

## ENGLISH: *THE WAR POEMS*

### Anger and bitterness suffuse Owen's war poetry. Discuss.

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Wilfred Owen, having personally succumbed to the horrifying and grotesque nature of war, fiercely exposes his attitude towards the wastefulness and "incomparable" destruction of warfare; as well as condemnation towards those that encourage "young men" to travel to war. Imbued with resentment and with a belief that 'all the poet can do today is warn', Owen set out to inform future generations about the unforgiving nature of warfare; adopting visceral imagery and onomatopoeia as a vehicle to emphasise his regret and "pity of war".

The patriotic idea of the "Old Lie" led many men, including Owen, into a nightmarish situation that they could never escape from, and their eventual realisation that the reality of the conflict was being "white-washed" by officers and governments created an immense amount of fury and resentment. The officers in "Smile, Smile, Smile" are shining a light on the gains they've had, and are neglecting the soldiers that have perished for the cause, incorrectly exposing war to the rest of the nation. The use of the phrase "We rulers sitting in this ancient spot would wrong our very selves if we forgot" highlights that the rulers (generals) are lying about their integrity and how much they really care about the lives of the men they send off to be slaughtered on the frontline, indicating the attitudes towards combatants during World War 1. Permeating his poetry with sarcasm, Owen attempts to attack the "rulers" integrity and power to indicate the extreme amount of bitterness held towards the "vain citadels". As seen in "The Dead-Beat, the description of "bold uncles, smiling ministerially" suggests Owens bitterness towards the people back home who are safe and happy "getting [their] fun"; completely contrasted with the mentally unstable soldier experiencing shell shock. Yet interestingly, Owen reveals how it is not just the brutal "blood bath" that has crippled the soldiers mind, but also the reminder of his family who have "improved materially" whilst he is left to lay down his own life for the "valiant" home front. The term "ministerially" further reveals Owens cynicism towards the "bold uncles", as he suggests that despite their understanding and awareness of the soldier's pain, they will continue to follow the "Old Lie" and denounce sacrifice of the young men, all for the sake of their own pride. This is heightened in "The parable of the old man and the young" with the use of the phrase "Ram of Pride", suggesting the authority's inability to admit their pride dominated their sympathy and compassion for the soldiers, resulting in the death of "half the seed of Europe".

Through his anthology, Wilfred Owen expresses the viciousness and verisimilitude by exposing readers to the barbarity that is customary in front line combat. It is through the adoption of visceral imagery and severely harsh language that Owen exposes his anger towards warfare, forcing the readers to visualises the "blood bath the soldiers endured. As seen in "Mental Cases", the phrase "drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish" is purposely designed to paint a vivid image of animalistic qualities, dehumanising these men into walking corpses. This repulsive and shocking image is heightened through the depiction of men as "cattle" in "Anthem for Doomed Youth", an animal that carries connotations with slaughter, of a collective being formed and herded to die together, suggesting that the Generals and "the shires" think of them as animals rather than human beings, exposing Owens anger towards such selfish and incomparable treatment. Additionally, the "monstrous" sound of the guns, as described in "Anthem for Doomed Youth", are personified to portray even the non-human elements of the battlefield as alive, hostile and terrifying, further emphasising the constant fear and feeling of danger, plunging the reader into the "Hellish" and nefarious environment. Ironically, the replacement of all musical elements of a religious funeral service - guns for bells, rifle shots for prayers and "wailing shells" for choirs –suggests that what mourns these soldiers will eventually kill them, expressing Owens severe resentment towards the inadequacy of religion and the unprecedented horrors of warfare. The sound of humans on the battlefield is also emphasised in "Dulce et Decorum Est" where the reader is compelled to literally hear the suffering of a young soldier who is "guttering [and] choking" whilst "blood come[s] gargling" from his lungs. Due to the words containing multiple syllables Owen is literally compelling the reader to further draw out the process of suffering, as though the readers themselves are a part of the

gradual and excruciating death; highlighting Owens indignation towards the wastefulness and pointless nature of warfare.

While soldiers are sent to war amidst fireworks of premature congratulations, the returning serviceman is often the subject of pity and negligence, propelling Owen to bitterly condemn those who abandon their young boys; "Why don't they come?" the "legless" soldier cries. Owen's poems act to "warn" any young man enlisting with the expectation of "smart salutes" and "esprit de corps", by emphasising the lack of innate care and support on the improbable arrival home; As revealed in "Disabled", the mother that once romanticised about the "nice safe wound to nurse" doesn't even look at her son as a human, merely a "legless" "queer disease" incapable of life beyond a wheelchair. The negligent treatment is further emphasised when Owen describes the appreciation of sacrifice from only "a" single man suggesting the severe lack of sympathy and concern for the "legless" walking dead, encouraging the readers to understand the callous and horrifying reality of not only trench warfare, but the aftermath of this animalistic event. Moreover, the constant use of the word "he" throughout the poem indicates this "old" man has lost his identity, left nameless and disregarded by the community and himself, ultimately denouncing the home front for leaving this man alone and unwanted, as many of the soldiers were on the return home, further accentuating Owens anger and bitterness towards the selfish behaviours of "the shires".

Wilfred Owen's anthology reveals the resent and rage towards several entities that Owen blames for the "incomparable carnage" and destruction that war caused. Owen exposes the waste of lives of the young soldiers who fought for the pride of their ignorant "uncles", "Megs" and government bodies, indicating their lack of care and sympathy for the young men.