

Disabled and the band played waltzing matilda essay sample



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The poem "Disabled" and the song, "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda" both show the horrors of the war from a soldier's perspective, describing from the day they joined the war and how this affected their lives after the war. The soldier in "Disabled" lived a joyous life in his youth. He liked to play football with his pals and then used to go out and get drunk together. He had a girlfriend and joined the war to please her and also because "someone had said he'd look a god in kilts".

He was not yet 19, and legally a minor for the war, but this never concerned him, nor did it concern the authorities who knowingly wrote down his lie, "Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years." He was silly enough to lie about his age, not thinking about the consequences that awaited him and what war really meant, "And no fears of Fear came yet"; he wasn't afraid of death because he was too young to understand the horrors of war. He only thought about how smart the soldiers look while they salute and other such army etiquette ("For daggers in plaid socks; of smart solutes"), and how he would be marching amongst them.

But the war changed him. In the present he is in hospital and is crippled by the war, "Legless, sewn short at elbow". He can no longer play football or party with the girls, "Now he will never feel again how slim girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands". In the song "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda", the soldier is conscripted to go to war - "So they gave me a tin hat and they gave me a gun, and they sent me away to the war." He used to be a rover, living a carefree life.

The terrible conditions in the war are described vividly - "We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter"; "And in five minutes he'd blown us all to hell". He fought for ten weeks in a world that he called mad, of "blood, death and fire". At the end of the poem he is now an old man, and is watching the parade of soldiers pass before him. He notices a difference in the ways the old and the young men march, how the old men march slowly - "all stiff and sore". Like the young people, he asks himself the question, "What are they marching for?" and the answer which we can probably give is 'nothing'.

The irony in the poem "Disabled" is that the soldier before the war was a handsome young man ("There was an artist silly for his face") and his main purpose for volunteering to go to war was to have a chance to look smart and please his girlfriend. He is now repellent to the girls unlike in the early days before he went to the war when he was the one who attracted the girls, "Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes passed from him to the strong men that were whole." In "Disabled", the soldier describes his injury as - "a leap of purple spurted from his thigh", which sounds very horrid.

This perhaps may only be a glimpse of the horror in the battlefield because the soldier himself is regretting this thought and is trying not to think back into his horrifying past. In "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda", it is ironic how the soldier describes - "We buried ours and the Turks buried theirs, then we started all over again." He makes it sound as if it is a game, taking turns to die. It is humorous in a bitter way how Eric Bogle uses statements like "And in five minutes flat he'd blown us all to hell, nearly blew us right back to Australia" even though it has a serious meaning to it.

He is trying get across that the conditions in the battlefield were horrendous. It is also ironic how the soldier illustrates the armless, the legless and the blind to be “ Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla Bay” when they are not ‘ proud’ to be crippled and/or physically disabled. Both the song and the poem end with questions questioned by the soldier himself. The poem “ Disabled” ends on a double question, “ Why don’t they come and put him into bed? Why don’t they come? ” The repetition of the question “ Why don’t they come? ” shows that the soldier is at the end frustrated.

He is eagerly waiting to be put to bed. This may as well mean that he is angry and also waiting to meet his death, because he knows he won’t face these miseries in the ‘ after-life’. This idea is also supported by the first line of the poem, “ He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark”. The soldier has to rely on others for help even for the simplest of things like being put into bed. Even though he is mentally able, his physical condition forbids from doing what he wants.

In “ The Band Played Waltzing Matilda” it ends with the question “ Who’ll come a waltzing Matilda with me? ‘ Waltzing Matilda’ was a national patriotic song of Australia and when the soldier, an Australian, fought in the war, this song was sung to raise the spirits of the Australians. In this case however is used ironically. When the soldier says, “ I waltzed my Matilda all over”, Matilda here represents previous the girl friends of the soldier. The question at the end “ Who’ll come a waltzing Matilda with me? ” leaves the reader with a dreadful sense of irony, since the soldier is of course no longer able to dance.