

**The Concept of War;
Two Different Views**

Asst. Prof. Essam Mohammad M.
Alnoor University College

Asst. Lect. Mustafa Mahmood N.
General Directorate
of Education in Nineveh

I

Abstract

The present paper simply explores and goes through two contradictory approaches towards the concept of war and its devastating consequences on soldiers at the front. These consequences are clearly found in Brooke's "The Soldier" and Owen's "Sweet and Honourable it is". In these two poems, Brooke and Owen truthfully express their own points of view as each one looks at war from a different angle which may convince each one and lead him to adopt a doctrine that he believes in.

المستخلص

يهدف البحث إلى سبر غور اتجاهين متباينين لمفهوم الحرب ونتائجها المفزعة على الجنود في ارض المعركة. ونجد هذه النتائج بشكل واضح في قصيدة شاعر الحرب ويوبرت برووك "الجندي" وقصيدة الشاعر ولفريد اوين ما أحلاك وما اشرفك يا حرب يعبر الشاعران برووك و أوين بصدق عن وجهتي نظرهما حيث أن لكل واحد منهما نظرتة الخاصة به عن الحرب من زاوية مختلفة والتي يمكن أن تقنع الآخر وتقوده إلى أن يتبنى تلك العقيدة التي يؤمن بها.

II

Since the outset of creation, war was considered a decisive factor in the life of human beings; it creates and brings about pain, suffering, destructive toil and above all tears. Once, a philosopher was asked: what was the difference between peace and war? He promptly and simply answered: "in peace, sons bury the fathers and in war, fathers bury the sons." Hence, war was tackled in all branches of life and in particular in some branches of literature in novel, drama, short story and in poetry as well. War as it is said has two sharp blades; both convey destruction and humiliation, but human beings in general have a variety of points of view: some advocate and support the idea of war to find an outlet for problems: some others avoid war by all means in order to avoid creating problems.

However, both diverged views are somehow reasonable and logical. The war lasted year after year and millions of combatants and non-combatants died. Men, at the front, lived in semi-rat holes along muddy trenches that stretched for miles and men fought vicious battles that had little glory and much senseless death. Soldiers thought the war might never end and their positions at the battle-field in the horrible trenches would last forever. At the beginning of the war men were overwhelmed by the idea of being able to go to fight for their country

which was being considered the right thing to do. Nevertheless, once they are hurt in a battle-field and lived the misery of war, their feelings were shifted and changed into more serious and dangerous conditions. As a result of these horrifying situations war did produce some outstanding poets who devotedly wrote about this filthy war. Among those were Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen.

Hence, Brooke and Owen attempt to show and display the changes in young soldiers' feelings in the first years of W. W.1. and at the end of it. The poems, written by Brooke and Owen, are concerned with the theme of war. but really they have different points of view about it and almost opposite views. In the two poems, the two poets use different types of language to achieve and score their targets. The language used by Brooke in "The Soldier" and Owen in "Sweet and Honourable it is" is vastly different from each other, even though both poems are about war. Brooke uses language in his poem to give the reader the impression that dying for one's country is very honourable and glorious. However, there are many reasons why Brooke did write "The Soldier" at the beginning of the war in 1914. the poet Brooke wrote the poem as a person who hasn't been at the fronted at the same time. Brooke says that it is good to die at the front fighting for your country. On the other hand, Owen uses, in his poem, a language to give the reader the impression that war is filthy, nasty destructive and dying for one's country is not all glorious honour that it seems and that in reality dying in a war, no matter for what cause can be both painful and full of suffering and torture. Moreover, Owen composed his poetry at the end of 1917. Owen did fight and take part in many disastrous battles as his poem was written half way through the war. Owen claims that war is terrible and unbearable as he witnessed and experienced it, especially in the trenches because W.W.I was war of trenches. As for the two poems, love and death are the basic themes, but they are written from different perspectives. It is good to die for the sake of man's beloved home-land as Brooke claims, whereas, fighting at the front is really a tragedy for a man losing his life in a fierce combat, Owen says. Hence, both poets introduce their knowledge to show the reader how soldiers confront war and what fatal consequences do war bring to them".)

