

Arms and the boy by wilfred owen



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The title of the poem is an extension from George Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man." The replacement of 'boy' for man indicates the nature of the monstrous First World War, that the Great War had boys instead of men forced into the war. The starting phrase "Let the boy try along this bayonet blade" implies let the boy experiment with the weapon proving that he is not accustomed to doing so. The steel is depicted as 'cold' exemplifying the cold-bloodedness of the nature of the weapons. It also illustrates how it is hungry with the craving for blood, reflecting its hideous tendencies that does not serve anything constructive.

It is typified as 'blue' or bloodless as though possessing no life at all and no human instinct. The war dehumanized men to their own likes. The association of men with weapons of destruction was as though they were initiated into perversion. The colour blue is likened to the "madman's flash". "The 'madman's flash' was a piece of blue cloth attached to the uniform of a soldier being treated for stress induced mental illness, serving to warn those he met that he might behave in an erratic manner." (<http://www.liteskills.com/c/1808>). The phrase "thinly drawn" outlines the sharpness of the weapon, and the narrowness of minds that led to the catastrophic war. The phrase also illustrates the lack of abundance of love that led one to the famishing for flesh. It mark man's descent to primitivism where in his insatiable craving for blood, he is depicted as a cannibal. The verb 'stroke' illustrates an action of love. The speaker asserts that let these so-called people "stroke" or hold dear these blunt-bullet heads.

The speaker earlier associated them with the sharpness of instruments of War, and now with the bluntness of the same. He suggests in the process,

the shallow/blunt causes that led to the cruel/sharp war. These long to point their muzzle at the hearts of lads destroying them with inhuman instincts rather than resort to physical killing. He must be provided with cartridges of fine zinc teeth that act as his greeting. The teeth are a symbol of greeting as the smile is incomplete without them. And a smile is the first instance of greeting, Here the mode of greeting is enhanced with cartridges of zinc. These cartridges of fine zinc teeth will be sharp with anguish of grief, and the pangs of death. His teeth is revealed to be like that of Satan as it is found laughing around the Forbidden fruit(apple). Nevertheless, God endeavours his best against the transition of the soldier into a complete devil: For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple. There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple; And God will grow no talons at his heels, Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls. The talons and antlers are those of a demon.

God was in total opposition to this collective 'demonification' of a race as a whole. It also suggests that the man did not become a devil naturally; neither was he divinely-induced to do so. This points to how God is against the concept of war itself, how 'war' is a man-made disaster and how God does not entail this phenomenon. The people who were shoved into the World War were those least accustomed to its atrocious tendencies. By focusing on the concept of War, Man was cutting off the branch that he was sitting on.