

## Wilfred Owen Poems

### Disabled

- Start with opening information: Owen wrote *Disabled* at Craiglockhart in 1917 where he would have observed men like the one in the poem. Robert Graves was visiting Siegfried Sassoon at the time and both were impressed by the verse. Owen revised *Disabled* in Ripon during his training in 1918.
- 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 was written when Wilfred Owen was at Craiglockhart, a war hospital at which Wilfred Owen recovered after suffering injuries during his time on the battlefield, and we see his intense personal experiences with war reflected onto the poem that he writes.
  - The structure of the poem is irregular in stanza, meter and rhyme. The narrative of the poem expresses the frustration and torment experienced by a young soldier sent back from the battlefield after being disabled and perhaps the irregular structure is meant to compliment this concept of a disabled individual who does not appear or function normally
  - Through the depressing experience of the disabled soldier, Wilfred Owen is able to explore the nature of war, evoking pity for the soldier while passing commentary on those with pro-war sentiment
  - Structure:
    - 7 stanzas of varying lengths. Comparison of a soldier's life before and after the war.
- I will be approaching the poem thematically
  - The themes of the poem that I will be exploring are
    1. The tragedy of war
    2. The plight of the soldier and pity of war
    3. The farce of patriotism
- The tragedy of war
  - Diction
    - 'Legless, sewn short at elbow'
      - The physicality of the soldier is described to us in a frank and uncompromising way and we are shown the extent of the injuries he sustained, that he has lost both his legs along with an arm
      - The sharp sibilant sounds create a sense of the searing pain experienced by the soldier, evoking sympathy in the reader who might wince at the brutal nature of the injuries
      - Additionally, the natural pause that the use of a comma creates also builds on the sense that something has been cut short, reflecting the nature of his injuries
    - 'In the old times, before he threw away his knees'

- The term 'threw away' connotes a certain sense of wastage or carelessness that highlights the unnecessary loss that the war has caused many individuals
- The tone here is one of anger and regret for the loss of his limbs.
- Furthermore, "threw away", "lost", and "poured" are all action verbs and are ironic as they suggest that the man's suffering and his loss is due to his own actions.
- Color imagery
  - 'He's lost his colour very far from here', 'Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry'
    - This loss of colour might refer to how he might have gone pale upon seeing all the horrors of war, for example, in another of Owen's poems, Insensibility, he likens the march of soldiers on the battlefield to walking on an alley cobbled with the dead bodies of their comrades and such a horrifying sight would definitely cause one to lose his colour, emphasising a common theme in both poems, the horrors of war
    - Another interpretation of the phrase 'loss of colour' might be in reference to youths being described as having rosy cheeks and the fact that this soldier is described as having lost his colour might indicate a loss of innocence
    - Yet another meaning that could be carried in the phrase 'loss of colour' could be in that the soldier lost blood and became paler as he bled out. This is corroborated in the following line where the speaker tells the reader how the veins of the soldier ran dry, poured down shell holes. This paints a mental image of a blood soaked battlefield marked with craters from artillery fire and this builds on the theme of the horrors of war
    - The fact that the speaker specifies that this occurred 'very far from here' creates a sense of disconnect or distance between what happened while this soldier was fighting in the war in the past, juxtaposed against the soldier's present scenario. The lack of detail creates mystery and also creates a sense of fear of the unknown or unfamiliar in the reader, adding to the grim and uneasy atmosphere
  - The use of the flowing 'l' sounds in "lifetime lapsed in the hot race/ and leap of.." conveys the flowing of blood and adds emphasis the the spurting of blood stated in the following line.
  - 'leap of purple spurted from his thigh', 'One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg'
    - A juxtaposition between the injuries described in the two lines and this is emphasised by the break in stanza between the two lines. The break between the two lines also serves to create a distancing between the home front and the western front.
    - Assonance of the plosive sounds p in "purple spurted" is distasteful.

- The soldier reminisces of how he would not mind being bloodied while playing sport, perhaps because of the masculinity associated with it. However, the vastly different and uncompromising nature of the injury he experienced on the battlefield illuminates the **grim nature of war**.
    - This is emphasised by the way the injuries are described. While the injury from playing sport is simply a smear of blood, the injury from the battlefield caused a leap of purple to spurt from his thigh, and the use of visual imagery paints a much more violent and visceral image, this highlights the theme, **the pity of war**.
  - Symbol
    - The broken figure of the soldier that the poem is centred around is a symbol for the destruction at the aftermath of war. The blood smear down his leg symbolises how all youth see the war as it is portrayed to them through propaganda, as an honourable and glorious thing to participate in. However, the poem shows the bloodshed and the tragedy of war in how it truly is.
- **The plight of the soldier and pity of war**
  - Color imagery
    - ‘waiting for dark’, ‘shivered in his ghastly suit of grey’
      - Colour imagery used in the opening lines immediately sets a bleak atmosphere and situation that the soldier is faced with and this is further emphasised by the use of the verb shiver, which indicates a cold and bleak setting.
      - “waiting” conveys a sense of hopelessness, rather than anticipation anticipation when paired with the colour imagery used.
  - Anaphora
    - ‘Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn’, ‘Voices of play and pleasure after day’
      - The soldier is reminded of the youth that he has forgone because of his time in the war as well as the injuries he has sustained from the war.
      - **Additionally, the simile used to liken the voices of boys to a hymn serves to compare what he hears to that of an elegy at a funeral, as he is left to mourn the death of his youth**
      - The use of **anaphora** emphasises the taunting and tormenting nature of having to listen to the joy of others while he himself is **unable to lead a normal life because of the war**
  - Transferred epithet
    - ‘gathering sleep had mothered them from him’
      - This transferred epithet is used to emphasise the isolation experienced by the soldier and this sentiment is echoed later in the poem where it is revealed that girls interact with the soldier ‘like some queer disease’
      - This evokes more sympathy for the soldier and emphasises his plight