World War I began with great fanfare with long columns of smiling soldieries going to war wearing dress uniforms with flowers

sticking out of their rifles. Everyone expected the war to be over quickly and the heroes returned soon with shiny new medals of bravery pinned to their chests. Unfortunately, it did not turn out this way. The war lasted year after year and millions of combatants and non-combatants died. Men, at the front, lived in semi-rat holes along muddy trenches that stretched for miles and men fought vicious battles that had little glory and much senseless death. Soldiers thought the war might never end and their positions at the battlefield in the horrible trenches would last forever. Hence, war did produce some outstanding poets who devotedly wrote about this filthy war. Among those, were Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. During early years of the great war, poetry was written to encourage men to go front. At the beginning of the war, men were overwhelmed by the idea of being able to fight for their country, which was being considered the right thing to do. Nevertheless, once they were hurt in a battlefield and lived the miseries of war, their feelings were shifted and changed into more serious and dangerous conditions. Hence, Brooke and Owen attempt to show and display the changes in young soldiers' feelings in the first years of W.W.1. and at the end of it. The two poems, written by Brooke and Owen, are concerned with the theme of war, but they have different points of view about it, and almost opposite views. In him or her, each poet uses different types of language to achieve and score his target. The language used by Brooke in "The Soldier" and Owen in "Sweet and Honorable it is" is vastly different from each other, even though both poems are about war. Wilfred Owen uses, in his poem, a language to give the reader the impression that war is filthy, nasty, destructive and dying for one's country is not all glorious honour that it seems and that in reality dying in aware, no matter for what cause can be both painful and full of suffering. Brooke, on the other hand, uses language in his poem to give the reader the impression that dying for one's country is very honourable and glorious.

As for the two poems, love and death are the basic themes, but they are written from different perspectives. It is good to die for the sake of man's great beloved home-land as Brooke claims, while fighting at the front is really a great tragedy for a man losing his life in a fierce combat. Hence, both poets introduce their own knowledge to show the reader how soldiers confront war and what fatal consequences do war brings to them.

As for "The Soldier", Brooke wrote it as the great war began in 1914. Brooke, himself, being a pre-dominating a war poet, died the year after his poem was published. This poem deals with love, death and accomplishments of a soldier. It encompasses the memories of a fallen soldier on a battle-field who declares his patriotism to his home-land by showing that his incredible sacrifice should be the owner-ship of England, of a small portion of land he has died on.

England has become the main target of this simple naïve man, as he believes that if he should die for England, people would appreciate and always remember his glorious deed. As a naïve, simple man, he has to fix in his, mind, this notion completely. The first eight lines of the poem support and reflect this notion:

If I should die, think only this of me;
That there is some corner of a foreign field;
That is forever England. There shall be In that rich earth, a richer dust
conceded;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware;
Gave once her thought to love her ways to room;
A body of England's breathing English air;
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home. (4) (8-11.1)

The lines above show that if this soldier has to die on a land other than England, that piece of ground would be honoured and be better, because there would be always a piece of England within it. This invaluable sacrifice of this poor soldier is an action of a man who sincerely loves and adores his country. Moreover, the repetition of the word England emphasizes one major, important point: it is to convey a real message. This would clarify the idea that this man has an utmost respect for his country and if he dies in a battle-field, he will become part of the land he falls upon. Therefore, the death of this man is glorified and signified. So, if he dies serving his country where ever he is, he is still part of England as England "Bore him, shaped him, made him aware"(1.5) of being a proud English soldier. Moreover, one who is proud of his home-land and is ready to serve it, disregarding worldly desires, making his act a selfless one(5).

