the bloody battlefields, and therefore do not have first-hand experience of the horrors. He is writing from a period of time after the war, looking back in retrospect and remembering his experiences. The poem is trying to dispel the myth that the men who died and suffered during the war were heroes, fighting patriotically for their country, when in fact they died unnecessary deaths, their war efforts futile and in vain.

Owen is attempting to inform people of the terror, anguish and torment which was experienced by the soldiers during the war. In the first stanza, the scene is of weary, exhausted soldiers walking in the actual time of war. They are returning to base camp, where Owen uses a slow, halting rhythm to suggest how much pain and misery the soldiers are encountering and to imitate how slow they are walking. The choice of vocabulary in this verse is very effective in communicating the message of fatigue, by using the noun 'sludge' and the verbs 'trudge' and 'haunting'.

The second stanza continues the tense, speaking in the past and still set at war. The rhythm here is suddenly quickened, displaying the men's panic, by use of punctuation - exclamation marks and short sentences are used to create excitement. An unexpected twist in the third verse sees Owen change abruptly to the present tense, but still using past tense lexis, describing the nightmares that continually haunt him. This carries on into the final stanza where Owen vividly relives his terrifying memories and concludes the poem. The first main image in the poem is at the beginning.

Owen compares the young, once agile soldiers to old, weary men in a humiliating fashion ('Bent double, like old beggars'), insinuating that the men were almost pleading for the war to end. It heavily suggests the negative consequences and effects of war on these men with the antagonistic lexis used. In the same stanza, Owen uses harsh adjectives like 'haunting' and euphemisms such as 'distant rest', which both have connotations of hell and therefore suggest pain and death. Secondly, the idea that 'men marched asleep' suggest utter exhaustion - to all intents and purposes the men are asleep.

The lines are enstopped and punctuated with commas, to steady the pace of the poem, dragging the lines out to increase the feeling of weariness. The next main image occurs in the second stanza, where a gas attack is happening. The narrator can see a man, 'drowning' in a 'green sea' of chlorine gas. An ellipsis is used to create the effect of a 'cliff-hanger' - the reader is tense and anxious to find out what will become of the soldier that is suffering. The last stanza contains many evocative and powerful images, such as 'white eyes writhing', 'his hanging face', and 'blood came gargling'.

This vivid usage of sharp, bitter, unpleasant lexis is used to involve the reader in the text, making the experience seem more realistic. The simile 'bitter as the cud' suggests that the soldiers have become almost inhuman because of the war, as 'cud' is regurgitated grass from a cow's stomach. This is reflected in the use of 'devil' in a previous line. These graphic images used by Owen create peaks of tension and anxiety with atmospheric lexis

throughout the poem, and to encourage and support his main challenge - to change typical attitudes of war in the era.

Imagery such as ' bent double' and ' marched asleep' are visual descriptions and harsh lexis containing hard consonants like ' coughing', ' cursed', ' drunk' and ' deaf' combine to create an aggressive atmosphere in the first stanza. This establishes a very powerful emotional appeal to the nation, pleading with them to listen to Owens words. The use of sibilance (' gas shells dropping softly') gives the effect of lethargy, fatigue and weariness, showing that the soldiers' senses are affected, that they are immune to the full intensity of the noise.

Stanza two provides us with embedded speech to help the experience seem more realistic. It tells us what is going on in a lively way but it is not necessary to the narrative as it becomes apparent that the poet is describing a gas attack as the reader reaches the final line of the stanza. The dramatic one word sentence (' Gas! ') that begins the stanza is emphatic and livens the pace and increases the tempo of the poem. A further ' GAS! ' intensifies the situation and the repetition emphasizes the emergency of the circumstances.

Stanza three provides an unexpected twist to the poem. It disrupts the verse structure, creating a sense of ' organised chaos', whilst continuing the A, B rhyme scheme, with every other line rhyming. This implies order, emphasizing how soldiers had to conform to these orders. The stanza itself creates a sense of isolation, as it is a mere two lines long, in reference to the fact that readers do not share his nightmares so he is lonely.

The verbs are written in the progressive tense using the -ing present participle to prolong the action, e. . choking – the poet conveys that it happens for a long time. ‘ Dulce Et Decorum Est’ can be roughly translated as ‘ it is an honour to’, creating a false sense of positivity, as the title suggests that the poem, if we assume that the reader already knows that it is a wartime piece, is about patriotism and heroic soldiers. However, as the poem progresses the reader realises that Owen is critical of the general perception of war. The final two lines are a culmination of the poet’s negative emotions – ‘ The Old Lie’.

