

Compare the representation of the experience of war and attitudes towards it in Stephen Crane's 'Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind' and Ronald Blythe's 'A Suffolk farmhand at Gallipoli June 1915'.

To compare is to examine two articles and discover similarities and differences between them. Extract A is a pre-twentieth century poem and extract B is an account about, but written several years after, the First World War. Both the extracts are written by men. Stephen Crane, the writer of extract A, did not fight in any war because he was turned down due to ill health. However he became a war correspondent so did witness battles and gain some knowledge and experience of war. Ronald Blythe, is not the writer of extract B, he was the interviewer so the account has little input directly from him. This essay will examine the similarities and differences between their attitudes and experiences which are presented in the title, structure, themes, voice and language.

Whilst the title of extract A, 'Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind', provides a reasonable amount of information about Crane's attitude to war, the title of extract B does not. 'A Suffolk farmhand at Gallipoli June 1915' is informative about the context of the extract but it is matter-of-fact and expresses little of the Blythe's attitude.

The archaic title of 'Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind' creates a sense of ambiguity for the reader as it seems odd to describe the horror of war as 'kind'. This suggests to the reader that the poet is using irony and implies an attitude which is negative of war. The word 'maiden' informs the reader that the poem is addressed to a woman. This makes the title sound like something which might be said to a worried or grieving woman at home in an attempt to comfort. The definition of 'maiden' is a young, unmarried woman and has connotations of innocence and naivety which in this case could be related to naivety about the true nature of war. It could be suggested that Crane is criticising the women in war who never have to know the horrors and reality.

In contrast the title of extract B offers little insight into Blythe's attitude. However, the title does set up contrasts; the rural county of Suffolk, England compared to the exotic lands of Turkey and the danger free occupation of a farmhand with the life-endangering post of a soldier. The juxtaposition of the two situations could suggest that Blythe is trying to highlight how different the experience of war was to anything the men had witnessed before. The events in the account are dated as 1915 however the extract

was not written until 1969. There is a significant amount of time between the two dates which would make an everyday event difficult to remember, but the fact that the man interviewed can relay the episode in so much detail emphasises how much the war effected him and is an experience he will never forget.

The structures of the extracts support the negative attitude of war which both the writers appear to hold. Extract A is a poem of uneven stanzas and no rhyme or even pace. This conveys a lack of order which could be related to the chaos and messiness of war. Three of the poems stanzas end with the repeated line 'Do not weep, war is kind' to stress the irony in the poem. The irregularity of the structure and the uneven pace of the poem create an uneasy read which could make it less pleasant in some readers opinions. However, this could be Crane's purpose because it emphasises the unpleasantness of the war.

Extract B is a piece of prose which gives an informative, personal account of the Gallipoli campaign. The extract begins with a paragraph which informs the reader of the context with reference to the number of casualties and gives the impression that it is a historical document. The continuous prose has no interruption from the writer and contains minute details such as the numerous names, 'James Sears...Ernie Taylor...Albert Paternoster' and the recollection of the names of trenches, 'Hill 13'. This suggests the man can recall these events with very little prompting which implies that it is always at the forefront of his mind. Blythe is again making the point that an experience like the war is one that is never forgotten.

The two extracts have similar themes which create a similarly negative attitude towards the war. However, it is difficult to comment on the attitude of Blythe because the main extract is an account from another man, not the writer, so it is his views that the reader is getting. In any case both extract A and B include themes on the extent of death and the wastefulness of lives in war.

In 'Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind', Crane repeatedly describes the soldiers as 'born to drill and die' and depicts a field 'where a thousand corpses lie'. 'Born to drill and die' gives the impression that men were being produced for the war on a production line, once one batch was dead they would send in another. The use of 'born' and 'die' in the same short sentence suggests that their lives were extremely brief. This is an example

of the waste of lives, lives that were hardly lived.

The same themes are illustrated in extract B. The extent of death is highlighted when the man describes tents 'full of corpses...lines and lines of them...two or three hundred' and the waste of lives is conveyed when he says 'We learned that if 300 had 'gone' but 700 were left, then this wasn't too bad.'. This creates a sense that the soldiers are merely numbers, when they are killed they are dealt with in an extremely undignified and impersonal way. The presence of these themes create a horrific representation of war in both the extracts and express equally negative attitudes.

The writers use contrasting voices in the extracts. Whilst in extract A the voice is highly ironic, in extract B it is reminiscent. The voice in extract A is evidently the voice of the writer which easily conveys that the attitudes expressed in the poem are his own. The continuous repetition of 'do not weep' and the use of 'maiden', 'babe' and 'mother' on their own would be considered an effort to comfort. However, juxtaposed with words like 'slaughter...corpses' and phrases such as 'the excellence of killing' creates the irony. It again suggests that Crane is being critical of the woman's role in war and seems to be mocking their apparent naivety of the reality.

In extract B the voice is of the Suffolk farmhand, not the writer. Whilst there is little input from Blythe, except the paragraph at the beginning, it could be suggested that he does not oppose the attitude expressed otherwise he would not have included it in his book. This could then imply that he wants the harsh reality of war known to the reader and the inclusion of this horrific experience could suggest he wants to persuade the reader against war.

The first person account at first conveys an excited tone through the use of the exclamatory, 'on the Hellespont!', the dynamic verb 'rushed' and the simile describing the soldiers 'like boys getting into a circus'. However, before the end of the first paragraph there is the realisation that the reality of war is anything but exciting. As the extract progresses the voice becomes numb, he talks of the dead bodies in an unsympathetic way, describing how they 'pushed them into the sides' but 'bits of them kept...sticking out' and he uses taboo language such as 'shitting' to convey the unpleasantness. This shows how the experience of war caused men to become detached merely so they could cope with the horrors.

Despite it being difficult to judge Blythe's attitude in his extract because it is not his words, the fact that he decided to include this particular account in his book does loosely suggest that he agrees with the representation and attitudes towards war. This therefore makes the comparison possible. Crane and Blythe do not share or express exactly the same attitudes and experiences but they both convey a similarly negative attitude to war. They both seem to share the opinion that it is unnecessarily wasteful of human life and the experience of it is horrific and tragic. However, extract A is more concerned with irony and highlighting to the reader that war is not kind, despite its title. On the other hand, extract B is conveying the horrors of war in a realistic and matter-of-fact form. Whilst extract A is directed at the lover, daughter and mother and seems to be deliberately mocking them, extract B is more concerned with informing the reader of the facts.