

The Presentation of War

Compare the presentation of war in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred Tennyson and "Dulce et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen.

War is a topic that elicits many different emotions from people depending on what perspective the individual takes. A perfect example of this is the comparison between The Charge of the Light Brigade and Dulce et Decorum Est. While they both deal with the death and destruction that comes with war, one poem glorifies the warrior by making them larger than life and painting their death with a noble as well as patriotic colour (Tennyson, 1854). The other poem shows the horror of war and how useless a death can be if it is based on a lie that dying for one's homeland is sweet (Owen, 1921).

The poems are also separated by time and place since Charge deals with the Crimean war where Dulce is based on the First World War. The scale of war between the two eras had changed significantly since the First World War was death mongering on a grand scale with mechanised warfare rendering machines more important than cavalry charges. Tennyson used the charge to represent the highest traditions of soldiering, an unsurpassed feat of bravery and dedication to a cause. The charge itself was led by Lord Cardigan and took place in the Battle of Balaclava in 1854 (Bachrach, 1997).

The charge was successful in meeting the objective given to it but it suffered heavy losses for the Light Brigade. One hundred and eighteen men were lost with almost the same number of wounded. Half of the horses were killed and after the charge only 195 soldiers still had horses and were able to ride. The French allies saw this action as brave and magnificent but totally against the concepts under which a war can be fought. On the other hand, the Russian commanders who fought against the charge thought that the British charge was conducted by drunken soldiers since only then could they be foolish enough to do what they did (Bachrach, 1997).

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