

EXTENDED ESSAY

SUBJECT: ENGLISH B

CATEGORY: 3

Title:

Comparison of the poems *Dulce et Decorum Est* by Wilfred Owen and *The Soldier* by Rupert Brooke in terms of the poets' point of view of World War I

Research Question:

To what extent do the poets' point of view of World War I differ in the poems *Dulce et Decorum Est* by Wilfred Owen and *The Soldier* by Rupert Brooke?

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Introduction

World War I (WWI) (1914-1918) was a major war that started because of things like the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and was associated with problems like European expansionism, alliances, and political tensions. The war saw the Allied Powers, including the British Empire, France, and the Russian Empire, oppose the Central Powers, comprising the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire. The war resulted in over 16 million deaths and widespread destruction, leading to severe economic hardship and shifts in social structures. Despite the devastation, it also spurred advancements in technology and medicine.

The effects of WWI were also noticed in the British Empire. After a hesitation in joining the war owing to their existence until that day depending on “splendid isolationism”, British Empire joined WWI with the support of House of Commons, Parliament and local British government. The army was smaller when compared to the rest of the armies but the soldiers were well-trained. During WWI and during the aftermath of the war like many others Britain faced with food shortage . Britain incurred 715,000 military deaths (with more than twice that number wounded), the destruction of 3.6% of its human capital, 10% of its domestic and 24% of its overseas assets, and spent well over 25% of its GDP on the war effort between 1915 and 1918 (Broadberry and Harrison, 2005).

WWI created a huge impact on the British society and many people started to search for a way to express their ideas about the war. Poetry became one of the ways of expressing the thoughts or feelings experienced deep inside of a person. Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) was an English poet recognized for his idealistic war sonnets written during the early months of WWI, portraying war as noble and filled with national pride. His poem *The Soldier* reflects a soldier's commitment to Britain, aligning with patriotic sentiments supported by the church

and government. Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), on the other hand, became a well-known war poet who wrote about the harsh realities of trench warfare. He was inspired by Siegfried Sassoon's satirical realism. Owen's work critiques the glorification of war, focusing on themes of disillusionment, loss of innocence, and suffering, notably in poems like *Anthem for Doomed Youth* and *Dulce et Decorum Est*, which starkly oppose Brooke's romanticized views.

The poems *The Soldier* and *Dulce et Decorum Est* both concern the WWI enabling a detailed comparison between them. Both poems were written during WWI, allowing a realistic description of the conditions in the war period. Nevertheless, the poems differ from each other by their contrasting tones. Moreover, distinct utilization of literary devices presents fundamentally opposing perspectives.

Considering the things mentioned above, it is going to be relevant to conduct the research with the research question presented: To what extent do the poets' point of view of World War I differ in the poems *Dulce et Decorum Est* by Wilfred Owen and *The Soldier* by Rupert Brooke?

The research is going to be composed of the incorporated usage of qualitative, primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are going to be taken into account for a clear insight into the years of WWI. The primary resources that are going to be the part of this research are the literary texts written back at 1910s. Furthermore, secondary resources such as scholarly books and peer-reviewed academic articles are going to contribute to the understanding of the topic and permit a broad literature review. While doing the research in order to obey the research ethics and to avoid plagiarism, all the resources are going to be cited. It should be noted that despite being careful to avoid any biased source -especially primary resources- they may contain biased or incomplete information which is the main limitation of this study. All things considered, in order to respond this research question, both poems are going to be

analyzed thematically and comparatively with the help of the primary and secondary sources considering their overall tone, use of imagery, literary devices including rhymes, rhythm and irony.

Tone

The poems *The Soldier* and *Dulce et Decorum Est* convey opposing tones and perspectives on WWI. *The Soldier* expresses a profound devotion to England and presents sacrifice as noble, grounded in hope and idealism. Conversely, *Dulce et Decorum Est* exposes the harsh suffering and horrific deaths of soldiers, seeking to shatter illusions about war through moral anger and vivid, disturbing imagery. (Text paraphrased from ChatGPT, 2026)

The idealistic tone of *The Soldier* is first observed in the opening of the poem, “If I should die, think only this of me”. This line denotes that during warfare there are some uncertainties on lives of the soldiers and that dying might be unavoidable, which extinguishes the painful and dreadful side of death by normalizing it. Moreover, this line indicates that the poetic persona which is a soldier is ready to make a noble sacrifice as well as wanting to be remembered in a certain way. Another part that reflects the positive side of death are the second and third lines, “That there’s some corner of a foreign field/That is for ever England.” Despite the soldier being obliged to fight at a remote land, having the chance to carry his nationality somewhere else and leaving a permanent mark from his nation there is a motivation source for him. This not only glorifies death but also, proves the deep nationhood of the poetic persona. The poem contains some words that are related with religion such as “blest” and “heaven” which support the spiritual tone of the poem. Furthermore, the words that have favorable connotations like “rich”, “home”, “sun”, “laughter”, “happy dreams”, “eternal” and “love” are frequently used in the poem. These words sharply contradict with the brutal, fatal, wild concept of war while they have an essential role in the transposal of the