The second part of the poem, the last six lines, sheds some light on the soldier's accomplishments. He is really proud and self-confident: And think this heart, all evil shed away; A pulse in the eternal mind, no less;

Gives some where back the thoughts by England given, Her sight and sounds: dreams happy as her day:

And laughter; learnt of friends and gentleness;

In hearts at peace, under an England (14-11.9)

The extract, quoted above, has a certain, nice flavour. Here, it is being told not to mourn the death of a soldier since he is secured in a place similar to England, a heaven protective and caring. It is also declared that any foreign field will turn richer and become part of England if an English man is buried there since England is superior, so are her sons. England rewards her sons with care and nurtures them her love, care and beauty. Again, England is personified to a mother, a heaven and even nature itself. There is a nostalgic effect as this soldier is content with his life and wishes to die for a wonderful reason". The soldier says this on behalf of all soldiers who are proud of their country and wish to repay their home-land for all it has blessed them with. To conclude, it has become clear that a person who loves his country is ready to fight to the very end for England: he is loyal and a true fighter who cares about his country more than about his own existence. This brave soldier is so fascinated by the beauty of his home-land and he sees England as a very beautiful female because English society values women as loving and protective. He feels mother England will be proud of him and will remember him all the way through. England offers him eternal life.

As a matter of fact, Brooke seems to romanticise and glorify death by all means through his body and spirit. Rupert Brooke romanticises and glorifies death. He truly believes the saying (used in Wilfred Owen's poem,) *Dulce Est Decorum Est pro patria mori*, meaning it is sweet and honourable to die for one's country. He wrote about how noble it was to give up age and wealth to die for England, how death and sacrifice then restore honour and nobility to the world. In contrast to poets such as Owen and Sassoon, Brooke uses an abundance of positive connotations to depict this romantic image of a positive death. Through his poetry he is somewhat building up this romantic relationship that he has with England, and encouraging others to have this same relationship as perhaps a release of fear of dying. By stating this positive noble view of death and personifying this land that is England, death becomes much less of an act for much greater of a cause. His poetry was complimentary

to the propaganda by the government prior to the war but Brooke's words are empty of sarcasm. He entirely believed that dying for one's country was sweet and honourable. However, Brooke never faced the reality of war as he died before battle. Would his poetry have changed to be anything like say Wilfred Owen's had he experienced the true, horrific nature of war. Wilfred Owen, on the other hand, visualizes war passively in "Sweet This and Honourable it is". However, during the cold war, a period when armed conflict between U.S.A. and Russia was being avoided, U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower a former soldier, said; "I hate war as only a soldier who lived it can, only one who has seen its brutality and its stupidity." anti-war view point is the same as expressed in "Dulce Et Decorum Est", (Sweet and Honourable it is). Wilfred Owen was once a soldier who fought in W.W.I. His excellent disastrous series of tragic events he, as a soldier, had to go through. The poem's major theme, the veneration of war, is explored through the presentation of war as horrifying. Furthermore, Owen displays the reality of war as he witnessed it at the front by divulging the secrets and terrors of brutal warfare. He exposes the superficiality of valor and false heroism. Owen breaks idealism, replacing it with illness, physical injuries, fatigue and personal bells.

Within "Dulce et Decorum Est" the poet utilises a variety of powerful poetic devices in order to depict death in war as a brutal and horrifying experience. Alliteration serves to draw the attention of the reader, as expressed in: "And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,"(1.13) which creates a stark and confronting image within the reader's mind. Further, in "his hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin"(1.15) it is through the use of simile that the poet arouses the sympathy of the responder as they witness the grotesque nature of such a death.

With regard to his poem, Wilfred Owen wrote "Sweet and Honourable is it" during his four months at war hospital as he was recovering from a trench severe fever. Faced with many fatally injured men, this must have inspired him to write about the horrible war. Unlike Brooke's "The Soldier", Owen portrays not a glorified or heroic war, but a realistic point of view which consists of a completely different attitude and is perhaps more logic and brings out the harsh reality.

