

## Wilfred Owen IOC Notes

Owen's Biography

- Born in Oswestry on the Welsh borders and known as one of the greatest voices of WW1 (1914-1918)
- Enlisted in the British army in 1915 and his first experiences with trench warfare in 1917 led to shell shock, causing him to return to Britain
- While recovering at Craiglockhart war hospital in Edinburgh, he met a literary hero of his, Siegfried Sassoon who guided him and encouraged him to bring his war experiences into his poetry
- He was killed in 1918 during the battle to cross the Sambre-Oise canal at Ors
- Witnessing first-hand the horrors of the Western front, his verse draws on his love of nature and profound anti-war sentiment, fused with his Christian heritage
- His work is based on an increasing realisation of the disconnect between the view of the war at home and the harsh and gruesome realities of the battlefield

Categories of Owen's poems

1. Spokesperson: Speaks from the viewpoint of soldiers as he has the first hand experience
2. Truth Vs Lies
3. Casualties of War

Poem Analyses (Device/Linear approach)1. **Dulce Et Decorum Est (Device)**

**Introduction:** As Owen describes it, war becomes a never-ending nightmare of muddy trenches and unexpected gas attacks. Set in the middle of a gas attack, this poem explores the intense agony of a world gone suddenly insane – and the unfortunate men who have to struggle through it.

**Messages****A. Warfare**

- There doesn't even need to be a real enemy present to create the devastation and destruction.

**B. Suffering**

- Physical pain and psychological trauma become indistinguishable
- Caught in the memory of a gas-attack, the poem's speaker oscillates between the pain of the past (the actual experience of battle) and the pain of the present (he can't get the image of his dying comrade out of his head)

**C. Patriotism**

- In this poem, dying for your country seems a lot less worthwhile than old patriotic battle cries imply (Irony in the title)

**D. Disconnect in perspective**

- Civilians at home can never know how it really is on the battlefield

**Devices****A. Title and its Irony**

- Latin phrase taken from an ode by Horace which translates to "It is sweet and proper"
- These words were used as an oath by soldiers at the start of WW1
- The irony that lies in the title is immediately discovered within the first few lines of the poem, how can it be sweet and proper to be "coughing like hags, cursing through sludge"?
- The full version of the Latin saying is found at the end of the poem and goes "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" which translates to "It is sweet and proper to die for your country"
- The irony lies in the fact that Owen calls it "The old lie" and he is trying to convey the fact that there is nothing sweet, proper or glorious about war. In this poem, Owen tries to reveal the real gruesomeness of war to the unknowing eyes who haven't witnessed it themselves
- Purpose of the poem is to reveal the truth of war and the real sufferings of soldiers

## B. Sound devices

### - Alliteration

- Plosive: repetition of 'b' sounds in "bent double, like old beggars" launches audience straight into the description of a war
- Liquid: repetition of 'l' sound in "Lost their boots...But limped on...All went lame" -The sounds are long and draggy to show how dreadfully slow time passes for soldiers on the battlefield
- Guttural: repetition of 'g' sound in "Gas! Gas!"- Effect of choking on the poison gas
- Guttural+Plosive: repetition of 'p', 'g', 'ch' and 'd' sounds in "He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning" reflects intensity of the poison gas and mimics the coughing sounds of soldiers who are drowning in the green sea of poison gas
- Euphonic alliteration: repetition of smooth sounding consonant 'w' in "watch the white eyes writhing in his face" creates the effect of the "smothering dream" that Owen mentioned. Everything is smooth and surreal like a dream, it is something the reader can only imagine but never be able to experience personally (More like a nightmare)
- Guttural+Sibilant: repetition of 'g', 'c', 's' sounds in "Gargling...Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud"- Emphasises the vile and horrifying effects of poison gas on the soldiers
- Sibilant: repetition of 's' sound in "like a devil's sick of sin"-Religious allusion to Christianity, where the devil is described as a serpent. Sibilance resembles hissing sound and solidifies the auditory imagery

### - Pararhyme

- Owen's pararhyme bends the poetic tradition, creating in the reader an uneasy sense of dislocation to create a gap between the reader and himself. He makes this distinction to emphasise again, the fact that a person outside the battlefield will never truly understand the experiences of a soldier
- Pararhyme pairs: "Sacks, backs", "Sludge, trudge", "boots, hoots" and "blind, behind"

## C. Imagery

- The imagery present is purposed at vividly describing the experience of being in poison gas infested trenches