message of the poem which is the significance of reverence for England. To sum up, from the very beginning till the end, warfare optimism is identified. This optimistic perspective is conveyed by the use of religious tone and it advocates death for England is sacred. The overall idealistic tone and euphemistic war expression of the poem is matchable with Brooke's viewpoint of the war since he was not a soldier himself in the battle field and he had not observed the actual conditions of WWI though the broad picture was known by the public.

Conversely, most prevailing tones in the poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* are the disillusioned, accusatory and condemnatory tones. The poem has an immediate opening with the line "Bent double, like old beggars under sacks." which reflects the appalling side of the war field. The first line foreshadows that the soldiers are not there to be heroes but just try to live and fight at the same time. The health issues described in the poem indicate the lack of health support to the army. The soldiers' feet being covered with blood, coughing, all being lame and experiencing extreme fatigue are the evidences of their poor wellbeing. Additionally, in the first stanza the lines "And towards our distant rest began to trudge./Men marched asleep." also demonstrate the fact that soldiers are forced to walk long distances even to reach the place to get rest. In general, the portrayal of soldiers of the poetic persona are pathetic, drained and horrific rather than patriotic. Lines "deaf even to the hoots/of gas-shells dropping softly behind." shows the seriousness of the health issues since the soldiers are extraordinarily exhausted that they cannot hear the sound of danger right behind them. These three lines together emphasize the reality that fighting for Britain is more than a sacrifice. The shift of focus from the army to a single soldier between the two stanzas transmits the outrage of the poetic persona. The poetic persona also reinforces the idea that there is a disillusionment about the army being a sacred group. In the second stanza, in the line "As under a green sea, I saw him drowning" the word "drowning" is a direct statement to inform

the reader about the soldier's death. This straightforward narration is also seen in the lines "In all my dreams before my helpless sight, He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning." as a reflection of the psychological phase experienced by the poetic persona after the soldier's death. The rule of three utilized in this line fortifies the impact of the death of the soldier on the poetic persona. All these lines, mirror the background of a loss during the warfare showing the brutality and bitterness by condemning and accusing the audience. Another contributory part of the poem to its tone is the ending "The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est/Pro patria mori" whose translation to English is "it is sweet and proper to die for one's country". The phrase has a Latin origin and it is known for its beautiful sound. The certain implication of the poetic persona marking this phrase as a lie echoes the grotesque reality of the poem and once more disenchant the audience. The dominant accusatory, realistic and serious tones in the poem are coherent with the exposure of Owen. Him being a soldier and observing the surrounding enables an objective description of the battle field.

Both poems compare death's portrayal and the role of the poetic persona. In *The Soldier*, death is depicted as noble and prideful, neglecting its biological aspect, while *Dulce et Decorum Est* presents it as a harsh reality caused by war. The poetic persona in *The Soldier* reflects serene acceptance without rebellion against war, whereas in *Dulce et Decorum Est* the persona reveals the painful truth of combat, aiming to awaken the audience. Additionally, *The Soldier* offers a comforting mood that focuses on soldier sacrifices, while *Dulce et Decorum Est* delivers a confrontational message to a previously misled audience.

Use of Irony

Use of irony is an impactful contributory to the general tone and the message of the poems. Lack of use of irony in the poem *The Soldier* strictly belies with the frequent usage of irony in *Dulce et Decorum Est*. *The Soldier* offers a straightforward idealism while *Dulce et*

Decorum Est becomes prominent with its subversive and resentful irony. Lack of irony and repeated utilization of irony both provide divergent functions to the poems. Lack of irony usually allows a more direct and sincere transfer of the main idea of the poem as in *The Soldier* whereas, a constant use of it is often seen with its long-lasting effects on the audience.

A conscious avoidance in subversion in meaning is a device that is applied in the context of *The Soldier*. The deliberate choice of absence of ironic contrast empowers a non-satirical manner of telling. The opening “If I should die, think only this of me” is not a concealed forewarning of his death, it is a genuine demand for the audience. This proves that the expectation of the poetic persona is undoubtedly delivered. The theme of idealism and nationhood are not questionable throughout the poem. The deep affection of the poetic persona to England is perceived from the phrases “That is for ever England.” and “A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware”. He unveiledly indicates that England created him and raised his awareness and that he strongly believes that he has been in a progress thanks to England. Therefore, the directness of expression uttering his experiences permits the poetic persona to conduct his patriotic propaganda sincerely to the audience and he connects with them. Generally, evasion of profound irony makes the poetic persona a close figure to the audience instead of an authority, so, the message of national cohesion extends to the poetic persona as well. Despite his attempt of honesty, his perception strictly creates a contrast to the rude awakening that would later be the definition of war.

