

**THE CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD WAR**

**as**

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**by**

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Homer's Iliad, Horace's Odes, and the Mahabharata show that in the ancient world three main attitudes toward war hold sway: it is an honor to fight and even to die for one's country; physical strength and skill are desirable attributes for the individual warrior to possess; the gore one produces is considered proof of one's abilities as a warrior.

The "Battle of Brunanburh" shows that in early medieval England these same attitudes are dominant. Dante's Inferno and the "Song of Roland" do not disagree with these tenets but they introduce a new note: life after death is the only life of great importance so all actions should relate to this understanding. In war, as in every other aspect of worldly life, one should conduct oneself knowing that life after death is the only life of real value.

The attitudes toward war held in America of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are reflected in the verse of Philip Freneau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Both of these poets express a keenly patriotic spirit and both show that it is still considered noble and honorable to die for one's country. Freneau and Emerson also show that a rallying cause is of no small consequence. They also both point to the new significance that the common man has attained.

Another important change reflected in their poetry is an offering of solace and the hope that the war-dead are in a far better place than the earth could offer. However, this offering of consolation does not depress still-buoyant material spirits.

Henry Timrod, speaking for the South at the time of the American Civil War, promotes patriotism. He shows that war is accepted but it is no longer an enthusiastic acceptance; instead it is a fatalistic acceptance. In addition, he shows that the South feels it has been woefully wronged and he offers solace to the South for the hardships it has had to endure and for the sons it has lost.

Walt Whitman expresses deep feeling to the point of reverence for all of mankind and for all of the individuals who comprise it. In addition, he accepts war as part of the human experience. This is a reluctant acceptance.

Stephen Crane foreshadows the emergence of modern questioning through his ironical treatment of war. Crane does not promote patriotism, glorify death by war, console mourners, nor in any way accept the concept of war.

The poetry of John McCrea and Rupert Brooke of the World War I era reverts to romanticizing the heroism of war. However, other poets, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Ezra Pound, who had a more intimate knowledge of war than did either McCrea or Brooke, speak most disparagingly of it. Sassoon, Owen, and Pound speak for a world that is shocked, hurt, and disillusioned by the mechanized slaughter of World War I. These poets cry out against war and against the world that has gone before them for having celebrated war throughout the centuries.

The poetry of World War II shows that the main attitudes held toward war today include a feeling of guilt and responsibility for war and its hardships, the idea that death caused

by war is an unreasonable death, and the realization that war destroys both the individual and morality. Poets who speak to these points include Albrecht Haushofer, Randall Jarrell, Henry Reed, and Dylan Thomas.