Owen creates a sense of satire with a bitter and sarcastic edge to his writing, epitomising the futility of the war, underlining that the ‘ patriotic’ soldiers died pointless deaths, not heroic but unjustified, untimely ones. The use of Latin in the last lines makes for a respectable and convincing finale, as the use of this ‘ scholars language’ proves Owen to be educated and intelligent, therefore more credible and believable to others, although it is a sharp contrast to the other words and images in the poem which are shockingly intimidating and atrocious.

He uses plosive alliteration, ‘ Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori’ to evoke an angry tone, challenging poets like Jessie Pope and Alfred Lord Tennyson because of their positive and patriotic portrayal of the war experience, asking his readers to question the certainties and glorified events that Pope is encouraging and Tennyson celebrating.

Owen condemns these types of poets because they feed young children’s appetites for glory, shown in the last stanza with the adjective ‘ desperate’,

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aiming to change the view that society takes on war and present them with an accurate portrayal of it, representing all the soldiers that were sent to their unnecessary deaths who cannot speak for themselves. This message of conspiracy is echoed throughout the poem, as from the opening stanza, the reader can visualise a very different image of soldiers than what the title suggests.

Owens personal experience on the battlefield, where he captures the atmosphere of the war with lexis such as 'lame', 'blind' and 'fatigue' and reminds the reader that he was there by using the first person personal pronoun 'we' ('we cursed'), is used to create a very realistic depiction of war. Words such as 'cursed', 'haunting' and 'helpless' are used to indicate pain - they are neither majestic nor euphemistic but shockingly realistic.

The colloquial lexis used throughout Jessie Pope's 'Who's for the Game?' ('come along lads', 'country a hand') and the informal, conversational tone it is written in involves the reader by communicating on an everyday spoken level with them. The querying atmosphere all through the text is maintained and accentuated by repetition, with the interrogative pronoun 'who', or a derogative of this word beginning nearly half the lines. The poem is written in a simplistic style, as it was aimed at working and middle class men, who may not have been able to understand complicated language.

This is effective because people who read the horrifying and graphic depictions of war in Wilfred Owens writing would have been shocked by the harsh and vivid imagery and may have thought he was over-exaggerating.

Poems like 'Who's for the Game?' assured people that Owen was playing up

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the ideas of war and presented their messages in an easily digestible, light-hearted fashion. Pope euphemistically describes war with the word 'Game', suggesting that the soldiers will just be players in a large scale match and has connotations of teamwork, fun and competition.

However, the real meaning, war, implies death, suffering and bloody battles. 'Game' precedes a question mark, creating a rhetorical question, involving the reader to provoke their reaction. Pope develops this technique of using rhetorical questions throughout the stanzas and combines it with anti-thesis, whereby she uses opposing ideas to make the reader think.

She gives them choices such as 'Who wants a turn to himself in the show?', appealing to the readers' patriotism and heroic ambitions, which is then followed by 'And who wants a seat in the stands?', subtly comparing the positive attitude to war taken by some men to the negative, almost lazy outlook viewed by others. It suggests that men who 'lie low and be out of the fun' should be ashamed that they are not volunteering to fight for their country and forces them to face the social pressures brought about both officially and unofficially, which is the ultimate objective of recruiting poems written by Jessie Pope and other poets of her type.

However, poets like Sassoon and Owen criticise Pope for her attitude to war, scathingly accusing her and other recruitment poets of glorifying a horrific and appalling ordeal. However, in the last stanza, the pattern of 'choices' is broken when Pope gives the men a single option - 'only one course to pursue' - and reassures them that it is the right one ('you'll come on alright'). The last stanza is a culmination of the encouragements given by

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Pope throughout the poem, using imperatives and slang phrases, 'Come along lads', to urge potential soldiers to join the army, and writing in a direct yet colloquial manner.

Throughout the previous three stanzas, emphasis on the pronoun 'who' is heavy, lending an almost enigmatic air to the poem, but in the final verse the use of the second person singular personal pronouns 'you' and 'your' allow the poet to speak directly to the reader, making them feel wanted and needed. The use of parenthesis, whereby extra information is added unnecessarily, further adds to the informal mood of the poem, with 'not much' and 'but you'll come on alright'. Personification in the final stanza gives 'your country' human characteristics, to make the reader feel adequate, equal and important to the nation and its greatness.

The atmosphere created in the poem is one of patriotism, nobility and heroism, although underlying tones of negativity can be felt when Pope uses words such as 'red', a colour symbolic of danger which could also represent blood, an idea which could lead to death, and 'fight' which is a more obvious, evocative and accurate depiction of the 'game' of war. In the second stanza, the slang phrase 'give his country a hand' may mean 'to help out' in context, but perhaps, although absurd, could imply a more sinister and literal meaning?