### - Tactile

- "knock-kneed"-effect of a sharp pain in the knee
- "cursed through sludge"-muddy and sticky trenches

### - Auditory

- "coughing like hags"-disturbing sounds of violent, diseased coughing
- "deaf even to the hoots of gas shells dropping softly"-Their eardrums are so destroyed that they can't even hear the sound of gas shells dropping near them
- "Blood come gargling from the froth corrupted lungs"-Gory and horrifying sound imagery to emphasise the pain caused by poison gas, both to the person who inhaled it and the person who sees his comrades suffer

### - Visual

- "Men marched asleep"- They are so sleep deprived that they seem to be fully asleep while on the battlefield
- "misty panes"-panes allow the reader a window into what the soldier sees. The soldiers are wearing gas masks and all they can see is the mist covered pane of their goggles.
- "thick green light" and "green sea" refer to the poison gas, giving the reader an image of how it looks. The use of 'sea' intensifies the image and shows it to be unending
- "white eyes writhing"- ghastly image of a soldier's eyes in pain and suffering from choking on poison gas

### - Gustatory

- "bitter as the cud of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues"- leaves a foul and vile taste in the reader's mouth as he imagines the soldier with the sores on their tongues, revealing the reality and gruesomeness of war

**D. Structure****- Caesura**

- Unnatural pauses in the middle of the line in “Men marched asleep.” and “but limped on, blood-shod.” Creates an effect of disjointedness and erects a barrier between the reader and the soldiers

**- Enjambment**

- Lines in the poems run on without punctuation such as “we turned our backs and toward the distant rest began to trudge”- shows the unceasing nature of war and how soldiers do not even have a second to rest

**- Simile**

- “Bent double, like old beggars under sacks” shows Owen’s attempt to make the experiences more relatable and easy to visualise for the common civilian, again showing the disjoint between how well civilians understand the real experiences of soldiers.

**2. Apologia Pro Poemate Meo (Device)**

**Introduction:** Owen wrote this poem, which either means apology for my poetry or an explanation of his poetry, as a response to Robert Grave’s ‘Two Fusiliers’. It was written in late 1917, which was around the time of his release from Craiglockhart War Hospital. The poem conveys a battle between good and evil, both within the soldiers themselves, and war as a whole. A Soldier has to put aside his conscious and kill for the bigger picture without ever questioning whether he is doing the right thing or not. This poem explores this idea along with a few other key messages.

**Messages/concerns**

- A. Dehumanisation and desensitisation of soldiers as a horror of war
- B. Divine aspect of man which transcends into the horrors of war
- C. Camaraderie and intimacy within the horror of war
- D. Civilians will never understand war in its raw form

**Devices****A. Title**

- Directly translates into “In defence of my poetry” which shows Owen’s defensive attitude. The poem is written to justify the tragic tone Owen employs in his poetry

**B. Juxtaposition and paradoxes**

- “Saw God through mud”-Juxtaposition between something sacred and something profane, emphasis on realism instead of falsely beautifying war
- First stanza is full of paradoxical pairs such as “God, mud”, “wretches smiled”, “glory, blood” and “laughs, shakes”- Shows the tinge of initial optimism and motivation that soldiers have, despite witnessing the reality of war first hand. A soldier’s motivation to go to war is the pride and glory they are told of before enlisting as a soldier
- Contradictions in “music” vs “silence” and “peace” vs “shell storms”. These seem like unusual pairs to the ordinary reader or civilian, but not to soldiers. The soldiers managed to find tranquility amidst the turmoil of war, something the ordinary reader will never understand
- The paradoxes have been used to create a barrier between soldiers and civilians, emphasising that civilians at home cannot understand the sentiments of soldiers on the battlefield

**C. Sound devices****- Alliteration**

- Sibilant repetition of ‘s’ consonant in “sailed my spirit surging”- Effect of smoothness and freedom, reiterating the image of a free spirit

**- Paraphrase**

- Owen’s paraphrase bends the poetic tradition, creating in the reader an uneasy sense of dislocation to create a gap between the reader and himself. He makes this distinction to emphasise again, the fact that a person outside the battlefield will never truly understand the experiences of a soldier
- Pairs of paraphrase include “mud, blood”, “smiled, child”, “there, bare” and “absurd, murder”
- Paraphrase has a cacophony effect as it contains many hard consonants such as ‘d’ and ‘b’

### - Assonance

- Repetition of soft sounds in “binding of fair lips with the soft silk of eyes” is contrasted with the earlier hard consonants to emphasise the affection between soldiers. Owen is trying to portray the idea that caring for someone’s wounds is deeper than romantic love

