

Studying two poems
by william
shakespeare and two
poems



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In this essay I will be analyzing the title question and find out what my view is on the opinion that all war poetry is violent and depressing. I will be studying two poems by William Shakespeare and two poems by Wilfred Owen; this will incorporate pre-1900 poetry and post-1900 poetry in my essay by using these two poets. I will also add in any quotes from other war poetry, which I feel is relevant to this essay. Firstly, I will analyze the two poems by Shakespeare, which I have chosen, Henry V at the siege of Harfleur and Before Agincourt. The first Shakespeare poem I will be studying is Henry V at the siege of Harfleur.

This poem is a speech made by Henry V during the battle of Harfleur. It is a speech, which is meant to spur the troops to victory, and also it is a very patriotic poem. The poem is all about making England and fathers proud so the king is trying to convince the army not to be scared; what do the soldiers have to be scared about? Death, although it is not talked about so the violent part of war is avoided. The poem/speech is spontaneous and frantic as it is an attempt to rally the troops for a final push. The poem implies that the battle is in course because in the first line it says, ' Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more'.

The king is leading by example and refers to his men as equals. This is the start of him trying to rally his troops to victory. This ' rallying cry' is trying to make the soldiers prove themselves to be true heroes. He asks them to make their mothers, fathers and most of all, England proud! Also, in the course of the battle, it seems that the English army have broken through the wall of the city and that if they do not carry on the break through will not matter and ' the hole will be closed up with their English dead'.

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This line is also the only partly violent comment in the poem. After the first few lines, the poem becomes even more patriotic and more of a war cry. He tells his troops to be calm during peace but be like the tiger during war! He says they have to disguise themselves with rage. He then moves on to families, by saying that their fathers have proven themselves so you have to do it now and make yourselves worthy sons. He also says that as they are English they are better than anyone else and that they should fight for England!

The rest of the poem is basically about the soldiers having to prove themselves as good Englishmen. The final line outlines that the poem is about patriotism and is not in the slightest depressing, " Cry ' God for Harry! England and Saint George! "' After this they carry on fighting and win the battle. The poem does not give a violent or depressing view of war but you can see certain points that may show the soldiers were scared. This is not violent or depressing but shows an underlying feeling of fear, which the king probably holds too.

I think that on the whole this is not a depressing view of war as there is no mention of death apart from how noble and good it is to die for your country, with the only violent line being, ' Close up the wall with our English dead'. This example of pre-20th century poetry shows me that possibly war was seen not as a scary thing but it was a noble thing to die for your country in Shakespeare's time. The second Shakespeare poem I will be studying is, Before Agincourt. The poem is a conversation between the king, Henry and his cousin, Westmoreland. This poem is different to the first one because it isn't frantic and spontaneous.

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It is calmer and more in the form of a conversation than a last ditch attempt to rally an army. Also, it was 'performed' or written before the battle took place. This quote, in my opinion best sums up the patriotic mood that the poem gives, 'He that shall live this day, and see old age, will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours, and say, 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian.' Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, and say, 'These wounds I had on Crispian's day'. The king is trying to make war sound good and that if you do not take part in it then you miss out on glory.

The king says that the soldier who fights in this battle will be proud of his memories and that people will remember the names of the soldiers. These two poems show me that poetry, which is pre-1900, portrays war as an annoying hurdle to glory. It does not give a depressing and violent view of it as in those times it was not seen as a depressing subject but a noble and patriotic one. The two poems do have something in common in that they are both patriotic poems and have minimal amounts of violence with no depression in them at all.

I will now write about two poems from post-1900. These two poems are written by Wilfred Owen and are called, 'Dulce et Decorum est' and, 'Futility'. The first poem, Dulce et Decorum est is a very depressing and violent poem. The title means, 'It is a noble and good thing to die for one's country'. This title does not reflect the poem however. The first verse is descriptive and tells of people dying from a gas attack. People died and nobody was able to care because they could only have the strength and ability to worry about themselves.

The second verse becomes real as it tells of another gas attack. It shows that his life depended on putting his gas mask on. It is another depressing verse as Owen tells of watching another man die from the gas. He is haunted by the experience because he was helpless to this man. The final verse is told direct to the reader and tells how awful war really is. This says to me that the view of war had changed from pre-1900 to post-1900. But the main point to make is that the author has very different perspectives of war.

Shakespeare never experienced war whereas Owen was experiencing war at the time of writing his poetry. This shows that those who have taken part in one can only really describe war. It is depressing as it shows how life was treated during the war. The poem gives a dim view of war, and does not show it to be noble but shows it to be scary. There is no hope in this poem and Owen is clearly suffering mentally from the war to write a poem such as this. It is a disturbing poem. The final poem I will be analyzing will be 'Futility' by Wilfred Owen.

The poem is another depressing poem. It is not so violent this time though. It tells of how a man had died from the cold. This poem shows that Owen was bitter and disillusioned by the war at this stage. He is disturbed by this mans death. This poem again has no non-depressing parts to it and shows the title quote to be correct in this case. The two post-1900 poems have shown me that war poetry can be depressing and violent but the pre-1900 poetry shows war to be noble and patriotic to take part in. Also, I think that those who have experienced it can only describe war.

Finally, war has changed since the 19th century so it has got more violent and depressing since then and the death has multiplied. Overall, I think that all the modern war poetry is violent and depressing whereas pre-1900 poetry shows war to be a noble and patriotic thing to take part in. So, in analyzing the above poems I have found the title quote to be incorrect as not all war poetry is violent and depressing. Although in my opinion I think that all war is depressing and violent, the poetry does not have to be as shown by Shakespeare. He shows that it can be portrayed as noble and a patriotic thing.