

# Comparative Analysis: Dulce et Decorum Est vs This Is the Dark Time, My Love

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## Introduction

Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est* and Martin Carter's *This Is the Dark Time, My Love* both expose the cruelty of organized violence. Owen writes from the context of World War I, presenting war as physically degrading, traumatic, and falsely glorified. Carter writes from the context of colonial Guyana, presenting military oppression as a force that destroys national hope and emotional security. Both poems reject any romantic view of violence, but Owen focuses on the suffering of soldiers on the battlefield, while Carter focuses on a whole society living under occupation and fear.

**Central shared theme:** war and political violence, especially how organized power destroys bodies, hope, innocence, and emotional security.

## War and its horrors

Both poets present violence as destructive rather than noble.

In *Dulce et Decorum Est*, Owen strips war of heroism through the **simile** "bent double, like old beggars." Soldiers are not proud, strong, or glorious. They are exhausted, broken, and reduced to a state of physical humiliation. The later image of "froth-corrupted lungs" makes death grotesque and bodily, forcing the reader to confront what patriotic language hides.

Carter also rejects any celebratory view of violence. His phrases "festival of guns" and "carnival of misery" use bitter irony, placing words associated with celebration beside images of fear and suffering. The result is disturbing: violence has become part of public life, turning society itself into a spectacle of pain.

## Individual trauma and collective suffering

Both poems show suffering as psychological as well as physical.

Owen emphasizes trauma through the speaker's memory: "In all my dreams, before my helpless sight." The dying soldier continues to haunt him after the event has passed. The word

"helpless" is crucial because it shows the speaker's guilt and powerlessness. He can witness the suffering, but he cannot stop it.

Carter presents suffering as collective. The line "Everywhere the faces of men are strained and anxious" shows that fear has spread across the whole community. This is not one soldier's trauma, but a national condition. The poem's darkness is social and political, affecting ordinary people, lovers, workers, and the land itself.

## Death and the loss of hope

Death is central in both poems, but it appears differently.

In Owen's poem, death is immediate, graphic, and physical. The soldier is "choking, drowning," and the speaker later remembers the "gargling" of blood. Owen makes death impossible to romanticize because the reader is forced to see and hear its bodily reality.

In Carter's poem, death is more symbolic and political. The "man of death" watches the beloved sleep and aims "at your dream." This suggests not only physical danger but the killing of hope, freedom, and national possibility. Carter's death is therefore both personal and political: it threatens the body, but also the future.

## Imagery and symbolism

Both poets use dark imagery to make violence feel inescapable.

Owen's imagery is graphic and sensory. The soldier is described "like a man in fire or lime," and the gas attack is imagined as movement under "a green sea." These images trap the reader inside the battlefield's horror, creating an experience of suffocation and panic.

Carter's imagery is more symbolic and surreal. "Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow," while the "boot of steel" tramples the "slender grass." Nature becomes a witness to oppression, and the damaged landscape reflects the damaged nation. Carter's symbols make colonial violence feel larger than one event; it is a whole atmosphere.

## Criticism of power and propaganda

Both poems criticize the systems that justify violence.

Owen attacks patriotic propaganda directly. The phrase "the old Lie" condemns the idea that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. His direct address, "my friend," turns the poem into an accusation against those who encourage young men to believe in heroic war.

Carter criticizes colonial power through images of invasion and surveillance. The "strange invader" and "man of death" suggest a force that has entered the land and made ordinary life unsafe. Unlike Owen, Carter does not focus on recruitment propaganda; he focuses on the terror created by political control.

## Conclusion

Both *Dulce et Decorum Est* and *This Is the Dark Time, My Love* present organized violence as cruel, degrading, and destructive. Owen exposes the physical horror of war and attacks the propaganda that glorifies it. Carter presents colonial oppression as a darkness that destroys hope, freedom, and emotional safety. While Owen's poem is more graphic and accusatory, Carter's is more symbolic and mournful. Together, they show that violence damages both bodies and dreams.