The poem consists of quatrains containing an A, B rhyme scheme, suggesting order and harmony, whilst the pace and tempo of the stanzas echoes the marching of the soldiers returning from war, suggesting that they have survived and that war is indeed a 'game'. Stanza one of Alfred Lord

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Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' begins on a positive note, with an obvious atmosphere of patriotism. It starts with action: 'Half a league... onward', creating a sense of excitement and providing the reader with images of galloping horses in the cavalry charge.

The noun 'league' is ambiguous, it can be interpreted as the body of soldiers that charged 'onwards', working together as a team, or as the old Greek measurement of approximately three miles. The 'half' is perhaps significant of the distance the comrades had left to travel, with the repetition of 'half a league' three times to emphasize this point. Tennyson uses a noble sounding euphemism twice in the verse, 'Valley of Death', to describe the fate that awaits the soldiers, giving a heroic edge to the phrase, thereby softening the blow of the harsh, unpleasant reality that he is in fact describing.

This also demonstrates Tennyson's use of dramatic irony, whereby the readers are aware of the imminent fate of the soldiers whilst the men themselves display ignorance of their likely deaths or injuries, by acting heroically and jovially. 'Into the valley' suggests a downwards slope, a valley being 'V' shaped, which, combined with the reference to 'Death' (spelt with a capital letter to emphasize the importance of it) insinuates the idea of hell and therefore suffering and bloodshed.

Forward the Light Brigade! 'sweeps the reader along without time to question the futility of the gesture, as despite Tennyson's writing maintaining a condoning attitude towards the war, the fact remains that six hundred men were sent unnecessarily to their probable deaths, only two hundred returning unscathed. This particular phrase, combined with the line

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following it (' Charge for the guns! '), quickens the pace of the poem and livens the text with punctuation marks. " Charge for the guns! he said': the bitterness of the soldiers is conveyed when the reader is not told who the man who gave this order is, an emotion which is reflected in the second stanza with ' someone had blundered'.

An imperative verb begins stanza two, ' Forward the Light Brigade! ', with a punctuation mark to add an exciting and encouraging tone to the poem, using speech again to animate the poem and escalate the tempo. The rhetorical question which follows it provokes the readers' thoughts, asking them ' was there a man dismayed? It implies that the soldiers were not intimidated by or frightened of the gun, giving them a bold, valiant image. This question is answered in the next line, ' not though the soldier knew', using the poetic device of dramatic irony to suggest that the soldiers were unaware of their impending fate, displaying ignorance of the ' blunder' that the authorities had made, whilst the reader is informed of the error of judgement made by the generals.

He celebrates the ideal of unquestioning obedience in the face of death, ' Their's not to make reply... heir's but to do and die', adding a touch of realism to the poem by displaying elements of discipline which the reader can identify with, making the poem more convincing. The repetitive use of the euphemism ' valley of Death' has biblical connotations in this context, creating a sense of hierarchy, where the generals who are giving these orders play ' God', sending soldiers out to obey their orders without considering the consequences.

Stanza three begins with a hyperbole, where the fact that the soldiers were surrounded by danger ('cannon to the right... o the left... in front of them') is exaggerated for the sake of emphasis, but without intending to deceive. The poet creates an adverbial phrase telling the reader where the 'cannons' are, using three lines to convey one fact, to highlight their perilous situation and underline the courage of the soldiers who are walking into this trouble. 'Volleyed and thundered' creates sonorous imagery, appealing to the

reader's sense of hearing and visualisation, communicating the bravery of the soldiers and recreating the sounds on the battlefield.

Sibilant alliteration is used in the following line with 'stormed at with shot and shell' and onomatopoeic lexis accentuates the harshness of the verb 'stormed' and again the menacing effects of the nouns 'shot' and 'shell' upon the readers and their consequences on the soldiers. Tennyson expresses his admiration for the brave comrades by using such adjectives as 'boldly' and 'well', and again uses noble-sounding euphemisms and personifications such as 'jaws of Death' and 'mouth of Hell' to impress upon the reader the extremities of the soldiers' daring, determination and fearlessness.

Verse four is full of bravery and adrenaline. It is the crux of the poem, providing the focal point - the battle scene. It is the longest stanza, containing an erratic rhythm and rhyme scheme, differing from the rest of the poem and providing an atmosphere of chaos and disarray. 'Flashed all their sabres bare' gives the impression of a very well equipped and

impressive army – a sharp contrast to the soldiers described in Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'.

