

The Effects of War: Positive Morale

The effects of war can be felt from soldiers and civilians alike. Throughout history, war has affected the economies, viewpoints, and social structures of people both directly and indirectly involved. Art and literature have also been inspired by the effects of war, as can be seen in the poetry of soldiers or the movies produced back home by civilians affected by the war. Some products of war take on a critical and condescending approach, like the movie "We Were Soldiers," where war scenes are gruesome and home life is depicted by a group of housewives awaiting the dreaded letters announcing the deaths of their husbands overseas. However, other products of "war have shown the efforts by soldiers to maintain a more positive outlook on life, like the poetry from World War I soldiers living in the trenches of the battlefields. Poetry that paints a picture of the mind of the husband and father who keeps his thoughts not on the battlefield, but on the joys and love back home with his family; poetry portraying positive thoughts completely unrelated to the war, as if the writer was ignoring the horrors in front of him, seeking a paradise in his mind—all are examples of how it is human nature to fight for the preservation of their minds, even in the worst situations. War brings both soldiers and civilians down to reality, forcing them to find ways to keep up positive morale.

Looking back at the poetry of soldiers in the midst of World War I, one can find examples of thoughts completely unrelated to war—on the surface. Roland Leighton's "In the Rose Garden" is a short poem, with fascination of something so simple as a rose: "Dew on the pink-flushed petals; / Roseate wings unfurled; / What can, I thought, be fairer / In all the world?" (1-4). This appreciation of simple, organic life is something special, because Leighton took his mind away from the battles in front of him in order to remember the small, beautiful things in the world worth fighting for. Another example of this getaway mindset can be seen in Wilfred Owen's "From My Diary, July 1914." Owen lists simple things that remind him of a better place back home, including "leaves," "bees,"

1 "birds," and "her heart," then pairs each thing with a brief description or thought. Some examples
2 are "Leaves/Murmuring by myriads in the shimmering trees" (1-2), "Bees/Shaking the heavy dews
3 from bloom and frond" (9-10), and "Stars I Expanding with the starr'd nocturnal flowers" (29-30).
4 Owen doesn't necessarily have a plot or conclusion in his poem, it is a list of things that he
5 appreciates, and probably misses back home.

6 Other poetry of the time does mention the war, both indirectly and directly, but is still overall
7 positive, showing the anticipation that the soldiers have to get back home. Examples include poems
8 from Robert Graves and Roland Leighton. Graves' "1915" is a personal account of his frustrations of
9 the war and the wishing for the pleasant things he misses. Assuming Graves is the narrator, he has
10 "watched the Seasons passing slow, so slow" (1) in the "soul-deadening trenches" (9). But he knows
11 that when he gets back home he will again enjoy "pictures, books, / Music, the quiet of an English
12 wood/ [...] The narrow, bouldered mountain-track, / The broad, full-bosomed ocean, green and black,
13 / And Peace, and all that's good" (9-14). This determination and positive thinking is what kept
14 Graves from letting his spirits get too low. An even greater example of the power good morale can
15 have is in Leighton's "Ploegsteert." In this brief poem, Leighton dedicates the first stanza to his
16 criticism of the war: "... and all the joys that arc / known once ... / leaped ...to the elemental dust of
17 war" (2-4). The second stanza is Leighton's response to "joy" being taken from him and his battle
18 brothers: "I have seen blood and death, but all has ending, I And even Horror is but made to cease
19 ..." (5-6). Leighton points out that the war will be over soon, and so will his suffering, his family's
20 suffering, and his country's suffering. This poem serves as a reminder that the war is horrible, but is
21 worth fighting till the end, because the end is near.

22 So is the fight for good morale a concept of the era, or is it an effect of war that is seen
23 through the ages? Taking a recent account of British soldiers in Afghanistan (a hundred years after

1 World War I) into consideration, one can conclude that morale is the center pin keeping things
2 together for soldiers involved in all wars from any time in history. BBC's UK Troops Mark Last
3 Christmas in Afghanistan, an article from December, 2013, celebrates the overall relief that British
4 soldiers in Afghanistan had when the holidays were near. Even in foreign, warring land, Christmas
5 cheer was spread with "carol concerts," "exchange of presents," "mince pies," and even a marathon
6 run where soldiers dressed as Santa Claus. Brigadier James Woodham, the commander of Task
7 Force Helmand, speaks of the troops and the holiday celebrations: "It's a good morale boost and the
8 small details help to bring a little bit of home to Afghanistan."

9 War has its obvious effects – pain, confusion, suffering, struggle, sacrifice-but it also brings
10 out the deepest parts of the hearts of the people involved, showing the power humans have to keep
11 their morale boosted up in order to cope with the pain and survive difficult times. Whether it is poetry
12 or gathered events during the holidays, people tend to find the good in any situation, escape from the
13 war-mind, and remind each other what is really worth fighting for peace.

Works Cited

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