

The sentry and dulce et decorum est

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Through his war poetry Wilfred Owen communicates to the reader the realities of war. In his poems, he creates emotions and feeling, which describe the horror of the war and the conditions of the trenches. The language that Owen uses shows the truth and power of his feeling. Two of his poems that demonstrate Owen's ability to express this are 'The Sentry' and 'Dulce et Decorum est'. 'The Sentry' is a poem in which Owen describes how a sentry was injured.

The poem describes in detail how it happened. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is a description of a gas attack and in particular, the effect on one soldier who failed to protect himself against the gas in time. In both of the poems Owen describes the effect that the events have had on him and by doing this expresses his feelings towards war. His poem 'The Sentry' is an example of a poem in which Owen describes, in detail, the terrible conditions of the trenches. Owen shows such conditions when he talks about " Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime".

By comparing the rain to a waterfall, Owen shows the power and force of the rain. Use of the word 'slime' indicates that the rain was not pure and refreshing, as might be expected, but in fact dirty and muddy. Owen further describes conditions of the trenches in the poem when he talks about how the trenches were unable to cope with the weather conditions. He says that the rain " kept slush waist high" and " choked up the steps too thick with clay to climb". This indicates that drainage in the trenches was poor and gives the reader an insight into how the soldiers had to live.

In 'The Sentry', Owen also describes the air in the trenches: " what murk of air remained stank old, and sour" here he is saying that the ventilation was poor. He is describing the air in the trenches as dark, gloomy and foul smelling. Owen further develops this, saying that in the trench remained " the smell of men who'd lived there years". Here Owen talks about how the trench had been home to other men for long periods of time. He emphasises the point about ventilation by pointing out that the smell of these men is still there.

Owen then goes on to describe how the soldiers " left their curse in the den, if not their corpses... this tells the reader that the men in the trench were living alongside dead bodies. This instills a feeling of disgust and pity in the reader. Owen conveys through his poems 'The Sentry' and 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' the horror of the war and by doing so emphasises the reality and brutality of the war. In 'The Sentry' Owen shows about the horror of war through his vivid description of the situation. He talks about how the rain " choked up the steps too thick with clay to climb", this is suggesting the horror of the war in that its says that the clay is choking the steps.

It creates a feeling of horror in that there is a sense of helplessness and horror that the slush is overpowering the man-made trench and there is very little that the soldiers can do about this. So too, when Owen talks about the soldiers who " left their curse in the den, if not their corpses" is a feeling of horror created. Use of the word 'curse' creates a feeling of horror and fear and the word 'corpse' just highlights the reality and terror of the situation. Owen talks, moreover, about the way that the men " herded from the blast".

This conveys the fear and horror of the war as it suggests that the men were so afraid that they cowered together, like animals for support. Furthermore, Owen effectively describes the sentry's eyes as " eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids" this shows the horrific effects that the war had on the sentry. Owen is comparing the man to a squid saying that his eyes had become inhuman, this hints at the grotesque disfigurement that has occurred because the shells explosion. In addition to this, the description of the air as " shrieking air" gives it a demonic quality instilling an emotion of horror into the reader.

When Owen is describing the state of the other men, " those other wretches, how they bled and spewed" there is a feeling of horror just thinking about what these men have to go through. This is developed further when Owen describes the " wild chattering of his broken teeth". There is a feeling of horror because the word 'wild' suggests a lack of control and the description is Owen showing what some of the terrible effects of war are. 'Dulce et Decorum est' also shows the horror of war. In the first stanza, a way in which Owen does this is through talking about the young soldiers as though they are old cripples.

Owen talks about how the soldiers are " bent double" so gives the impression that the soldiers are in such agony that they are unable to stand up straight. He also says that the soldiers are " like beggars" and that they are " coughing like hags". By making these comparisons, Owen makes his point as the reader is led to think that the war must be utterly horrific if it can turn young soldiers into such a state. When Owen talks about the " distant rest"

that the soldiers are making their way towards, Owen seems to be implying that for some of these soldiers the rest may in fact be permanent.

