

The soldier and dulce et decorum est

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'The Soldier' was written by Wilfred Owen and 'Dulce et Decorum est' was written by Rupert Brooke. They were both written during World War 1, 'The Great War' between 1914 and 1918. World War 1 was a major defining event in Europe.

This war was between England and Germany and it was mostly staged in the muddy battlefields of France and Belgium. The type of writing which both poets use was developed as a response to this war and it is known as 'war poetry'. Both writers write with authority as Brooke was in the English Navy during the war and Owen was in the British Army. Sadly, Owen was killed just one week before the end of the war. A lot of the soldiers were not killed in battle, their own living conditions helped to kill them as diseases like 'trench foot' were very common in the harsh and grim trenches. Even though both poets write with differing opinions to war, they have one item in common, what it actually meant to be a soldier in World War 1.

Unlike Owen, Brooke thinks it is an honourable thing to die for your country. He feels that death in war is victorious and glorious. If he dies in the battle, he thinks that it will be triumphant and the piece of land on which he dies will be English and it will be an English achievement and a memorial of England. "For ever England".

The piece of land in some "foreign field" will be English territory and if he dies he thinks that he will go to heaven because he is fighting for what is right. He feels that God is a righteous Englishman. "English heaven". He also uses repetition in the poem to illustrate how strongly he feels towards his

country. He repeats the word “ England” under different forms six times in the limits of the short poem.

This is an extremely patriotic and poem. Brooke is prepared to die for his country. He does not concentrate on the fact the English send out seventeen and eighteen year olds to the battlefields, he focuses on the beauty of England and why it should be preserved. He presents England as an ideal country with beautiful, rural scenery. “ Her flowers to love, her ways to roam. ” He presents it as a heavenly paradise and a place worth fighting for.

He feels that this justifies all the deaths and tragedies of World War 1.

Brooke thinks that England is better than any other country. There is a sense of jingoism in this poem as Brooke adores England and praises his country throughout his poem. “ Forever England”. He doesn’t just think of England as a country, he feels that England is his mother. “ A dust whom England bore,” England gave him his life and it made him into a man from particles of dust.

He owes his life to England. He owes a debt of gratitude towards England and he wants to repay the favour. He says that he was “ a dust” and he accepts the fact that he and the other soldiers are disposable. He has personified England from a country to a mother. Brooke is also exploiting our feelings of loyalty towards our mother and if she is in trouble, we should protect her.

This is identical to what he feels about England and he has a very close and personal relationship with England just as everyone has with their mother.

Brooke also says that the death of a soldier is not a waste of life. “ That there’s some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England”. The body of

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the slain soldier will enrich the foreign soils of the land on which it falls. To Owen, this is a victory in itself.

He also thinks that the death of the soldier is a victory over evil and the “good” England has won. All evil shed away”. Even in the afterlife, the soldier will continue to give his life to England. “A pulse in the eternal mind.” Death is not the end of life.

However, Owen does not share the same view as Brooke. He does not think that it is an honourable thing to die for your country. He presents death in war as being undignified and he thinks it is grim and horrific. In the last stanza, he prefixes the title with “The old Lie”. He uses “Dulce et Decorum est” as the title of the poem and as the concluding phrase because it makes us look at the title in a different perspective, and we think of it as a lie.

When you look at the title before you read the poem, you think that Owen is pro-war, though when we read the poem we know that he is very anti-war. The saying, “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” rhymes with “The old Lie” and this makes the lie seem more deceiving. Owen also used a capital L in “old Lie” and this implies that the lie has been told for a long time and it is a massive lie. “The soldier” contrasts with “Dulce et Decorum est”. In “The Soldier”, the slain soldier is exposed as being divine and godly, he is “a richer dust concealed”. On the contrary in “Dulce et Decorum est” the soldiers are presented as “beggars” and “hags” who are “knock-kneed”.

They are reduced to the level of rubbish and they are humiliated and degraded. They “flung” a soldier into the back of a wagon like he was nothing and nobody even though he gave his life for his country. Brooke
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does not hide the fact that you may die in war. “ If I should die, think only this of me:” He could be speaking to the British public here to encourage them to view soldiers’ deaths as glorious, worthwhile, dignified, victorious and fitting.

He does not think that it is a waste of life as “ there’s some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England. ” He also believes that we have to be prepared to let our young people die for their country in battle as their country gave them life. He doesn’t want the public to think anything else, “ think only this of me:” Brooke doesn’t want the public to think of the negative elements of war. There are breaks in families, peoples’ lives are ruined and people may never see their loved ones again. This introductory phrase could also be read as a personal address to his own family.

He tells his family that if he dies, they should not mourn his death but think of it as proper and fitting. However, it is a very general title, “ The Soldier” and so it could apply to any family and not just his own. Owen describes what it is like being in a trench war and a chemical attack. He presents the reality of being in war. There is more to being a soldier than all the glamour before you leave to go to the battlefield. Beyond that, there are other horrific experiences of being in a war, these include diseases, watching your comrades die, loneliness, physical pain and there are aftermaths too, that is if you are still living.

Owen feels that he has to use his poetry to portray the reality of war. He knows that the press shows the good side of war and they use misleading propaganda to encourage the young people to sign up for the war. The only

way that Owen feels that this can be stopped is by highlighting the gruesomeness and ghastliness of being in a war. He tries to convince his audience not to advance the idea that war is glorious and it is a sweet and honourable thing to die for your country.

“ My friend, you would not tell with such high zest to children ardent for some desperate glory, The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori. He does not want the British people to tell their children that war is good because children will believe what their parents tell them and if they tell them this then they will be interested in joining the war when they are older. This would cause more deaths to younger men. In “ The Soldier”, Brooke does not evade the sinister side of war. He talks about “ hearts at peace” and “ an English heaven”, this makes us think of death but Brooke hides the real facts of war.

He sanitises and idealises death as it doesn't show the horrendous pain of dying in war unlike “ Dulce et Decorum est”. He makes death seem quite pleasant as you continue in the afterlife when you die. He is active even after death as he “ gives” England something back when he dies, he doesn't present death as being final. Brooke does not describe being in war, he describes the rural England and why it should be preserved, “ her flowers to love, her ways to roam. ” He knows that if he describes the actual war, it would discourage and dissuade the British public to let their young men join the war.

Brooke also displays the English society as being companionable where everyone is happy and this tranquillity should not be destroyed. Washed by

the rivers, blest by suns of home". Brooke presents England as being clean and affable which is in contrast to "Dulce et decorum est" where everything is contaminated and in disorder. The physical effects of trench warfare are being emphasised in "Dulce et Decorum est". It has a devastating effect on the soldiers and it turns them into "old beggars". The war has aged them and they have been 'robbed' of their youth and their strength.

They are no longer strong and fit, they are debilitated and incapacitated; "like old beggars under sacks... e cursed through sludge". We have an opposite image of war in "Dulce et decorum est" compared to the illustration we have in "The Soldier".

Owen uses a simile when he compares the soldiers to old beggars and hags. "Bent double, like old beggars...

coughing like hags". They are no longer dignified and they have lost their dignity by going to war. We no longer have the materialistic image of a soldier, in his smart uniform heading off to war. The soldiers have been emasculated and weakened as "hags" are thought of as old, vulnerable women.