

Compare and
contrast the different
attitudes towards war
that you have studied
in...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

War has many different viewpoints. Some say that going to war is an adventure, and a way of becoming a hero, but others – usually those who have experienced it – say otherwise. Many people have written poetry on war – some advertising war as a good thing, and others recalling their harrowing experiences.

Jessie Pope was a poet who I will be writing about. Her poems can be described as propagandist. Another poet who was pro war was Rupert Brooke. Poets who were very anti-war included Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. As mentioned, Jessie Pope was a poet who saw war as a good thing.

In one of her poems called 'Who's for the game?' she portrays war as a sports game such as rugby: 'Who'll grip and tackle the job unafraid?' Pope encourages young men to sign up by making war sound really fun: 'Than lie low and be out of the fun'. Pope even makes the soldiers that don't sign up feel guilty by writing 'Your country is up to her neck in a fight, and she's looking and calling for you', and uses familiarities such as 'Come along, lads'. The purpose of this poem was to persuade young men to join the army. A similar poem with the same purpose is 'Peace' by Rupert Brooke. In this case, however, Brooke is persuading the young men to go to war by saying that if you go to war, you will experience inner peace, because you will feel you have a purpose in life.

Brooke writes about how the world at that time had lost its sense of purpose and grown old, cold and rich. He thanks God for letting there be war, so that people would be awoken from their sleep of indolent satisfaction and do something in life. Rupert Brooke has a vision of the youth of Britain as

swimmers who will be diving into fresh water (war) if they sign up. 'Peace' was an effective poem when it was written because Brooke wrote it at the outbreak of war, when war still seemed like an adventure, and people didn't yet know how brutal it actually was. As a contrast, the poem 'Dulce et decorum est' written by Wilfred Owen writes about the atrocities he faced when he fought in the First World War. The title is cut short from the full sentence 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' which means 'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country'.

The title is ironic because he doesn't mean it. The main purpose of this sarcasm is to ridicule poets like Jessie Pope who had the idea that war was fun and exciting, with no strings attached. In his poem, Owen firstly deflates the heroic image of soldiers to show the truth, by writing in the first two lines: 'Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge'. The poet explains in the metaphor 'blood-shod' how the soldiers had walked for days, resulting in losing their shoes and therefore cutting their feet very badly. Subsequently, Wilfred Owen describes a gas attack on the soldiers.

He states how one of the soldiers didn't put his gas mask on in time, accordingly inhaling the thick green gas. Owen then records that the soldiers put their choking friend into their wagon, pulling him along. The poet uses horrific and vivid details to put across how diabolical the gas was: 'If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood Come gargling from the froth corrupted lungs' 'Dulce et decorum est' makes war sound like hell, totally unlike the rugby match that Jessie Pope made war out to be. At the end of his poem, Wilfred Owen sums up the poem to Jessie Pope in the words: 'My friend, you
<https://assignbuster.com/compare-and-contrast-the-different-attitudes-towards-war-that-you-have-studied-in-the-martin-anthology-essay/>

would not tell with such high zest To children ardent for some desperate glory, The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori. ' A poem that is very comparable to ' Dulce et decorum est' is ' God! How I hate you' by Arthur Graeme West.

There are three main similarities between the two poems. Firstly, they are both anti-war poems, secondly the poems both mention pro-war poets, and finally, both poems give graphic images to the reader. ' God! How I hate you' begins by ' taking the mick' out of those like Brooke and Pope who wrote ' happy-clappy' poems about war, just like Owen did: ' God! How I hate you, you young cheerful men, Whose pious poetry blossoms on your graves As soon as you are in them'. He writes sarcastically, imitating them: "' Oh happy to have lived these epic days'". Later in the poem West uses grim details to tell Brooke and Pope what war was really like: ' His neck against the back slope of the trench, And the rest doubled between, his head Smashed like an eggshell and the warm grey brain Spattered all bloody on the paradoss..

. ' Owen's and West's poems are much more believable than Pope's and Brooke's because they actually experienced the war so their poems should be more reliable, as opposed to Pope and Brooke who didn't really have a clue what war was like, and wrote to persuade young men to join up. It is slightly amusing, however, that before Wilfred Owen fought in the war and realised how execrable it was, he too wrote a poem praising war. The poet compares ' living at peace with others' to ' dying in war for brothers'.

He says that it is better to die in war. It is quite ironic that Owen, in his later years, goes on to contradict himself and criticise those who praise war in their poem. Another pair of poems that are alike are 'Vergissmeinnicht' by Keith Douglas, and 'Anthem for doomed youth' by Wilfred Owen. Both poems deal with the death of soldiers during the wars.

'Vergissmeinnicht' means 'Do not forget me'. Douglas writes about how a group of fellow soldiers are returning to the battlegrounds in which they fought three weeks before. They find the soldier who tried to kill them, but is now dead and rotting. Then, they find a picture of the soldier's lover, called Steffi, with Vergissmeinnicht written on it. But the key to the poem is how the killing soldier couldn't help but feel slightly guilty.

Although the two soldiers were enemies, at the end of the day he was still a human, like himself. He had a lover who would consequently be upset and hurt for the rest of her life: 'For here the lover and killer are mingled Who had one body and one heart. And death who had the soldier singled Has done the lover mortal hurt.' The poem is very moving – it does not give graphic details of how terrible war was, but gives a deeper idea of love amongst the soldiers.

Similarly, 'Anthem for doomed youth' is emotive. This poem is an elegy. The purpose of the poem is to describe how 'un-funeral like' the soldiers' deaths were. Owen compares the ways in which the soldiers died to the way a normal person would die: Firstly, the prayers are depicted as machine guns, because that is the only noise that comes from the soldier before he dies, so

it is like his last prayer: ' Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle can patter out their hasty orisons'.

The singing choir is portrayed as the wailing shells that are going off around them when they die: ' The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells'. The candles around the coffin are illustrated as the glimmer from the soldiers' eyes that are around them: What candles may be held to speed them all? Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes'. The flowers are depicted as the suffering relatives of the dead soldiers: ' Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds'. The two poems are both very poignant because they make you realise how the soldiers never got to say goodbye to their loved ones, or die peacefully.

In conclusion there are many different opinions whether war is good or bad. I would most probably believe poems written by Owen and others who actually experienced war. These poems are more often than not anti-war, so are therefore more reliable. Poetry goes deeper than the facts because the poets tend to be writing their memories, as if it were a diary, so you get a very different picture of war when reading poetry than reading a textbook.