This implication really makes the reader aware of what war can do. In the stanza, use of words like " sludge", " trudge", and " haunting" describe the harsh conditions of the battlefield A gas attack is described in the second stanza and Owen shows the horror of such an event. He talks about how he saw a fellow soldier being overwhelmed by the gas: " under a green sea I saw him drowning". The suffering of the soldier is highlighted by this description and it communicates to the reader the horrific consequences of war. The description of the soldier in the final stanza clearly communicates the horror of the war.

The description of the soldier with " white eyes writhing in his face" and " his hanging face like a devil's sick of sin" emphasise the devastating nature of war. The image of the soldier's eyes writhing in his face suggests a total lack of control. Whilst the way in which Owen describes the man's face suggests a complete distortion of what is normal and there is a hint of sadness because of the loss of what was once there. The language that Owen uses in 'The Sentry' and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' go some way towards indicating the truth and emotion in his poems.

In 'The Sentry' the colloquial language that Owen uses makes the point that the people involved are just normal, everyday people. This is effective as it makes the reader more able to relate to the soldiers. His description of the shells at the beginning of the poem: " for shell on frantic shell hammered on top" is personifies the shell saying that the shell is 'frantic'. This gives an

insight into the panic and the fear that the men feel and an impression that the shells are relentless, like animals focused on their prey. In the second stanza, Owen makes use of the metaphor " Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime".

When Owen talks about the 'waterfalls of slime', he describes slime that is oozing and muddy. This is different to rain because rain is imagined to be pure and refreshing as it brings life and helps crops grow. By saying that there were waterfalls of slime Owen makes the metaphor even more effective as it suggests force and power making the slime seem dangerous and implies the strong will of nature. Use of words like " hammered", " blast", " thumping" and " pummelled" all help to convey the strong impressions in the poem, as they are all words that imply strong and violent sound indicating the violent and aggressive nature of war.

It is particularly effective as it suggests how the soldiers had been used to every loud noise being an attack or a threat so it shows the reader how vulnerable and nervous the soldiers are. Indeed, they " herded from the blast" this is effective as it implies that the men cowered together like animals because they were frightened. As they were supposed to be brave soldiers, Owen clearly shows what a frightening experience this was because even brave young men were so scared they had to flock together for support.

The use of onomatopoeia when it says, " thud! flump! thud! is effective as it describes the sound of the sentry falling so that you can almost hear it. It indicates that the body falls without any control, this shows that it is in the

control of circumstance. Furthermore, there is a succession of identical vowel sounds: " buffeting", " snuffing", " thud", " flump", " thumping", " pummelled", " crumps" which are suggestive of assault, aggression and ruthless punishment. Owen does not spare any detail describing the sentry's blinding.

He discusses how the man was " dredged" up for dead " until he whined 'O sir, my eyes - I'm blind - I'm blind, I'm blind! The repetition adds poignancy and hopelessness to the man's condition. Owen takes responsibility, and holds a flame against the man's eye, asking if he could see the light. "'I can't,' he sobbed" the word sobbed shows the sentry's lack of dignity at that point, highlighting how upsetting and traumatising the experience was for him. Then when Owen talks about the sentry with " Eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids" he creates a very effective simile. The simile is particularly effective as creates a powerful image and the pain of the sentry is shown.

Owen then goes on to say that the eyes " watch my dreams still" showing the haunting effect of Owen's experience. Owen goes on to describe the " wild chattering of his broken teeth" the word 'wild' implies a complete lack of control and suggests viciousness and frenzied movement. By saying that his teeth were broken Owen once again, does not leaving the reader to imagine anything and telling all the graphic details of the horrific injuries suffered. The last two lines in 'The Sentry' are very powerful as the connotations of the words give a double meaning.