In reverse, *Dulce et Decorum Est* is constructed around the device of irony. The main ironical phrase in the poem is the title used as a subversive tool. As stated before, “Dulce et Decorum Est” which is a moral premise means “it is sweet and beautiful”. It represents the accepted wisdom and the traditional belief that dying is sacred. Nevertheless, an instant glance to the poem shows a brutal image of war demonstrating destruction and dehumanization. The title has connotations which carries the audience far away from the concept of war meanwhile

the opening “Bent double, like old beggars under sacks” describes the soldiers distorted under the heavy packs. The sharp shift in the idea and the tone builds the poem’s central irony. An unambiguous title would not cause a striking and shocking effect on the audience as an ironical device. The profound ironic moment is also seen in the portrayal of the gas attack which is the climax of the poem. The soldier perishing in agony is the opposite of patriotic conviction. Hence, the poetic persona emphasizes a soldier yelling, floundering as if he is in the middle of a fire or lime and drowning in his helmet is not a noble sacrifice, it is just a grotesque, undignified end. The satirical undertones are not just to criticize the notion of war, at the same time the ironic lenses are directed to the society. The poetic persona assumes that everyone is encouraged with the same view that he firmly disagrees and he directly addresses the audience along the lines. The poetic persona’s attempt of reaching to the audience is understood by the repeating “you” pronoun in the last stanza and it is a call for empathy or sympathy to the soldiers fighting. He emphasizes the soldiers being individual human beings that even though soldiers defend the country with devotion, the cruelty and inhumanity is not ignorable. The ironies in the final stanza become explicit and condemnatory. The distressing, severe warfare descriptions give their place to accusation. The line “My friend, you would not tell with such high zest” displays the irony in perception of victory. According to the belief of sovereignty of death, the death of a soldier for triumph would be a pride source for the society. However, focalizing on the soldier’s family would reveal a completely distinct scene so this line carries the focus of the audience from a whole to a specific fragment which creates the perceptual irony. The ending of the poem reiterates the irony between the Latin phrase “Dulce et Decorum Est pro patria mori” and the poem’s tone but this time by clearly labelling it as a lie. The use of irony is not used as a poetic device here, it is a way of conveying moral judgment. All in all, the irony is used prevalently in the poem strengthening the effect of disillusionment.

Taking the profound irony in both of the poems into account, it is possible to state that both the common usage of it and lack of it have significant impact on the transfer of the message. The straightforward description in *The Soldier* helps the audience view the poetic persona as an honest, non-deceitful figure. While the instrument of irony in *Dulce et Decorum Est* serves as a serious indictment by underlining that the disposition to the noble side of the war is not just an ineffective behavior but an incentive to the war.

Comparative Language

Metaphors and similes are figures of speech applied for comparisons creating a sense of vivid imagery and complexity. In *The Soldier* metaphor is a dominant literary device, the usage of it includes an abstract and elevated approach to England and the war. “A dust whom England bore” compares the body of the poetic persona to a dust cultivated by England. Since England is viewed as a holy place that fills its citizens with the sentiment of nationalism, the dust which represents the body “shaped” by England implies that the poetic persona has transformed from nothing to a versatile person ready to take risks for his country. Similarly, in the part “a pulse in the eternal mind” the pulse is associated with the consciousness of the poetic persona speaking on behalf of the soldier. This part results in incongruity between the conception of death being the end of life and the immortality of the consciousness. The poem reinforces the perspective of devotion for one’s country and brings perpetuity with this metaphor which is consistent with the overall tone of the poem. The metaphors in this poem are generally beautiful and reassuring making even the hardest moments like death seem soothing. Moreover, they facilitate the understanding of the audience of such a profound, mythical illustration. Unlike the numerous metaphors in *The Soldier*, the examples of visceral, degrading similes are detected in *Dulce et Decorum Est* both in the way of a wide view of the soldiers and the observation of the individual soldier. Beggars are poor people desperate for money or food, fighting for their lives panhandling. The soldiers are allegorized

into “old beggars” evincing their despair and alienating the tone from dignity or heroism. The line “knock-kneed, coughing like hags” is also a simile used for the same purpose. The soldiers are not only suffering from poverty or shortage but also experiencing health issues like coughing as old poor women. These similes aid the audience about having a clear visual in their mind of the army fighting. The individual soldier mentioned starting from the second stanza leaves a huge impact on the poetic persona, catching him in his dreams over and over. This nightmare includes the sight of the soldier’s face “like a devil’s sick of sin” signifying the man’s face looks so mangled that the expression on his face is like a devil is drained from sin which is incontestably impossible. That is the reason behind this simile’s effectiveness is the horrifying appearance of the soldier’s face and the comparison of it to an awfully improbable mien. Altogether, the comparative language used in both poems contribute to the descriptive style of them. The metaphors in *The Soldier* are utilized in order to express the abstract charm and prettiness of England. Conversely, the similes in *Dulce et Decorum Est* supply reality to the image of warfare.

