

World war 1 poets

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

War and the idea of war had, throughout history, been associated with honour and heroism. Before World War 1, war poetry had reflected the opinion that all soldiers were to be honoured as heroes, regardless of the role that they played during the war. Soldiers were treated as celebrities are today. They were idolised. War continued to be glorified until World War 1 was set into motion. At the beginning of the war, these older style poems which depicted soldiers as heroes were released as propaganda to recruit as many soldiers as possible.

But as the war dragged on and more eyewitnesses began to write home and tell of their horrific experiences in the trenches, the true picture of war became clear. Those first poems were as true as black is white. The real story was being brought back first-hand from the trenches in the form of poetry. One such poem that changed the public's view on war was Anthem for Doomed Youth by Wilfred Owen, which seems to be an elegy. It forces the reader to reflect on its 14 lines, which etch themselves upon the readers memory.

A few sparsely scattered archaic terms, " And bugles calling for them from sad shires," force the reader to think back to the wars of old, where heroism was rife, and compare them to the horrors of this modern war, where all who enter into its squalid depths are doomed. The poem is very emotive, and these archaic terms also help to draw out the sad, mournful tones from within the poem. Anthem for Doomed Youth is relatively short and split into two stanzas, although also consisting of 14 lines, and therefore a sonnet.

In the first stanza, every other line is a rhyming couplet, which gives the poem a regular rhythm reminiscent of the drumbeats leading ancient soldiers into battle. But in the second stanza, the first and fourth line are a rhyming couplet, with the second and third, and also the fourth and fifth following this pattern. This has the effect of splitting the stanza into two parts which helps to emphasise the slowing down of the last two lines that are full of words which have obviously been chosen for their association with a lack of speed.

Slow", "tenderness", "drawing down" all emphasise this by using long vowel sounds and containing more syllables to enable the words to become more pronounced. There is a good use of assonance in the two phrases, "each slow", and "drawing... blinds". The final two lines are a rhyming couplet which provide a good ending to the poem, giving it a finality. Throughout the poem there is a strong theme of death and dying which directly opposed some earlier war poems which talked of surviving and winning the war, coming home as a hero.

Death, "nor any voice of mourning" and funerals, "hasty orisons" are talked about somewhat profusely in this poem, as if to emphasise the fact that young soldiers should not go off to war because they will not return as heroes. It is most likely that they will not return at all. In the first section of the first stanza this theme is not so apparent, instead focusing on the monotonous nature of the "stuttering rifles' rapid rattle", effectively using an antonym, alliteration and onomatopoeia to convey the reality of the war.

Guns are shown to be monsters, "monstrous anger of the guns" using the word monstrous which sounds like monster aids this effect, and the personification of the guns, achieved by deeming them "angry" also adds to the effect of perceiving them as monsters. I believe that this poem has been constructed in chronological order, so as to show the reader the atrocities of war from the first day as a new soldier, until the last day dying in a mudbath on a foreign field. It starts by relating a soldier's recollections of war, describing then his dying moments, thoughts and wishes.

Finality is then brought suddenly in the second stanza where the "drawing down of blinds" is experienced, obviously a metaphor for death. This sad ending draws a fitting close to an emotional pathos. Another poem that highlighted the horrific nature of World War 1 is The General by Siegfried Sassoon. This poem focuses more on the 'behind-the-scene' part of warfare where the incompetence of the Generals, who were mostly no more well trained than an ordinary soldier caused the deaths of thousands of soldiers.

These Generals were often only awarded that position because they had paid to be awarded it, in the hope that they wouldn't have to experience the horrors of the front line. I believe that the poem is set in chronological order, again as if to tell a story. The story is short, yet simple and gets straight to the point, telling of two soldiers, Harry and Jack, who are excited about going to the front line, and then die almost as soon as they arrive because of the General's incompetence and poor tactical decisions. The poem starts by conveying a cheerful tone by using repetition of "good morning".

The General is then shown in a very impersonal way, just a passing shadow to the two young soldiers. He is not named, because there is no reason to name him. This is in a stark contrast to Sassoon's decision to name the two soldiers. " Harry" and " Jack" are very common names of the time, and Sassoon has chosen these names to show the public that it could be their sons at the brunt of the General's tactical blunders. This blame that is being mounted on the senior ranks of the army would never have been addressed in poems from older wars because the high ranking officers were seen as heroes, and no-one thought they could do wrong.

