

How far does wilfred owen's poetry convey the realities of war essay sample

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



Wilfred Owen was born in 1893 and he joined the army in 1915. He was invalided because of shell shock and was sent to a hospital in Edinburgh. It was in this hospital that Owen met Siegfried Sassoon. Sassoon helped Owen with his poems. Although Owen only published five poems in his lifetime he is very much remembered for his bleak sense of realism, his anger and his realistic portrayal of the war. For my essay I have chosen to write about three of Wilfred Owen's poems.

They are 'Dulce et Decorum est', 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' and 'Exposure'. 'Dulce et Decorum est' is about some young soldiers who are at war. They are marching but are so tired it is difficult for them to carry on. But they must as their lives depend on it. Suddenly there is a gas attack and through their tiredness a soldier shouts in panic because he cannot get his gas mask on and dies before their eyes. They place the dead body onto their wagon. Still the soldiers carry on. In the first line of the poem: 'Bent double, like old beggars under sacks', the soldiers are compared to beggars. This is to create the image of the soldiers gaunt and starving and in need of help.

The pace of the first stanza is slow and Wilfred Owen uses a caesura, which is a pause to reflect the slowness of the soldiers walking. The words 'sludge', 'trudge' and 'fatigue' also simulate a very slow pace. 'Bent double, like old beggars' and 'limped on' all translate as a slow weary pace. When a soldier shouts 'gas' adrenaline takes over and the soldiers hurry for their gas masks to save themselves from the attack. The pace of the poem quickens as the panic sets in. The word 'fumbling' implies the helmets are heavy and clumsy to put on.

One man's death is described with very powerful, desperate words: He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning. 'Wilfred Owen also uses the metaphor: 'As under green sea, I saw him drowning'. This helps create an image of what the soldiers saw and therefore make the experience more real to the reader. In this poem Owen writes of how the war affected soldiers after it had ended through flashbacks and dreams.

To convey this horror Owen uses the sentence: 'In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.' In the final stanza Wilfred Owen addresses Jessie Pope, a wartime propaganda author: 'My friend, you would not tell with such high zest To children ardent for some desperate glory, The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.' With this Wilfred Owen expresses his resentment towards Jessie Pope and shows that the war is not as it is portrayed in newspapers, an exciting and honourable adventure. 'Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori' means: it is sweet and proper to die for one's country.

Wilfred Owen describes this as a 'Lie' that Jessie Pope told all young men to persuade them to become soldiers in the war. Wilfred Owen describes this as a 'Lie' with a capital 'L' to emphasise the maliciousness of the word.

'Anthem for Doomed Youth' doesn't only describe the hatred of the war but also the sadness surrounding it at the front and at home. The poem compares the deaths and burials of soldiers at the front with the church rituals at home. The poem is a sonnet, which are usually used for love poems, and has a regular rhyming rhythm. The title of this poem shows that most soldiers were young and that even if they don't die in the war they will

still have to live the rest of their lives with the memories and flashbacks.

Some soldiers will also have to live with a disability.

In the first line of this poem: ' What passing bells for these who die as cattle?

' Owen compares the soldiers to cattle to show how the men died in large groups and because the battle continued their comrades had no time to mourn their death or even think about the dead. There are many comparisons made in this poem: ' The monstrous anger of the guns' on the front line is compared with bells at a church funeral. The lack of prayers are replaced with: ' The stuttering rifles' rapid rattle'. Onomatopoeia is used here to enhance the image created.

The choirs that would usually be heard in a church are, on the battleground only: ' the shrill, demented chiors of wailing shells'. ' What candles shall be held to speed them all? Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes' this is comparing candles to the reflection of explosions in the soldiers' eyes. The word ' boys' suggests the fact that the soldiers are very young and should not have to fight in a war. The last line of the poem: ' And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds' is a comparison between the drawing of blinds at home and deaths of soldiers at the front line.

Exposure' again conveys the sadness that the war creates, this time after a soldier has returned home. The poem is about a war veteran who has lost his arms and legs. The poem describes his sad and bitter thinking towards his past experiences in the war. The first stanza has a very bleak opening: ' He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark, And shivered in his ghastly suit of

grey' this shows helplessness. In this stanza the disabled man shows sadness at hearing voices of children playing in a park this saddens and darkens his mood even more.

In the second stanza the man remembers how he lost his limbs and how things used to be before the war: ' In the old times, before he threw away his knees. ' He is scornful of his youthful ignorance and now feels incongruent in the world around him: ' All of them touch him like some queer disease. ' The third stanza describes how the disabled man has changed since before the war and before the loss of his limbs. A metaphor is used to convey the loss of a decent lifestyle, what the man feels is the only life: ' He's lost his colour very far from here,

Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry'. In the fourth stanza the man looks back ironically on how he used to like having cuts after a football match to show that he can handle injuries and now that he has the worst injuries that he can imagine he realises it is not so good. Also in this stanza it describes that the now disabled man signed up for the war when he was too young and after drinking. Now wonders why he joined and can't believe his own stupidity at having wanted to join without being made to: ' He asked to join. He didn't have to beg'.

Before arriving at war he did not think of the enemies or fear only of hoe good he would look in an army uniform. The fifth and shortest stanza show the man's disappointment of his homecoming. It was nothing like the cheering crowds from which he was sent to war but: ' Only a solemn man

who brought him fruits Thanked him and then inquired about his soul'. The sixth and final stanza shows the disabled man's return to self-pity. He realises his loneliness and is upset that no one comes to put him to bed as it is so late.

Wilfred Owen uses repetition to emphasise the fact that no one comes: How cold and late it is! Why don't they come And put him into bed? Why don't they come? ' I think that Wilfred Owen's poetry conveys the realities of war to such a degree that I now understand not just the politics or ethics but the feelings of soldiers and their families. Owen uses very strong adjectives and extremely powerful metaphors to recreate the images that he has seen in the war. People can try to see the horror that soldiers saw and maybe the generations to come will think twice and be careful to prevent another war.