

# War girls and recruiting

Literature



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Both Pope and Mackintosh have used wartime propaganda in their poems to get across civilian attitudes about the war. Pope uses phrases very similar to the catchy propaganda that encouraged people to participate in the war effort, for example 'they're going to keep their end up'. Lines like these are positive and upbeat and give the poem an assured feeling that civilian attitudes were to pull together and try to get on with the war situation. In contrast Mackintosh uses an actual propaganda phrase, " Lads you're wanted" to get his message across.

He makes it clear in the first verse that this phrase is propaganda by saying that it is on a poster. Then, throughout the rest of the poem he twists this phrase to make it ironic and give a negative attitude, for example when he says " Lads you're wanted! Over there, shiver in the morning dew". This is obviously not the sort of image that people who write propaganda would want to project, the use of the word " shiver" suggests vulnerability rather than the attitude of acceptance of duty, shown in 'War Girls'.

By doing this Mackintosh is showing the (at the time) controversial attitude that war is pointless, and people who fight in it are just normal, but brave everyday people. Mackintosh also speaks of the kind of propaganda that Jessie Pope is promoting, " Girls with feathers, vulgar songs - washy verse on England's need". However he shows his disdain with words such as " vulgar", suggesting to the reader that the propaganda attitudes are falsely cheerful, whereas Jessie Pope has none of the cynicism, the attitudes in 'War Girls' are simple, positive and determined.

Nevertheless the two poets do show their different attitudes by using the same technique -- repetition. In 'War Girls' Pope repeats the phrase " there's the girl" whilst Mackintosh uses " lads you're wanted" throughout 'Recruiting'. This use of repetition hammers home to the reader the essence of the attitudes in the poems, and also gives a feeling of the attitudes being fixed and unchanging. Both poems show different attitudes through the action in the poems. Mackintosh uses lines such as " Leave the harlots still to sing comic songs about the Hun" to demonstrate opinions other than his own.

However he does not dwell on these, but quickly moves back to his own view, giving a reader a sense that the other ones are insignificant, just something to be accepted. In comparison Jessie Pope uses continuous action throughout 'War Girls' with phrases such as " There's the motor girl who drives a heavy van". The fact that the poem consists mainly of similar actions rather than different feelings gives the reader a sense of everyone having the same sort of attitude, to keep busy, there is no variety or conflict.

Pope paints a picture of general wartime life, whilst Mackintosh takes a more personal approach, making 'Recruiting' seem more genuine. Both poems have a sense of childlike innocence. In 'War Girls' this is shown with the use of " boys" and " girls" throughout the poem. The fact that Pope says the " khaki soldiers boys" will " come marching back" shows the civilian attitude that war does not change people, and makes it seem like a game, there is no mention of the soldiers suffering and dying.

Mackintosh shows a very different attitude with the use of the word " lads" throughout his poem. He continually refers to would-be soldiers as " lads",

implying that they are inexperienced, not properly grown up. This is contrasted with the word "men", for example in the line "You shall learn what men can do" By doing this Mackintosh is showing the attitude of soldiers who have already fought, and seen the war. He is saying that being in the war, no matter what the outcome, causes you to grow up and gain substance.

He identifies with the soldiers; his attitude is the same as theirs. The reader is left with the feeling that in the last line "come and die", Mackintosh is using the structure of the propaganda phrase, but twisting it to imply "leave the shallow falseness and join me". The use of the word "come" makes it seem as though he is one of the soldiers and is sharing what they are going through. Mackintosh's attitude is not at all pro-war, he ridicules the propagandists who are, but he is pro-soldiers, as he feels that they are being true to themselves, unlike most other people.

The contrast between attitudes at home and at the front is particularly apparent in the different ways the poets use sacrifice. In 'War Girls' Pope says "What a solemn statement this is, they've no time for love and kisses". This is a very naive "feminine" attitude, showing a belief that the biggest sacrifice made in the war is by the women who no longer have men around to court them. The statement is made to seem even more overly "feminine" by the fact that Pope uses a feminine rhyme, making the poem seem frivolous and trivial, giving a civilian lack of understanding about war.

In contrast Mackintosh speaks of the "gallant sacrifice", making it clear that he means death. Mackintosh's perception of sacrifice is far deeper and more

serious than Pope's; he has more comprehension of what the sacrifices of war really are. In conclusion, Pope and Mackintosh show very different civilian attitudes. Pope is giving a simplistic attitude of those who have not experienced war first hand. She creates a feeling of active wartime life to show attitudes, rather than looking at emotions.

As a result 'War Girls' comes across as a piece of shallow propaganda rather than a meaningful insight into civilian attitudes. Mackintosh is equally biased but in a different direction. He dismisses all forms of propaganda, encouraging the reader to side with him by ridiculing propagandists, and using irony. He gives the attitude that the soldiers are the only people who are reliable and without fault. Both poets use rhyme and repetition to make their poems and points memorable.