Now the soldiers he smiled on are most of 'em dead" shows the extent of damage that the " incompetent swine" of a General has caused to the Army. Thousands of young men were brutally killed as a direct result of his lack of knowledge and lack of training. A false impression was given to Harry and Jack that the General was a " cheery old card" (a smart fellow.) They were shown to place their trust in a man, and " slog to Arras" to aid him and their country, and his actions caused their death. The first stanza of the poem ends with a rhyming couplet.

This seems to round off a chapter in these two soldier's lives. It sounds the end of happiness and hope, and leads into the second stanza that, effectively, consists of merely one line. It is placed apart from the rest of the poem and is written in the past tense. It seems to be an epilogue to the story of Harry and Jack. It depicts the truth plainly and simply, in colloquial language of the time, " but he did for them both by his plan of attack". A euphemism is used for the word killing, which would appeal to the public of the time a lot better.

<https://assignbuster.com/world-war-1-poets/>

The blame is placed entirely on the General and his tactics, challenging effectively societies views on the way that high-ranking soldiers were awarded their positions, and demolishing the trust and faith that some people had placed in them. Jesse Pope was a different breed of war poet. She wrote poetry that glamourised war. Unlike the poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, there is not a trace of an elegiac tone to be found in *Who's For the Game?* Every other line is a rhyming couplet, which gives the poem a very upbeat and appealing rhythm.

The tone seems urgent, trying to encourage soldiers to join the war effort as soon as possible. *Who's for the Game?* Is similar to other war poems of that era in the fact that it does contain an element of the truth, " who would much rather come back with a crutch", but this truth does not display the true picture of war to any extent. Other poems of the time depicted World War 1 much more enigmatically, using many more adjectives to effectively show an accurate picture of war.

Jesse Pope uses a lot of patriotism in *Who's for the Game?* " Who'll give his country a hand? which makes me think that the poem was used as propaganda to attract new soldiers to the Army. " Game" is used as a metaphor for war. Jesse Pope depicts the whole concept of war as an exciting game, with lots of fighting, and the opportunity to 'show-off' medals and winnings at the end of it all. The poem appeals to a man's macho pride. The last line of every stanza is a rhetorical question, which, if answered positively, shows a want not to go to war and fight. " And who wants a seat in the stand? " The satirical wording forces the reader to feel as though they are a coward if they decline to go to war.

<https://assignbuster.com/world-war-1-poets/>

Male pride is a very sensitive area, and Jesse Pope has succeeded in exploiting it powerfully in this poem. The poem is written using very colloquial language, such as " lads" which is a very informal term, and reflects the informality of the entire poem. It is also put in a plural term, showing the young men that it is also put in a plural term, showing the young men that they will be able to socialise during the war. They will not be alone. The poem is very persuasive, " There's only one course to pursue", and the fact that " your country is up to her neck in a fight" shows a more personal side to war.

It is almost as though the country is a damsel in distress and the soldier would come back as a hero after rescuing her. Who's for the Game? Uses a modern style of writing, coupled with older views on warfare and knowledge of the male way of thinking to effectively convey an urgency and good reason for men to become soldiers and go off to fight. Recruiting by E. A. Mackintosh is a parody of Who's for the Game? It too, is different from most poems of the World War 1 time. It is written in very sarcastic tones, giving the truth of what was happening in the war, but not in all the detail that others were giving.

It's main message was that young men shouldn't listen to Jesse Pope, it was that they should listen to the other poems, they should be aware that if they went to battle, they would most certainly die, not just " come back with a crutch" as Jesse Pope predicted. The term " lads" is used often in Recruiting, which shows that most soldiers were in fact, just lads. They weren't men, they had no experiences of previous wars, and they didn't know what to

expect. They were extremely susceptible to propaganda and were gullible enough to believe whatever was presented to them.

Sarcastic colloquial language full of false enthusiasm is used to deter young "lads" from joining up. The language is quite blunt, telling young men that if they do go off to war, all the good that they would do would be to "help swell the names in the casualty lists". In this poem, the lads are treated without passion. It is as though they are inanimate objects. It is said that the lads are "wanted" but in fact they are not. They are purely needed to fill up extra spaces in the trenches. The sarcastic nature of the poem shows this.