## D. Imagery

### - Visual

- Owen further breaks the stereotypical conventions of romantic love with visual images
  - “ribbon slips”-weak link of romantic love slips and the love between soldiers takes over
  - “war’s hard wire”-wires that bind the love between soldiers
  - “bandage”-between soldiers in the form of camaraderie
- All these images show the stronger and more powerful love bond between soldiers, one that the ordinary man who is only exposed to romantic love, will never be able to comprehend

### - Tactile

- Violent tactile imagery in “slashed bones bare” is just a glimpse of the power that soldiers have.
- They have been bestowed so much power that “death becomes absurd and life absurder”- Soldiers are more used to death than life, which shows the extent of chaos in war
- They are immune to the effects of death such as loss or grief and feel no “remorse in murder”-The soldiers are completely desensitised by war
- So much so that Owen claims to have “dropped off dear”-He is so desensitised that he is incapable of fear. Shows the extent of violence in war that mentally scars soldiers to the point where they feel nothing anymore

### - Celestial

- The soldiers are described with celestial and angelic imagery such as “exultation”, “oblation” and “seraphic”
- The sacrifice of a soldier’s life is glorified to be like an “oblation” or a divine offering
- Owen describes war as something which transforms an ordinary man into an angelic being through self sacrifice, which emphasises the value of each life and each soldier

### - Biblical

- Comparison between heaven and hell in 8th stanza
- The war is described as a “sorrowful dark of hell”, which creates a sinister and traumatic image
- However, the experience is temporal, just like the “trembling of a flare”, almost insignificant
- “Heaven” is then mentioned as the only place that the soldiers will find peace. This is their final destination. There will be peace, but they have to die first. Shows the hopelessness of war and its inescapable darkness

## E. Structure

### - Repetition

- “You shall not” is repeated twice in the final stanza: Negatively authoritative. Owen attempts to distance the reader to show that there is no way one can know what the soldiers have been through without having fought alongside the soldiers themselves. The ordinary man can never understand the beauty of war
- Idea of “worth” is repeated, Owen tries to place a figurative value on the worth of our tears and the soldier’s merriment, and creates a disjoint. He emphasises that we should cry for the fighting soldiers. However, we are not the reason for their joy, we are not the reason they are fighting. Owen employs a bitter and condescending tone toward civilians as his sympathy is always with the soldiers

### - Rhyme scheme and line structure

- Consistent abab rhyme scheme and each stanza is a quartet
- Each stanza has a 6, 10, 10, 10 syllable structure
- These 3 features create a sense of order, which emphasises the positives within the negatives of war. Just like there is order within the disorder of war, there is love between soldiers amidst the turmoil

- Every stanza follows the 6, 10, 10, 10 syllable structure except the 8th one, signifying a turn of events, marked by the “nevertheless” at the beginning of the stanza where Owen turns to speak directly to and throw imperatives at the reader

### 3. Disabled (Linear)

**Introduction:** A poem that has grown in relevance since it was written in 1917, with the issue of disability being a common cause for concern during the WW1 period. Owen describes an ex-soldier who has lost all his limbs in the war, contrasting the life he once led to his current existence. The observer comments on how the man will never experience a normal life, and how his disability has destroyed him. The poem contrasts the handicapped soldier's life to how it was before the war as compared to how it is in his current state.

#### Messages

- Devastating effects of war on the lives of soldiers and how they are brainwashed to join the army
- The sacrifices that come with being a soldier and fighting for one's country
- The tragic helplessness that comes with being handicapped

#### Title

- “Disabled”- Connotations of something you are unable to do, sets a negative tone right at the start of the poem. The disabled soldier is one who represents all the casualties of war, therefore focusing on the pain each and every soldier goes through amplifies the collective horror of war.

