

## Wilfred Owen Poems

### Spring Offensive

- Start with opening information:
  - Spring offensive was completed in September of 1918 and is Owen's last poem.
- I will be approaching the poem thematically
  - The themes of the poem that I will be exploring are
    1. **The horrors and hellish nature of war**
    2. **Camaraderie between soldiers**
    3. **Unnaturalness of war**
- Provide contextualisation and overview of extract
  - This poem was written by Wilfred Owen, a war poet who focused on anti-war poetry after experiencing the horrors of World War 1 first hand.
  - In fact, this poem is based on a military initiative that Owen took part in, the German Spring Offensive.
  - Owen uses stanzas to build a narrative around the different stages of attack as part of the offensive, starting in the first stanza by setting the scene and completing the last stanza with a reflection of the battle in the stanzas between. In line with the dynamic nature of the poem through the story it tells, Owen is allowed to explore different themes of individual soldiers and of the larger war.
- **The horrors and hellish nature of war**
  - Juxtaposition between symbols
    - "spring", "summer", use of nature imagery
      - The use of spring, summer and nature in the first half of the poem is to symbolise the life and hope of survival for the men. These key symbols are then turned on end in the second half of the poem when the very earth seems to rise up and swallow the soldiers. This is seen from "green slopes/ chasmed and steepened sheer to infinite space", "cold gust", "fury of hell's upsurge".
  - Metaphors
    - "summer oozed into their veins"
    - Powerful figurative images of nature
  - Rhythm
    - Uneven lines throughout the poem, broken rhythm, creates an uneasiness and tension in the readers.
    - Creating a sense of unease and tension as the reader continues to read through the poem. This heightened tension parallels the tension that the soldier's themselves must feel for the impending battle that awaits them atop the hill.
    - Trochaic meter is used in certain lines to highlight the danger and tension of the war. (please identify)
  - Ominous tone
    - "knowing their feet had come to the ends of the world", "fearfully flashed the sky's mysterious glass", "clutched and clung like sorrowing hands".

- Owen creates an ominous mysterious tone in the poem which gives the impression that all is not well in the spring. This acts as a slight foreshadowing to the horrors of war that Owen portrays later on in the poem.
- Tension
  - Owen creates slight tension that breaks up the relative easy and relax tone used in the first few stanzas.
  - Alliteration
    - “halted... Hill”
      - Attracts the readers attention from the start and creates a slight bit of tension that acts as a hint to the readers that all is as well and peaceful as portrayed.
    - “s” sounds in “slept”, “stark”, “sky”
      - These sounds hint at the slight tension within the soldiers despite the peaceful setting.
- Oxymoron
  - Owen employs the use of an oxymoron in the last stanza with the phrase ‘superhuman inhumanities’. This suggests the lost of humanity that soldiers experienced in war. It is like they have become violent human killing machines, ‘out-fiending all its fiends and flames’. This oxymoron does not paint a glorious image of their survival and this just contributes to show how much ruins came out of war, how much destruction and how much soldiers have lost from war, thus the horrors of war.
- Creating a peaceful setting to act as contrast for the hellish nature of war
  - Onomatopoeia
    - “long grass swirled”, “murmurous”, “summer oozed into their veins”
      - The use of onomatopoeia here is to create a very peaceful setting for readers. Readers are lulled into the false sense of security of serenity and peace that the hillside in spring brings.
      - Owen uses the first 3 stanzas to do this in order to contrast the hellish images of war with the peaceful setting of spring.
  - Enjambment
    - The use of enjambment in the first two stanza is to provide this fluid feel to the poem of ease and relaxation.
  - Assonance and alliteration
    - “m” sound in “marvelling”, “may breeze”, “murmurous”, “midge”
      - The drowsy consonant “m” sounds used create a peaceful and calm atmosphere.
- **Camaraderie between soldiers**
  - Rhyming couplets
    - There are three sets of rhyming couplets throughout this poem that seem to indicate a sense of togetherness and camaraderie.

- “They fed, and, lying easy, were at ease // And, finding comfortable chests and knees”
  - The first rhyming couplet provides an image of togetherness and the closeness that the soldiers have with one another. The image portrayed is of the soldiers lying atop one another in brotherhood and in peace. Emphasizing the camaraderie.
- “So, soon they topped the hill, and raced together//Over an open stretch of herb and heather”
  - The second couplet here is used to show the camaraderie the soldiers have in running together through the exposed stretch of “heather” “together”. This conveys the camaraderie and bravery the soldiers have in the face of imminent danger and death.
- “Regained cool peaceful air in wonder— // Why speak they not of comrades that went under?”
  - This third rhyming couplet at the end of the poem is used to convey the grief and sorrow that the soldiers feel for their fallen brethren. The further use in enjambment seems to emphasize a gap created that used to be filled by a soldier/brother that has fallen in the battle. This contrasts the first rhyming couplet where before the soldiers were lying atop one another, on “chest” and “knees”. This conveys the theme of camaraderie in war as well as the pity of war.
  - Rhetoric question conveys the insurmountable grief that the soldiers feel for there fallen brothers. It highlights the profound sadness, pain and suffering that these soldiers feel and cannot express in words.

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- **Unnaturalness of war**

- Significance of the title
  - The titular significance of “Spring offensive” is that the title itself creates a juxtaposition between two opposing ideas.
  - “Spring” is the season which represent new beginnings, hope and new life. Whereas “offensive” is representative of aggression and violence.
  - By juxtaposing these two contrasting ideas with one another in the title, Owen creates a sense of tension in the title. This tension also conveys the idea of nature opposing war, introducing the theme of the unnaturalness of war.
- Personification
  - The personification of “brambles” in the third stanza is a biblical allusion. The allusion is to Jesus wearing a crown of thorns upon his head as he carried the cross for his crucifixion.

- The way that the brambles “clutch” and “clung” like “sorrowing hands” is perhaps how Owen shows that nature is against the act of war, portraying the unnaturalness of war.
- Symbolism
  - The sun is used as a symbol for life. The sun portrayed as a “friend” “with whom their love is done”, represents the soldiers turning away from the sun. The soldier’s have spurned the “bounty” of the sun sacrificing themselves and committing themselves to fighting the war. By turning away from the sun, the soldiers are turning away from life, effectively giving up the hope of living, and also it shows that they are committing unnatural acts of war.
- Nature imagery
  - The nature imagery used is very violent and destructive, painting an apocalyptic image for the readers.
  - “the whole sky burned”, “cups opened in thousands for their blood”, “green slopes chasmed”
  - All these nature imagery is used to contrast to the earlier peaceful natural setting painted by Owen and conveys the unnaturalness of war.

Conclusion