Imagery

Imagery is a part of figurative or descriptive language. Imagery is used to appeal to the senses to create vivid images in the reader’s mind. In *The Soldier* visual imagery is utilized prevalently to evoke peace and purity. In the opening part of the poem, the “foreign field” is associated with England. The use of the adjective “foreign” as a part of visual imagery creates a sense of contrast between the remote land and transforming that land into a familiar, blessed part of England. The imagery usage here contributes to the opening of the poem by emphasizing that the spirit of England is carried wherever a person travels, which in this case an unknown area where the WWI takes place. Therefore, the battlefield becomes comforting rather than inhumane. Another example of imagery in the poem is “Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home”. This line contains visual and tactile imagery by using words that has

positive connotations in order to describe the nature of England. A habitat with flowing rivers and a bright sun carries favorable conditions so the utilization of descriptive writing allows the reader to imagine England as a sacred place. This is not only coherent with the representation of England throughout the poem, but also functions as a source of relief for sacrificing a life for a country by presenting the sense of divine protection. However, *Dulce et Decorum Est* the sensory sight exposes the reality of war, by drawing attention to the sense of horror and suffering. Despite the fact that, the description of war is supported by the use of comparative language as mentioned before, the auditory and tactile imagery have a significant impact on the transmittance of the warfare. The line in the second stanza “Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!” demonstrates the urgent panic that the soldiers are experiencing and the presence of capital letters reinforces the expression of agitation. Thus, short exclamatory lines creates tension and chaos proving that the notion of war is highly disconnected from a gladdifying, soothing environment. Likewise, the line “If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs” is a combination of various types of figurative language including auditory, visual and tactile. While the verb “gargling” provokes suffocation by highlighting the last noises of the soldier while choking, the phrase “forth-corrupted lungs” implies that the appearance of the soldier in agony is unpleasant due to “froth” with the corruption of poison. Hence, the phrase “at every jolt” implements a rhythmic component to evoke the feeling of spasms on the reader. All the imagery used in this poem fortifies that the traditional statement “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*” is delusional. All thing considered, both of the poems are consisted of many sensory elements that shape the reader’s perception of war. However, *The Soldier* glorifies sacrifice by its serene and abstract imageries meanwhile *Dulce et Decorum Est* focuses on the mortality of war by reflecting some scenes from war with its sounds, visuals and toughnesses.

Conclusion

In answering the research question “To what extent do the poets’ point of view of WWI differ in the poems *Dulce et Decorum Est* by Wilfred Owen and *The Soldier* by Rupert Brooke?” this essay draws conclusions that although the poems have a common theme and common literary properties such as comparative language, irony and imagery, their tones and the way that the literary properties are utilized sharply differ from each other.

The tones of *The Soldier* and *Dulce et Decorum Est* show contrast by certain boundaries. *The Soldier* has an optimistic, patriotic tone by displaying war as a noble, glorified sacrifice and bitterness is understood from the tone of *Dulce et Decorum Est*. This difference in the tones of the poems are related with the perspectives owing to the personal experience of the poets. Brooke wrote his poem from a distance witnessing the public, Owen wrote his from direct warfare trauma. A similar pattern is seen in the usage of irony. Brooke avoids an ironical language which allows a sincere approach to the reader increasing the national devotion. Nevertheless, Owen places the irony at the center of the poem to strengthen the falsification of “the old lie”. The distinct approaches to the subversion of meaning prove that irony shifts the reader’s perception from national cohesion to moral judgement. Moreover, the literary devices justify the divergent functions of same literary choices in the poems. The description of war is abstract and transforms death into beauty in *The Soldier* as opposed to the sensory devices used to confront the readers with suffering and brutality in *Dulce et Decorum Est*.

To sum up, the difference between the two poems are caused by the representation of opposing wartime stages and the position of the poets. Brooke wrote *The Soldier* in early-war time that allowed him to have faith while late-war period and direct sight of battlefield affected the formation of *Dulce et Decorum Est*. Therefore, it is possible to state that their contrasting portrayals display how personal proximity to war determines artistic vision.

Additionally, the contrast between heroism and horror underlines the tension between patriotism and pain. Ultimately, Brooke focused on the noble sacrifice as Owen marked that perception as an “old lie” ensuring war should not be perceived as a source of glory, but for its human cost.

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