#### Stanza 1

- “He sat”- Soldier is unnamed and he has lost his own identity, he is no longer the same person
- “Wheeled chair, waiting”- Inactive images suggest him not being able to do anything himself, showing his lack of independence
- “Waiting for dark, grey”- Negative imagery using dull colours which sets a solemn and sombre mood for the poem.
- “Shivered”- Kinaesthetic imagery of coldness and hostility
- “Saddening like a hymn”- Oxymoron which creates a funereal atmosphere and uses dark religious imagery
- “Till gathering sleep had mothered him”- Sleep is his only respite since it removes him from reality. He is able to find peace in sleep. As a result however, he is alienated from reality and alienated from society
- “Mothered”- Suggests that he has to be taken care of, reduced to a child like figure which strips him of his masculinity and portrays him as overly reliant or dependent on others, helpless due to his disability

#### Stanza 2

- “Town used to swing so gay”- Personification of the town transports the soldier and the reader back into the past. The second stanza shows the lovelier past and is contrasted with the ugly present shown in stanza 1.
- “gay, glow, girls, glanced, grew”- guttural alliteration reflects his deep sentiments and links the idealised images of the past together
- “grew dim”- Romantic imagery, linked to the girls and is contrasted with ‘dark’ in stanza 1, which is menacing and depressing. Again, the contrast between the past and the present is shown.
- “threw away his knees”- Visual imagery suggests carelessness and recklessness. He sacrificed for nothing.
- “He will never feel again”- Absolute term reflects the interminable solidarity that he has been struck with after becoming handicapped
- “how warm their subtle hands”- Kinaesthetic imagery contrasted with earlier cold image of ‘shivering’ in stanza 1. Suggests how comforting and delightful it used to be, the contrasting images highlight the difference he feels between the circumstances of the present vs the past
- “All of them”- Collective term, as if every single woman was feeling repulsed by him
- “touch him like some queer disease”- Sickness imagery, he is a representation of a diseased society caused and manifested through war



**Stanza 3**

- “Artist silly for his face”- Artistic imagery emphasises his beauty as he is likened to a work of art
- “Youth, old”- Contrast between youth and old age shows the slow and painful process of the soldier’s degradation
- “Lost his colour”- Symbol of energy, life and good health, all of which he has lost. This colour could represent blood as well, the blood his “veins ran dry” of after being amputated
- “Poured it down”- Visual imagery, ‘poured’ is an active words which suggests again that he himself is responsible for his current situation
- “Leap of purple spurted from his thigh”- Colour imagery represents the blood gushing out from his wounds when he lost his limbs on the battlefield

**Stanza 4**

- “one time he liked a blood smear down his leg”-Sport imagery, he enjoyed getting a little blood on his leg because it looked masculine and gave him an adrenaline rush
- “carried shoulder-high”- suggests victory and yet again emphasises the sport imagery going on
- “when he’d drunk a peg, he thought he’d join”- suggests that he was drunk while he made the decision to join the army. It shows that only someone not in their right state of mind would ever think of joining the army. This reveals Owen’s negative view on war and becoming a soldier
- “wonders why”- alliteration of w sounds emphasises the questioning tone. Once he has come back to his senses, he questions his foolishness
- “Smart salutes”- The soldier joined the army for a number of reasons and this was one of them, he was attracted by the orderliness in the army that came along with the rank system. This is ironic as little did he know how much chaos and disorder war can bring, especially to his life
- “Esprit De Corps”- Refers to a feeling of pride and mutual loyalty shared by the members of a group, usually in sports. This sport imagery suggests that his excitement toward sport is translated into an excitement toward joining the army
- “He was drafted out with drums and cheers”- Reminiscent of the earlier sports imagery at the beginning of the stanza

**Stanza 5**

- “Some cheer him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.” -The send off is immediately contrasted by the muted reception. Even though he had a greater achievement and sacrificed far more as a soldier, he didn’t receive the same kind of recognition he did as a footballer when he scored goals
- From “all” to “some” to “only a solemn man”- Shows again the slow process with which he is being alienated by society
- “*Thanked*”- In italics, it questions how genuine the man is being. It’s also possible that the man is a home coming minister whose job is to thank the soldiers. He is only doing it as a part of his job, not because he wants to do it. Emphasises the ungratefulness of civilians and the lack of recognition soldiers receive
- Shortness of the stanza also suggests that him returning and being thanked is not that big of a deal, not something to be extensively acknowledged

**Stanza 6**

- “A few sick years in institutes”-Back to the present, back to the sickness imagery
- “whatever pity they may dole”-Unfortunate and sad term which highlights his helplessness and the tragedy of his situation
- “How cold”- Repetition of earlier cold imagery suggests that the soldier is back to the cold, hard reality of his situation
- “Why don’t they come? Why don’t they come?”- Double entendre. They could be referring to the women who avoid him. However, it could suggest waiting for night time, which is an extended metaphor for waiting for death. It reflects the hopelessness of his situation and grimly suggests that death is the only resolution to his pain. The repetition only emphasises his desperation and desire for peace

**4. Insensibility (Linear)**

Introduction: In this poem, written in November 1917 in the thick of war, Owen tells the reader that the only way for a soldier to survive on the Western front is to damp down his own emotions and to become insensible to his bodily sensations. Such men are, in Owen’s estimation, ‘happy’. The

poem as such is about a group of soldiers who have been so overexposed to the brutality of war that they have become immune to it.

