

Disabled by wilfred owen: commentary



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Wilfred Owen's powerful poem 'Disabled' explores the results of war. It tells the story of a young soldier who lost his limbs in World War One; and due to this, he considers himself as an 'ugly' man. According to this melancholic poem, disability had changed the man's life. The poem's introduction is very straight forward and to the point. In line two, 'shivered' implies that the man is outside, and you can further come to this conclusion in line three, where it is mentioned that was going 'through the park'. Also, line three says that the man is legless.

The 4th and 5th lines, 'Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn' and 'Voices of play and pleasure after day' give a sense of sadness, making the man remember his childhood. Although it seems like a distant memory, it wasn't too long ago when he too was like one of those boys, running around with nothing to care about. These lines possibly also show that the man was a bit jealous of those boys (who all still believed in happy endings). In the first three lines of the second stanza, the narrator reminisces his past, and how situations in life were so different, before he was injured.

He used to go out to parties with his friends, while many 'lovely' girls would constantly flirt with him. But, the next four lines of this stanza say that this was all before he "threw away his knees". 'Threw' is a very effective word in this line, telling us that if the man hadn't signed up for being in the army, then he still would've been healthy, had his legs, and attracted lots of women. However, as explained, he's not able to achieve any of those now; not a single woman is willing to even look at him.

I think that this stanza gives a strong essence of the man's regretting his enrolment in the army. He seems to be syo mentally weak, and ready to give up on life at any moment. Line fourteen, 'There was an artist silly for his face', probably suggests that there was a girl, who was an artist and was smitten with the man. Line fifteen tells the reader how young the man looked before the war; illustrating how war can devastate people's lives and physical appearances. The third stanza also mentions how the man 'lost his colour'.

This most likely means that he lost a lot of blood, in the event of losing his limbs in the enemy fire. Towards the end of this stanza, the narrator describes his memory of the time he decided to join the army. It can be inferred from this stanza that he wanted attention and was a handsome man. In the fourth stanza, the narrator talks about joining the army out of his own will to please 'his' Meg. Also, he never thought of fighting against Germany, and witnessing so much violence and bloodshed at such a young age (nineteen years).

The last stanza describes what happened when and after the man returned home from the war. Although a few people did welcome him home, others didn't seem to bother about his return at all. He spent his years of illness in institutes, and sadly noticed how women had considered him more as a passing cloud, but were very attracted to 'whole', strong men. 'Whole' most probably means a man who hasn't lost any of his body parts. The last two lines of this stanza show how this man still wishes that he could have his life (before the war) back, where women actually wanted to make love and pay attention to him.

He misses his old life so much, and regrets enlisting himself in the army. Even though attention played a huge role in why the man decided to join the army, it wasn't the only factor. Joining the army made people feel as if they were true or real men. Most men thought that fighting in the war would be an extraordinary adventure and a memorable experience (in a good way). However, they were all unaware of the severe consequences. The poem conveys a message that the memories of the war had scarred the survivors for life.

Not every man was necessarily physically disabled, but all of them were definitely mentally disabled from the traumas of the war. The title of this poem completely reflects the story narrated, including all of the emotions. What's really interesting about Wilfred Owen's style of writing in 'Disabled' is that he constantly describes a few of the man's flashbacks, but at the same time, describes what's currently going on in his life. It's like a before-and-after observation.

Another intriguing aspect of this poem is that Owen explains stories within a story. This technique is fascinating, and makes you want to read on. The poem also makes one feel a guilty for not appreciating what the soldiers had done and sacrificed to fight for their countries. Just like the persona in 'Disabled', they were all very brave. Although 'Disabled' is a very depressing poem which depicts a tragic reality, it's very powerful and makes readers realize that joining the army and fighting in a war is no joke.