

ENGLISH STANDARD

“Wilfred Owen’s poetry continues to maintain its appeal today because its ideas are timeless.”

Wilfred Owen’s poetry presents a realistic view on the horrors of war in order to force the audience to be continually reminded of the torment of the young soldiers sacrificed in WWI. “Dulce Et Decorum Est” and “Mental Cases” offers Owen’s personal experience of the grim realities of battle and a deep emotional response to allow for a true understanding of war. His great ability to create such distinct imagery and use expressive language captivates his audience in an emotional and memorable way.

Owen’s concepts display his criticism about people’s perception of war and thus, he approaches his audience to give a true understanding of war from his witnessed first-hand casualties on the warfront. In Owen’s most famous poem, “Dulce Et Decorum Est”, the view of war being sweet and fitting is exposed as a lie. The title is cruelly ironic and quoted from an ancient Roman poet, Horace, thus arguing that such a lie of war being honourable has been told for centuries. He expresses the disgrace and pity about forcing young men and manipulating them into this lie and this view is emphasised by the enjambment which interrupts the seemingly poetic iambic pentameter. This symbolises the breakdown of society’s values and suggests there is nothing poetic as it opens with vivid imagery portraying young soldiers undermined “like old beggars under sacks” and “coughing like hags”. The similes present prematurely aged, physically ruined and mentally traumatised men. In the warning of “Gas, GAS! Quick, boys!”, the audience is confronted with a sense of urgency which intensifies the horror. Owen likens the death by gas through the extended metaphor for drowning and thus, the collection of verbs, “smothering”, “writhing”, “hanging” and “gargling” gives the audience a vile experience of the suffering. Once again, Owen directly points out that there is no sweetness to war where soldiers are “flung”, depicting no sense of honour. This youth is now “devil’s sick of sin” suffering “froth-corrupted lungs” which disturbs the audience in a confronting and horrifying manner. It shows the extreme of human cruelty and immorality which has caused great suffering and atrocities. Owen concludes the poem by justifying the title in his mockery quote to “my friend”. The irony between “desperate glory” that displays a sense of achievement and purpose in life and “pro patria mori” meaning to die for your country exposes the misconceptions of propaganda and the “glorious dead”. Hence, Owen has portrayed the disastrous effects of war which conflicts with the view that war is sweet and fitting to allow for a change in society’s views.

With the use of distinct imagery, Owen displays the horror which forever torments the minds of the victim. In “Mental Cases”, Owen intends to illustrate the distressing and shocking images subjected by the soldiers in confronting and descriptive details. Like in “Dulce Et Decorum Est”, Owen shows the men in the prime of their life reduced to senile wrecks and mentally broken. In presenting the poem in a cyclical structure, there is great emphasis on the first word of each line to develop a falling rhythm in order to evoke the poem’s message. The nameless state of “these” and “they” dehumanises and reduces them to this label and confronts the reader with the interrogatory tone. He employs vivid imagery of “drooping tongues” and “baring teeth” to emphasise the horror of traumatised soldiers. Owen refers to them as “hellish” in which their tormented mental mind relives the sufferings, a fate far worse than death. Instead their “memory” is triggered the minds by vivid images of “sloughs of flesh” and “multitudinous murders”. Such harsh alliteration of “m” emphasises the persona’s shock and furthermore, make a connection between the horrific images of death “they once witnessed” and the creatures which they have now become. The “tormented” effectively emphasises on their suffering which has disconnected them to the outer world; their world is now delved in the pain and horror of war. “Sunlight” and “night” does not exist in their world as “dawn” has taken over that holds neither repair nor recovery and allows for the mental wound to worsen but never heal. The extended metaphor of “set-smiling corpses” gives a false appearance emphasising on again their dehumanisation. Such actions of “plucking”, “picking”, “snatching” and “pawing” highlights the destruction and madness of a war that forces the mental mind to visualise and be forever scarred. Owen clearly identifies that those who have sent them to war are responsible for

their madness and traumatised life. Thus, Owen greatly emphasises that horrors of war don't stop at the warfront but continues endlessly through the distorted mental mind.

Owen's images and expressive language in "Dulce Es Decorum Est" and "Mental Cases" creates influence in presenting his perspective of the horrors and pity of war. Thus, Owen's ideas allures to the audience in such a way that will continue to affect them and change their attitudes of war.