### Messages

- A. Horrors of war and man's inhumanity as seen on the battlefield
- B. Hopelessness and futility of war
- C. Survival is the only thing that matters and at war, men will go to any extent to ensure their own survival (shows again the gruesomeness of war)

### Title

- The title immediately shapes the thoughts and the mindset of soldiers in WW1
- It is devoid of emotions and sets an ominous and foreboding atmosphere

### Structure

- Each stanza is numbered with roman numerals as a deliberate attempt to show the increasing romanisation that was occurring in that time period, sets a context to the poem

### Stanza 1

- "Happy are men who yet before they killed can let their veins run cold"- Irony that people who can be cold blooded before they die are happy, an ironic re-writing which is opposite from the conventional meaning. Irony takes the reader aback and simulates thought with regard to the message Owen is trying to convey
- Pararhyme pairs "killed, cold", "feet, fought", "fleers, flowers" emphasise the awkward and incomplete internal rhyme within the poem which links back to the unusual way in which the poem started. Through these pararhyme pairs, Owen tries to create a disconnection and a sense of unease within the reader to prepare them for the brutal message he wants to portray through the poem
- "The front line withers"- Nature imagery which alludes to dying flowers. Reference to nature emphasises the point that war is not as beautiful or glorious as it seems. The men in the front line are high in command and are respected in the army, but they die too, they wither too. It creates an atmosphere of harsh realism.
- "flowers, fooling, filling, fought"- Fricative alliteration creates an accusatory tone, almost threatening the reader and emphasising the point that war is not meant to be romanticised, it is gruesome at its core
- "Men, gaps for filling"- Ghastly image of empty trenches which are described as if they are dug with the purpose of being filled with the corpses of dead soldiers, shows the atrocities of war
- "Losses, longer"- Liquid alliteration brings the reader's attention to the dying soldiers and evokes a sense of sympathy in the reader. These long vowel sounds extend the sentences and slow down the reader to show them the pain the soldiers have to go through

### Stanza 2

- "Some cease feeling"-Suggests lack of compassion. They are losing the emotions that make them human, which suggests their dehumanisation
- "Even themselves or for themselves"-Repetition creates a synthetic balance in the line and makes it unnatural and makes the reader feel uneasy to make the unease of the soldiers more relatable
- "Shelling, shilling" Pararhyme pair which has reached the epitome of disconnection as they are now separated by several lines
- "keep no check on armies' decimation"- Creates a futile and barren atmosphere where the life of each soldier is not paid attention to and the casualties become numbers, linking back to the roman numeric labels above each stanza

### Stanza 3

- This stanza emphasises the fact that every single human sense has been affected and destroyed by the wrath of warfare and bloodshed
- "Happy are those"-Owen uses repetition to reiterate his point and bring the reader back to the message he is trying to convey in this poem
- "imagination" vs "ammunition"- Contrast between an abstract, intangible idea and a concrete, tangible idea highlights the disconnect between realism and non-realism, a blurring of reality which soldiers experience

- “eyes are rid Of the hurt of the colour of blood forever”- Combination of visual and kinaesthetic imagery shows how desensitised the eyes are. The soldiers have seen so much blood shed that they are immune to the sight of blood
- “Scorching cautery of battle”-Metaphor used to describe the burning of their humanity, to a point where they are completely dehumanised and devoid of human emotions

#### Stanza 4

- The focus now shifts to one individual soldier, instead of soldiers as a collective group as seen in the previous stanzas
- “Happy the soldier home”- Repeated a third time. This one however suggests that those who stay at home are blessed as they are not exposed to the cruelty of war
- “with not a notion”- Idea of ignorance, soldiers who can go back home completely ignorant of lives that are lost, will be happy. Owen’s message starts to solidify and the reader can start to make out at this point that the greater one’s insensibility, the greater one’s joy.
- “Happy the lad whose mind was never trained”- Mental imagery which reflects innocence, which is lost once a person enlists in the army and fights a war
- “Which we march taciturn”- Owen uses a personal collective pronoun, speaking like a prophet. He includes himself in the suffering of his soldiers, which reflects his duty and responsibility in the army
- “long, forlorn” -assonance combined with long vowel sounds creates a stretching effect which slows down the passing of time. Reflects how dreadful and draggy it felt for the soldiers who marched at dusk
- “Larger day to huger night”- Night is an extended metaphor for death. Ending days signify ending lives.

