

Unmasking the Illusion of War

In literature, war is often depicted through differing lenses, highlighting the paradoxes inherent within it. The poems "Dulce et Decorum est" by Wilfred Owen and "War is Kind" by Stephen Crane present an illustrative depiction of war and its complexities. Owen's firsthand experience in World War I trenches has lent a brutal honesty to his verse, while Crane's indirect experience contributes a more detached and sardonic view of warfare. Both poems, despite their distinct perspectives, arrive at a similar conclusion, condemning the romanticized notion of war and the cultural narrative promoting death in battle as a noble sacrifice.

Owen's "Dulce et Decorum est" and Crane's "War is Kind" relate to each other by depicting war as a gruesome, destructive force, contrasting starkly against traditional war narratives. Through their texts, the poets posit that war is primarily about suffering, death, and the needless waste of human life. Owen vividly describes soldiers "bent double, like old beggars under sacks, Knock-kneed, coughing like hags," creating an image far removed from the glorified soldiers found in conventional war poetry (Owen, lines 1-2). Simultaneously, Crane's repetitious refrain "War is kind" serves as a biting irony that undermines the notion of war's nobility, highlighting the dichotomy between the reality and the perception of war (Crane, lines 5, 11, 21). These descriptions serve not just to paint a picture of war but also to question the rhetoric that promotes it. The stark contrast they create between the reality of war and the glorified image of it forces the reader to confront the lies that are often told about war.

Both poets provide minimal, if any, evidence advocating for fighting to the death, preferring instead to underline the horror and waste associated with it. Owen's use of the Latin phrase "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori," which translates to "it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country," juxtaposes the harsh realities he earlier described, casting a cynical light on the call to die for one's nation (Owen, lines 27-28). Crane, in his bitter description of war, rejects the "virtue of slaughter," painting an equally grim picture of the battlefield where "a thousand corpses lie" (Crane, lines 16, 18). Here, the poets challenge the commonly held belief in the nobility of dying for one's country, forcing the reader to question the value of such a sacrifice. The disturbing imagery they use underscores the tragic and unnecessary loss of life caused by war, effectively countering any arguments for fighting to the death.

However, both poets subtly advocate for survival, albeit from different perspectives. Owen emphasizes the struggle for survival, shown in the desperate attempt to fit gas masks during a gas attack, a testament to the human will to live in the face of horror (Owen, lines 9-12). On the other hand, Crane's repetition of "Do not weep" encourages resilience among those left behind, indirectly advocating for the continuance of life despite its intrinsic suffering (Crane, lines 1, 6, 13, 19). This subtle advocacy highlights the value of life and resilience, suggesting that even amidst the horrors of war, the fight for survival continues. The portrayal of those affected by war, struggling to survive or to come to terms with their loss, emphasizes the human cost of war, grounding it in individual experiences rather than abstract ideals.

In application to today's context, Owen's and Crane's depictions of war serve as potent reminders of the costs associated with conflict. Amid escalating global tensions and potential wars, these poems

warn against the ease with which societies can fall into the trap of glorifying warfare and sacrificing their citizens. They encourage a more critical view of war and push towards peace, survival, and the preservation of life. In essence, they remind us that the human cost of war is too high a price to pay, forcing us to reconsider our attitudes towards conflict and to strive for peace.

In conclusion, both Owen's "Dulce et Decorum est" and Crane's "War is Kind" reveal a multi-faceted view of war, laying bare the reality of conflict's brutality. These poets challenge the romanticized narrative of war, instead advocating for survival and resilience, reinforcing the importance of life over death. The two poems serve as timeless reminders of the destructive force of war and call upon societies to critically examine the real costs of conflict. Their enduring relevance underlines the power of literature to shape our understanding of complex issues and to challenge prevailing narratives.

Citations:

Owen, Wilfred. "Dulce et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owen." Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46560/dulce-et-decorum-est. Accessed 15 July 2023.

The Project Gutenberg E-Text of "War Is Kind" by Stephen Crane, www.gutenberg.org/files/9870/9870-h/9870-h.htm. Accessed 15 July 2023.

"Wilfred Owen." Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/wilfred-owen>

"Stephen Crane." Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/stephen-crane