Soldiers are referred to as "devils" rather than the heroes which older poems showed. During the war there was much aggression against the Germans, but E. A. Mackintosh is telling these lads that they are no better than the Germans. Both sides are killing others mercilessly, "more devils like yourselves waiting to be killed by you". Once more, war is referred to as a game in Recruiting. The cricket term "go out quick" is used to show that the soldier is out of the game. He is dead. The final line of the poem sums up all that the author has been trying to convey during the seven stanzas.

Lads you're wanted. Come and die. " The punctuation slows down the sentence and makes the reader pause and think that maybe all they are wanted for is to be another dead body. The sentence could also be a reference to the devil. The devil wants the lads to die. The Generals want the lads to die. Perhaps Mackintosh meant the devil to be a metaphor for the Generals because that is what he saw them as. Devils leading innocent young men to their death. The Charge of the Light Brigade by Lord Alfred

Tennyson is a poem that was written during the Victorian era. It is typical of pre-World War 1 poems.

It glorifies the soldiers, depicting them as great knights, laughing in the face of grave danger. The poem has a great rhythm that is imitating the thundering canters of the cavalry. There are also areas where there is an irregular number of syllables in corresponding lines, giving the effect of stumbling. The reader loses rhythm, just as the horsemen would have done in the real-life situation that Tennyson is describing. Throughout the six stanzas, Tennyson uses a lot of repetition of ideas and rhyme. The three words, "hundred", "wondered", and "thundered" are repeated throughout all six stanzas.

This continues to impress them upon the reader's mind. Hundred is used often to show just how wonderful these soldiers were, numbering just six hundred, and managing to remain victorious over a much larger opposition. The phrases "valley of death", "jaws of death" and "mouth of hell" are used to tell the readers just how awful war is, but unlike the World War 1 poems, The Charge of the Light Brigade shows that the soldiers came "back from the mouth of hell". In stanza three, the soldier's journey "into the jaws of death" is repeated as an antonym in stanza five, when the victorious heroes "came through the jaws of death"

War itself is not glorified in this poem, for it is depicted as a tough experience, with "cannon to the right of them... cannon in front of them". Although this seems to me that Tennyson, possibly unintentionally is saying to young men that although they will face these dangers, they will always

pull through them and emerge as great, noble heroes, " When can their glory fade?... Noble six hundred! " Even those soldiers that lost their lives would become heroes in their death, as Tennyson proved, " While horse and hero fell". Maybe in this poem the men were heroes.

The soldiers continued to charge in a very biased situation, even though they knew that " some one had blundered". They performed their duty, " boldly they rode and well", and were lucky to escape with their lives. This is not how the story was told in the poem, but this is because Tennyson had formed his own opinions on the Charge of the Light Brigade and found them to be heroes in his mind, therefore showing them as such in his poem.

Tennyson's poem was not based on a personal experience, just like Jesse Pope's poem and E. A. Mackintosh's.

It was written third hand, and he based all of his facts on a newspaper article, which would have been biased in favour of the soldiers being portrayed as heroes, whereas the stark poems of World War 1 were written from the first-hand experiences of the poets. There were many similarities between The Charge of the Light Brigade and the eyewitness poems of the First World War. The situations were very similar. High-ranking officers blundered and sent young soldiers to their deaths, yet in Tennyson's poem they survived to be known as heroes.

During World War 1 most of them were subjected to a very gruesome death as a direct result of these blunders. All poems told the truth of the actual warfare, yet only the firsthand poems of World War 1 told the truth about the soldiers, their situations, and the horrific ways in which they were treated

and killed. Therefore, to summarise, I think that the World War 1 poets challenged the way that society regarded war by alerting them to the truth about how soldiers were treated. They also helped to clarify what actually went on during warfare, and the horrific conditions became public knowledge.

Young soldiers-to-be now had a basis for comparison to the heroic poems and propaganda of the past, and had excuses to refuse the call-up. Blunders of the generals, and the way in which they were awarded such a high ranking also came to light, and this prompted a change in the way that such posts were awarded. Society now knew how their men were dying, and the myths that were being told to them of heroes deaths were disproved. This angered some people but the poets told the truth, a truth which society had a right to know.