#### Stanza 5

- “We wise”-Prophetic voice of Owen comes in again, spokesperson for all the cruelty experienced by the soldiers on the battlefield
- “We, our, our” VS “his, he”- contrasting pronouns creates a sense of quietness and isolates a single soldier
- “Blunt and lashless eyes”- Visual image that zooms in on a dead or injured person and singles him out
- “Nor sad, nor proud, not curious”- Suggests the void of emotions, complete emptiness and absolute desensitisation, to the point where the soldiers are incapable of human emotions
- “He cannot tell Old men’s placidity from his”- Idea of old age, where the young soldier is given senile qualities. The soldier is unable to see his potential and strengths and is just a pawn waiting to be moved around by his commanders. Yet again dehumanises the soldiers.

#### Stanza 6

- “But”- oppositional conjunction, the focus shifts from a single soldier to the generals
- “cursed, wretched”- Anger in the tone
- “dullards”- Owen is laughing in satirical anger at the generals, almost employing a mocking tone
- “By choice they made themselves immune”- Owen accuses the generals, saying that the generals are the ones who chose to be soldiers in the first place, who chose to be desensitised
- “mourns in man”- alliteration of m sounds, since they are elongated vowels, slows down the sentences and places emphasis on the slow and painful suffering of man
- “The eternal reciprocity of tears”- Heavy connotations to the last line, falling flat into the face of reality. It shows Owen’s strong emotions against the generals who made flawed decisions during war that caused the death of several soldiers

### 5. Spring Offensive (Linear)

**Introduction:** The poem is based on The Spring Offensive, which was a series of German attacks along the Western Front during WW1, 1918. Owen and his platoon were involved in this battle, which is what inspired him to write about it. The poem explores his experience during the attacks in six stages: The first stage set the scene where the action is to take place. The second stage is the pause or the lull before the attack. The third stage describes the building tension and the anticipation. The actual attack is the fourth. The fifth stage is about the casualties and the sixth and last stage is about the survivors of the attack.



**Messages**

- A. The chaos amidst the calm of nature (MAIN IDEA)
- B. War is unnatural, disrupting the balance of nature
- C. Ugliness and brutality of war
- D. Religious aspect of war: Poem reflect's Owen's loss of faith in God. He questions the role God plays in the war and how, if God supposedly had this power, did he allow the war to unfold in the first place

**Title**

- Juxtaposition in the title: 'Spring' is a season of new beginnings and life whereas 'Offensive' connotes assault, destruction and death. Sets an ominous tone right at the beginning

**Stanza 1**

- "Shade of the last hill"- Protection vs impending danger. Paradox emphasises the danger amidst the calm of the setting
- "Easy, ease"- Elongated vowel sounds+Enjambment create an atmosphere of relaxation
- Repetition of "and" implies ease and lack of urgency as it elongates sentences
- Caesura combined with "but" signals a change in tone/mood
- "Stark, blank sky"- Sharp consonant sounds disrupt the flow
- "Feet had come to the end of the world"- Apocalyptic imagery
- Soldiers are aware of the impending danger and tension amidst the calmness

**Stanza 2**

- Gentle "may breeze" contrasted with the biting and stinging "wasp and midge"- emphasis on impending danger
- "Summer oozed into their veins like the injected drug"- Since the poem is set in spring, summer refers to the memories the soldiers have of their time with their family. Summer is personified and injected into them like an aesthetic
- "Sharp on their souls"-Sibilance emphasises the cutting nature of the grass. Fond memories are only temporary, the grass cuts them to serve as a reminder of the danger they are in
- "Fearfully flashed"- fricative alliteration and sharp consonant sounds emphasise unease

**Stanza 3**

- "Hour after hour"- Lack of urgency
- "Warm field, buttercups"- Radiant and peaceful imagery shows the elegance and calmness of nature
- "Slow boots"- Visual imagery of dragging boots shows that the soldiers are reluctantly trudging toward the battlefield
- "brambles"- A thorny shrub. Religious allusion to Christ's crown of thorns. Nature is synonymous with God so as nature "clutches and clings" onto the men, so does God. God doesn't want the men to go to war (from Owen's perspective) and so the forces of nature are holding them back
- "Clutched and clung"-Alliteration emphasises the desperation of the brambles to stop the men
- "like sorrowing hands"- Personification of brambles shows the power it has to stop these men, representing the power of God
- "like trees unstirred"- Simile shows the harmony between nature and man which is about to be changed