By using vivid, visual imagery, such as 'shattered and sundered', the latter being a verb with denotations associated with severing – suggesting a clean and efficient stroke to the enemy – Tennyson creates peaks of expectation and anticipation to dramatise the battle scene. 'Charging' and 'sabring' use the -ing present participle to prolong the action, creating the effect of a long and worthwhile battle. This is in reference to the British troops, portraying them as patriotic, fighting for all their worth and showing immense courage, strength and stamina.

This is opposed to 'plunged', referring to the line of 'Cossack and Russian' enemies being 'broke' by these heroic soldiers, where the impression of rapidity is created, implying that the activity was over in a short period of time by use of the -ed past participle. This casts a positive light on the British again, because they are seen as experts in their work. Lines 8 -10 are presented in a run-on-lines, an enjambment, speeding up the pace of the poem by not allowing the reader a place to pause for breath, creating tension.

The adverb 'then' begins the penultimate line in the stanza, generating a tone of finality for the soldiers because they are retreating. Stanza five is basically a repeat of verse three, with a few details changed. The stanza summarises the return of the soldiers to base camp, bringing to mind images of their steps through the ground littered with the dead. Alliteration ('horse

and hero') suggests the patriotism, nobility and heroism of the soldiers in the face of jeopardy.

A sense of admiration and sadness is created throughout this verse, 'fought so well', effectively making the dead soldiers into martyrs, suggesting that they died to save their country, although underlying tones of negativity can be felt when Tennyson writes 'All that was left of them'. Here, he touches upon the futility of war, and the destruction it causes. The word 'behind' has an ambiguous meaning in this stanza, inviting the reader to think about the adverb in a less superficial manner, exploring the metaphorical context of it.

Tennyson is suggesting more than the position of the cannons in relation to the soldiers here, he is implying that they are leaving behind much more, such as their deceased companions and their horrifying, haunting memories of the battlefield, so that the reader can identify with the courageous demeanour of the soldiers. In the final stanza, Tennyson creates a sense of the immortality of the soldiers' bravery with a rhetorical question containing an abstract noun, 'glory', which encourages the reader to interpret its meaning themselves. They were sent to fight against an impregnable stronghold of Russians against their will and many suffered the fatal consequences. Repetitive imperatives ('Honour') instruct the reader to pay the soldiers respect, telling them to follow the conjectures of the writer.

Throughout the poem, Tennyson repeats variations of lines which all contain the phrase 'six hundred'. By repeating this, it becomes less and less unusual each time, so the reader becomes less shocked at the fact that six hundred men were sent to charge towards the guns, and instead anticipates it. The

figure then becomes familiar and unsurprising, which ties in with the final line of the poem, ' noble six hundred'. Here, they are celebrated as heroes, and the reader can clearly see Tennyson's glorious view of war epitomised here.

However, Tennyson does not show the pain of the people killed, the blood and the anguish and agony both the enemy and the Light Brigade perished in. ' All the world wondered' suggests that the people at home were not always informed of important events, so Tennyson was bringing this to their attention, making the public believe him to be more credible and reliable since he was providing them with this information in a comprehensible manner.

Also, poets like Owen may have offended the families of soldiers, speaking ill of their deceased loved ones who they had believed to have died for the nation when in fact the reality was very different, according to his poems. Tennyson was not actively involved in the Crimean War which he writes about; he was in Britain during the campaign. He therefore relied solely on accounts from soldiers, most likely high ranking officers who did not endure the terrible ordeals that common soldiers were put through at this time, and also his imagination.

This is reflected in his view of warfare, where he does not examine the dreadful realities of war and only lightly touches upon the violence (' sabring the gunners', ' shot and shell') focusing instead on the honour and glory involved. The images created in the poem are very majestic and noble, with an atmosphere of glory and heroism. Elements of fearlessness and danger

add thrill and excitement to the poem, ' into the jaws of Death' and ' charge for the guns'. The images created by these poetic techniques may appeal to potential soldiers, encouraging them to enrol in the army and boosting the morale of existing soldiers.

The short words and short lines play an important part in speeding up the poem and the action. There is little punctuation in the text, ensuring that the pace is not impeded, conveying the excitement at the men's bravery. In conclusion, the Charge of the Light Brigade does not have the impact and realism to convey and justify the opinions contained in it effectively, as Owen's ' Dulce' does. It is an imaginative outlook on war and provides little evidence of the pointless and futile mass-slaughtering and grim actuality that war brings.