In his poem, Owen focuses on the tragedy of war and the miserable conditions of the soldiers. He effectively conveys the horror of fighting and the sheer suffering of the soldiers who fought it." (10) The title of the poem translated from Latin "Dulce Et Decorum Est" means "Sweet and Honourable it is". It is clear ironic as the poet sneers the concept of war with all its overburdened heavy results. The poem starts sarcastically, but surely realistically:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks;

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed:

Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,

And towards our distant rest began to trudge; Men marched a sleep. Many had lost their boots: But limped on, blood-shed. All went lame, all blind; Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots: Of gas-shells dropping softly behind, (1) (LL1-8) The extract, quoted above, depicts a pitiful, farcical, impressive image." (12) Here, the soldier symbolizes anti-war sentiments which are false and devoid of meaning. This poor, desperate man, like "old beggar (1.1) is presumably the most-wretched men. Death written in his eyes, this desperate and helpless soldier walks aimlessly and fruitlessly. Like the man who rambles with no purpose is the living dead. Both his mind and spirit have been broken. The image of this soldier can be looked on as a living dead because although he is a live, he is dead in mind, spirit and heart. Moreover, one thinks of a soldier as a man full of strength who stands brave with his distinctive uniform marches confidently to war. Ironically, this comparison offers and conveys a sense of his non-glorified reality. His uniform, his psychological and physical health are really vanquished. This soldier can't even walk steadily and many of his fellow-mates fall dying one by one, Furthermore, the poet goes on sketching the monotonous great anguish of war as he uses the phrase "Distant rest" (1.5) Owen lets the reader wonder what kind of rest is to be getting. For some soldiers, it is just a place to lie on and for some others; it is the end of the war which is the ultimate target of the whole world.

III

To sum up, it is obvious that the two poems are related to the events of war, the First World War. These two products concentrate on a similar subject, going to war, but have two totally different points of views. Brooke's "The Soldier" was written at the beginning of the war.

This was before the horror of trenches was known. In his poem, Brooke expresses his love for his country and how he believes it is right to fight and die for his home-land. He has a patriotic attitude and offers a very positive view of war, but he never discovers what war is like, as he died in 1915, before he actually goes to fight at the front. Therefore, he does not have any idea about the torturous nature of death in war and he only acknowledges how the soldier honours England by dying in the process of defending the nation. His poem seems to be idealistic in its movements, Wilfred Owen's poem "Sweet and Honourable it is", on the other hand, is a perfect contrast which consist of a completely different view of the war. This poem was written near the end of war in 1917. In the poem, Owen focuses on the tragedy of war and the miserable conditions of the soldiers. The poem portrays and conveys a negative side of war to its extreme. Moreover, the title of the poem is deliberately sketched. It is really ironic: war is not sweet and honourable to die for one's country. He considers this war as a big lie. It can no longer to be called sweet and honourable but horrible and humiliating. Finally, it can be said that Brooke has been completely optimistic and idealistic in presenting his ideas, whereas Owen is pessimistic and realistic who brings about the harsh, bitted reality of war.

IV

Notes:

- 1) Harold B. Lee Writers and Literature of The Great War (Brigham: Young University. 2008).p.32. 2) Wilfred Owen Stallworthy,: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- 2) Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (Oxford University Press, 2000). p.286.
- 3) Hibberd, D. Wilfred Owen: A New Biography (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002). 5) Rupert Brooke, War Poems and Others. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976),p.43. (Brigham:
- 4) D.S.R. Welland, Brooke's War Poetry: A Critical Study Brigham Young University 1960),p.76.
- 5) Jon. Silkin, "Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War" The Dial Press. New York Review of Books, Vol 22 No 19.p.12.
- 6) Rupert Brooke, War Poems and Others.p.33.

- 7) Dominic Hibberd. Wilfred Owen, The Truth Untold (Weidenfeld& Nicholson, 2002). p.xxii.
- 8) Owen, Wilfred, The Complete Poems and Fragments, by Wilfred Owen: Jon Stallworthy (ed) (London: LUP, 1984).p87. the War
- 9) Adrian Caesar, Taking It Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and Poets (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) pp1-256.
- 10) Daniel W. Hipp, The Poetry of Shell Shock. McFarland. (South Carolina: South Carolina Press, 2005)pp. 88-89.
- 11) Motion, Andrew Ways of Life. (London: faber and faber2008).. pp. 218. 14) Dominic Hibberd, p.11.