**Stanza 4**

- "cold gust"- contrasted with warm field signals rising tension and start of the war
- "No alarms of bugles, no high flags, no clamorous haste"- Owen brings in the idea that it is not glorious to fight in war, there is no glorious ceremony to start it off (Parallel to Dulce)
- "The sun, like a friend with whom their love is done"- represents life, especially in nature's context. Since man and nature have such harmony, turning away from the sun means turning away from life
- "done" heavy sounding word, signals impending doom

**Stanza 5**

- Starts with a rhyming couplet, emphasises sense of camaraderie and how the soldiers will stick with their comrades in the toughest of times
- "Exposed."- Caesura signifies the break between peace and war. There is a shift between nature's favour and disfavour towards the soldiers

- “The whole sky burned with fury against them”- Violent and apocalyptic imagery shows the hostility and sheer power of nature. Nature is retaliating. This is synonymous to God retaliating against the men for going to war despite efforts to stop them
- “soft sudden cups in thousands for their blood”- Religious imagery, allusion to *Eucharist*, a christian ritual. Shows the religious aspect and Owen’s questioning mindset in this poem
- “Chasmed and steepened sheer to infinite space”- Image of Earth splitting open and swallowing the men. God is reclaiming these men for their sins, swallowing them to hell

#### Stanza 6

- “On the hot blast and fury of hell’s upsurge”- Dark imagery of hell upsurging to Earth, war is hell on Earth.
- “Some say God caught them even before they fell”- Only some of the men survived, God granted them divine salvation
- The shortness of penultimate stanza in comparison to the other stanzas may reflect the abruptness with which the men died

#### Stanza 7

- “too swift to sink”- Survived the apocalyptic war
- “Out-fiending all its fiends and flames”- Fricative alliteration, emphasis their inhumanity and how many people they have killed to survive, that they have become fiends
- “Superhuman inhumanities”- oxymoron, survivors are no more fortunate than the ones who died since they have been stripped of their humanity. They have completely lost their humanity and the soldiers have become violent, almost like killing machines
- “Crawling slowly”- Reduced and degraded to a pathetic state almost animal like. Men who survived would be expected to be honoured and glorified because they have survived, walk out of the battle strong and proud but that is not the case here
- “Why speak they not of comrades that went under?”- Rhetorical question, links back to the title, there is a tension but no resolution, reflects confusion and sense of futility that comes across in the poem. Owen might be hinting that he has had no divine justification or answers from God or nature that justifies why these men have to endure these atrocities. The poem ends with a melancholic sense of futility

### 6. The Sentry (Linear)

**Introduction:** Owen based the poem on a specific event in January 1917, mentioned in the letter he wrote to his mother. It describes with stark realism one of his unsurpassable experiences through the colloquially realistic and descriptive language. This poem is a vivid and dramatic description of how one man becomes a casualty of trench warfare. The emotions in this poem however are more compassionate than that in *Dulce Et Decorum Est*.

#### Messages:

- A. Brutality of war
- B. Light and darkness: Light is a major symbol in *The Sentry*. It and its counterpart darkness are major motifs in the poem. If light represents hope, then the lack of it represents the death of hope.
- C. Chaos and hopelessness: This is a poem about the chaos as well as the hopelessness of war.
- D. Camaraderie: the sense of the soldiers fighting, suffering, surviving or dying together.

#### Stanza 1:

- “We’d found”- First person plural suggests that an entire group or squad is involved
- “And choked the steps too thick with clay to climb”- Alliteration of ‘c’ sounds creates a choppy rhythm and mimics difficulty in movement which the soldiers are experiencing
- “Whizz bangs”- Onomatopoeia with reference to a special kind of artillery, the one that was responsible for the sentry’s injury
- “their corpses...” - caesura, Owen expects the reader to pause and gasp at the horrifying thought of the corpses
- First stanza contains realistic, grim and descriptive imagery