Owen says " Through the dense din, I say, we heard him shout 'I see your lights! ' But ours had long died out. ". One meaning, the literal meaning, is

that the sentry saw the candles but they had been extinguished. The second possible meaning is that the sentry was seeing the light as he slipped from life to death but Owen says that all the hope that the soldiers had was gone. In 'Dulce et Decorum Est' Owen's exact diction emphasises the moral meaning and views portrayed in the poem. In the first stanza, the pace of the poem is very slow.

This is established through the use of considerable amount of punctuation which breaks up the flow of the lines and establishes a plodding rhythm. Owen uses a slow halting rhythm to suggest how much pain and misery the soldiers are encountering and to imitate how slow are walking and the slow pace illustrates the slow and painstaking nature of war. The comparison between the young soldiers and old cripples indicates the changes and effect of the war. When Owen talks about the soldiers being " bent double" it gives the reader the impression that they are totally exhausted and that they are in agony, weighed down by heavy packs.

The simile " like beggars under sacks" is comparing the soldiers to beggars, Owen is talking about the soldiers like they are tramps emphasising their bedraggled appearance and lack of uniform. He suggests that the men have no pride left and they should be pitied. Owen takes the idea of the soldiers being old and crippled by saying that they were " coughing like hags" indicating the physical condition of the soldiers and how frail and vulnerable they seem. Then Owen says that " many had lost their boots, but limped on" this phrase gives the reader an idea of the pitiful state of the men.

However, Owen shows that even though physically they seem weak, mentally they are determined and heroic as they carry on regardless. Owen makes use of the metaphor saying that the men were "drunk with fatigue", he is comparing the state of tiredness with a state of drunkenness. This is particularly effective as it is saying that their tiredness has taken over so that they are no longer in control of themselves anymore. Suggesting that they waiver and stagger as they plod along. The second stanza brings an instant change in then mood and the pace of the poem.

The change of pace is from the slow journey of the men to a fast pace when there is the panic and fear of a gas attack. The stanza begins "Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!". Then Owen talks about "an ecstasy of fumbling", significant as the word 'ecstasy' is usually associated with extreme joy and pleasure. Things are different in the war; the 'ecstasy' is one of fear and panic due to the flow of adrenalin. Owen uses an extended metaphor when describing the effects of the gas attack on a soldier. Owen says "under a green sea I saw him drowning" comparing the effects of gas to drowning.

Owen describes the frantic and despairing actions of the soldier as he struggles against the gas, an effective comparison as it highlights the horror and the despair of the soldiers. In the next stanza Owen talks about his dreams and how "before my helpless sight, he plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning". Owen describes his feeling of helplessness when in his dream he relives the moment. He talks about how the man 'plunges' at him. This suggests desperation and instills an emotion of pity as it is obvious that nothing can be done.

Use of the words "guttering, choking, drowning" carries on the extended metaphor the drowning by using words that could be associated with either gas or drowning, and emphasises the man's inability to breathe. In the final stanza Owen talks about his "smothering dreams", use of the word 'smothering' is effective as it gives the reader an insight into how awful these dreams are. It also seems that his dreams overcome him so that he cannot escape. Owen then describes the face of the man, "his hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin".

Owen is comparing the face of the soldier to the face of the devil, Owen says that the devil is sick of sin. This communicates a message to the reader that it must be something truly terrible if the devil is sick of sin because by definition the devil is the master of sin. The awfulness of the soldier's condition is highlighted in the words "the blood come gargling from his froth-corrupted lungs". This Owen talking about the physical condition of the soldier, he makes a very graphic description that is very disturbing. There is much irony in the final lines of the poem when Owen talks about how people at home see the "glory" of the war.

When he talks about "the old lie: dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country, there is a hint of bitterness and anger. It is clear that after the experience that Owen has had he cannot see anything 'sweet' about dying for one's country and this is the main point of the poem. Owen relates a very anti-war message to the reader throughout 'The Sentry' and 'Dulce et Decorum Est'. He influences the reader through

his horrific descriptions and appeal to the emotions. His use of language and literary techniques make his war poems so effective.