- 'never feel again how slim Girls' waists are', 'how warm their subtle hands'
  - This might suggest that due to the fact that he lost his arm, he is physically unable to feel and have these experiences, but it might also suggest, as stated in the following line, that people around him treat him differently and do not want to share his company
  - Tactile imagery is used to emphasise the soldier's loss of the ability to experience intimacy
- Rhyme
  - The words in each line seem to rhyme with another line within 2 or 3 lines. Such as "grey" //"day" //"gay" ... this is continued throughout the poem.
  - What is interesting to note is the lack of a rhyming word with "hand" in line 12. This lack of a pairing end rhyme seems to highlight two things.
    - Firstly, absence of the girls' hands never to be experienced by the disabled man, used to emphasise the **pity of war.**
    - Secondly, the absence of the soldier's own hand as his suit is "sewn sort at the elbow", emphasising the **carelessness and the plight of a soldier** whilst evoking sympathy for the soldier in readers.
- Rhythm
  - The poem follows a largely iambic pentameter rhythm, however, in lines 10 and 40, Owen has added an extra foot in these lines. This disrupts the narrative flow of the piece just as the situations have halted/ slowed down the progress of the young soldier.
- Symbol
  - The darkness present at the start and end of the poem is a powerful symbol for the way that the man possible is just waiting for death to come. As the man is in so much pain, physically and mentally, and cannot change his future, that he just waits for death to take him.
- **The farce of patriotism**
  - Rhythm
    - Line 23, "It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg," is a hyper catalectic line and subtly focuses on the incoherence of a man that has had too much to drink.
  - Caesura
    - The frequent use of caesuras in stanza four indicate the soldier as a more mature man, carefully reflecting on his youthful days before he had signed up for the war, and the reasons as to why he had signed up for the wars. For example:
    - In line 24, the pause created by the medial caesura "-he wonders why" gives the sense of an older man that has time to reflect on his decisions and actions, most of which is focused on the over glorification of war fed to him through propaganda.
  - Juxtaposition of lines
    - "And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers. //  
Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal. "
    - The juxtaposition of these two lines, emphasizes on one hand the mighty cheers that were given out for the young soldier as he left for

war and the sad few cheers that he got when he returned from the war, no longer a “whole” man.

- By splitting the first line and 2<sup>nd</sup> line into two different paragraph, Owen, has managed to highlight the large difference in the cheers between those that were for him enlisting (over glorification) and for his return (softer than that of those that cheer “goal”).
- This is the sad truth of the over glorification of war that Owen wants to highlight.
- ‘He wonders why.’ ‘That’s why’
  - The soldier is left to reflect on his decision to enlist and when he thinks back to the reason, which is that ‘Someone had said he’d look a god in kilts’, he realises his foolishness and in fact the line itself, that someone said he’d look a god in a kilt, sounds **foolish** and even more so upon reflection. This highlights the mentality of the young men who were lead to believe the patriotic propaganda being fed to the youths by the government.
- ‘to please his Meg’, ‘to please the giddy jilts’
  - Another reason that the soldier thought to enlist was to attract the attention of women and again this presents the **foolish nature** of the soldier who thought that this was important.
  - Throughout the poem, we also see the truth of the situation, in that now the soldier is donned with a ghastly suit of grey and has the attention of women ‘pass[ing] from him to the strong men that were whole’ and this again highlights the vast contrast between the propaganda told to the youth before and when he enlisted contrasting against the true horrors of the war.
- ‘He asked to join. He didn’t have to beg’, ‘Smiling they wrote his lie’
  - The **sinister nature** of the enrolment process is highlighted, that they take advantage of the ignorant young men and this is emphasised by the fact that the young man is actually below enlistment age, yet the recruits happily wrote down his “lie”
- Over glorification of war (propaganda)
  - ‘Germans he scarcely thought of’, ‘Austria’s, did not move him’, ‘no fears of Fear came yet’
  - ‘He thought of jewelled hilts for daggers in plaid socks’, ‘of smart salutes; and care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears; esprit de corps, and hints for young recruits’
    - Polysyndetic listing is used to emphasise all of the false impressions that he had of the army, highlighting the ignorance of the soldier
    - Additionally, this highlights how propaganda has painted a glorified picture of the war effort and how for all of the patriotic sentiment that is spread through propaganda, the soldiers are the ones that suffer the consequences of their lies
    - Emphasising the farce of patriotism
- ‘a solemn man who brought him fruits *thanked* him’
- ‘inquired about his soul’ – something to do with religion

- Cyclic ending
  - 'How cold and late it is! Why don't they come and put him into bed? Why don't they come?'
  - The poem ends with the soldier alone again, just like how he was presented at the start of the poem.
  - The repetition of "why don't they come" presents the soldier's desperation for attention and care from others and evokes pity in readers for the pain and loss the soldier has suffered.
  - The cyclic ending also shows how the man is suffering a never ending mental torture.