**Stanza 2:**

- “buffeting, snuffing, thumping, deluging muck”- Owen uses assonance where the vowel sound ‘u’ is repeated to create an internal rhyme within the stanza, to simulate the action that is going on at the scene of the whizz bang attack
- “Thud! Flump! Thud!”- plosive alliteration mimics the sound of soldier’s boots and the exclamation marks amplify these sounds
- “O sir, my eyes”- suggests that Owen is of a high rank and that he has a paternal role of taking care of his soldiers as an officer
- “I’m blind, I’m blind, I’m blind”- Repetition creates a sense of urgency and panic, creating a chaotic atmosphere
- “—I’m blind—” Caesura with the use of dashes creates a dramatic pause which emphasises the soldier’s disbelief and shock with what is happening to him
- “lids, light, right, squids” Quatrain (abba) rhyme scheme combined with the iambic pentameter accentuates the unrest and tension
- “Eyeballs, huge bulged like squids”- Horrifying, visceral, gruesome visual imagery that haunts Owen
- “Watch my dreams still”- The war is long over, but his remaining memories are still reminiscent of the horror he witnessed

**Stanza 3:**

- “Wretches, how they bled and spewed”- Vivid, visceral imagery highlights the intensity of the pain
- “Drowned himself for good”- Linked to the earlier image of the waterfall of slime, implies suffering and being choked by the gruesome circumstances they are in
- “jumps, teeth, crumps, beneath”- Quatrain (abab) rhyme scheme creates an almost cycle like effect, where the pain and sufferings of soldiers are like a never ending cycle and an inescapable labyrinth
- “I see your lights! But ours had long died out”- This is a figurative reference to light symbolising hope. The blinded soldier sees innocence in Owen but believes that his own innocence is lost, just like his eyesight, as he has been permanently wounded by war.

**7. Mental Cases (Linear)**

**Introduction:** This poem was written in 1918 and inspired by Owen’s own experiences at the Craiglockhart hospital. Owen captures the damage to men’s minds as a result of war, known as shell shock. The damage war had on the soldiers was not just physical, it was not just temporary. It also had a disturbing and devastating effect on their mental stability. Owen’s aim is to shock and to describe the ghastly physical symptoms of mental torment.

**Messages:**

- A. Brutality of war
- B. War is not just devastating in the short term, but it has long term impacts as well
- C. Soldiers are degraded and destroyed to the point where they become victims to a mental illness known as shell shock

**Title**

- Double entendre in “cases”
  - Soldiers are empty shells with no individual substance
  - Soldiers are not treated as humans but are reduced to ‘cases’, which is a medical classification, almost like they have to be studied (dehumanisation)

**Stanza 1**

- “Who are these?”- Soldiers are objectified, Owen omitted the word ‘people’ or didn’t specify who he was referring to
- “why sit they, wherefore rock they”- 3rd person reference, sense of otherness and unfamiliarity
- “twilight”- Between day and night, reflects how the soldiers too are neither dead nor alive, like a vegetable. They are in a liminal state.
- “Purgatorial shadows, but who these hellish”- biblical imagery reflects the suffering of after death
- “Drooping tongues, baring teeth”- Animalistic imagery dehumanises soldiers in a repulsive manner
- “Stroke on stroke, slow panic” - Sibilant alliteration, reminiscent of serpent or the devil
- “Slow panic”- Oxymoron, suggests helplessness and slow suffering

- “Gouged these chasms”- Gaping hole, image of emptiness
- “But who these hellish?”- grammatical breakdown, missing the word people again. Reflects the disintegrating minds of soldiers

### Stanza 2

- “The dead have ravished”- Beastly imagery
- “Memory, murders, multitudinous”- alliteration reflects the humming of crazed soldiers and shows the horror of their mental state
- “Lungs, loved, laughter”- liquid alliteration, juxtaposes with the harsher sibilant and plosive counterparts and reflects the peace before they were exposed to war (Parallel to spring offensive)
- “Always they must”- Absolute terms have an air of finality and show that there is no escape
- “carnage”- emotive diction reflects the horror of war
- “men’s extrication”- Idea of entrapment, such that these men have to be extricated and set free from their mental disease. It is also a medical formal term for removal, dehumanises soldiers and makes them medical case studies

### Stanza 3

- “Eyeballs shrink tormented”- Horrid visual imagery emphasises the extent of the impact war had on their mental and physical faculty
- “back, brains, blood, black, breaks, bleeds”- Excessive use of plosive alliteration mimics the splattering of blood and is a sound or image that the soldiers cannot get out of their head
- “Sunlight, dawn, night”- It is an endless cycle which keeps repeating just like these traumatic memories
- “night”- image of death, visceral (deep, intense) images
- “hilarious, hideous”- Oxymoron, refers to the deranged smile across the faces of soldiers
- “hands are plucking at each other,”- Personification of hands shows that the soldiers themselves have no individuality, they are just a combination of moving body parts