Dulce Et Decorum Est And Old Soldier: Poem Comparison

The two poems “Dulce et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen and “Old Soldier” by Charles Simic gave their attitudes about war and the effect that it has on ordinary people. They used imagery, point of view, and diction to enforce their opinion about the war on the reader. However, the two poems have differing views, one believes that war is overly glorified and it's a lie that dying for your country is good and sweet, and the other is a 10-year-old boy who thinks that war is exciting and glorified it.

Owen suggested in his poem that war was nothing to be admired or glorified. He used a shockingly vivid flashback of a fellow comrade suffering from the effects of poison gas in order to disturb the reader and inform them about what soldiers experienced: “As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.” Owen found it ironic that so many men were eager to fight and risk their lives for the country without any inkling of what might really happen until they’re desperately clinging to life, hence the meaning of the title: “It is sweet and becoming to die for one’s country.” The men during the war were exhausted beyond belief while dodging death at every corner. The speaker believed that war is devastating and felt horrified at the thought of the young men ultimately signing their own death sentence by becoming a soldier.

In “Old Soldier”, Simic developed another approach to war and its effects. He started with a flashback as well, but unlike Owen’s poem, the memory gave the reader the idea that the speaker had always desired a chance to fight when he said: “By the time I was ten, I had fought in hundreds of battles, had innumerable wounds, had slain thousands.” Like a typical child, he knew nothing about what it was truly like out on the battlefront as described in the other poem. What I felt was ironic was how he felt so at peace with his mother out in the garden and described the beautiful garden amidst the sizzling cinders floating down from the last air raid. As a young boy, he had depicted himself as a hero already when he described to the reader his sword painted gold. He expressed in his poem that being a soldier was his true dream and fighting to protect his country was the ultimate goal.

These poems offered two different approaches to both war and the emotional impact it has on not only the soldiers but civilians as well. The speaker in “Dulce et Decorum Est” suffered greatly from his experiences at war. He remembers how physically exhausting and dangerous it was to be a soldier, to the point that they were unable to escape the poison gas ambush that he described. With “Old Soldier”, the speaker had the ambition and dream and to become a soldier. He hoped to escape his ordinary childhood home to do what he believed was necessary for society. Although he couldn’t do much as a child with his painted sword, the speaker had aspirations to be the hero he was meant to become. Owen and Simic contrasted in their beliefs about fighting for the pride of one’s country with their tone, one being more morose and bitter and the other being reflective and cheerful.