

Pity is for the living
soldiers not for the
dead ones



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Owen means to present to his readers the true victims of war – those who lived and not the dead. In doing so he seeks to bring out the truly horrific aspects of war. These aspects lead their victims to end up in varied severe dispositions. We can point out five types of victims highlighted in Owen's poetry amongst others; the physically disabled, the mentally traumatized, those whose sacrifice is not acknowledged, the soldiers who are on the battlefield and those who suffer the indignities of war.

The physically disabled are perhaps the most thought of when speaking about war victims. These victims are mostly seen in *Disabled*. Owen vividly brings out the soldier's disfigured state through the use of sensory detail, particularly visual images such as the description of 'his ghastly suit of grey,' and how he is 'Legless, sewn short at elbow'. Contrast is also made use of in order to further emphasize on his inabilities. The contrast is made between his past youthful life and his present depressing life. A significant contrast can be seen in the different ways in how he was carried. Whilst before he was 'carried shoulder-high' now he is also carried around in a 'wheeled chair', which shows his dependent state. Apart from his physical disfigurement the soldier also seems to simply have gotten older as a consequence of war. He no longer has 'an artist's face' but 'he is old'. Owen continues to go beneath the physical appearance and explores mental trauma in other poems. Mental trauma is seen mostly in poems such as *The Deadbeat* and *Mental Cases* in particular. The two poems tackle mental trauma in different ways. Both poems point out the soldiers' dumbfounded state post-war and portray this through animal imagery. However whilst *The Deadbeat* continues to expand in this, *Mental Cases* does

not, and goes into the eternal torment suffered by the victims and shows this through blood imagery and death imagery. In *The Deadbeat*, Owen seeks to evoke our pity for those who have suffered the mental trauma. This is done by first exposing their confused, vulnerable state, 'lay stupid like a cod' and then showing how badly he was treated because of his disoriented state and how much he was sought to be rid of.

None of us could kick him to his feet /
' That scum you sent last night soon died. Hooray!'

In *Mental Cases* does bring out the soldiers' helplessness and it does evoke pity in the readers, however he further explores the mental torment through which they suffer. This is seen through death imagery throughout the whole of the poem and particularly through blood imagery in the final stanza.

Whilst these soldiers have not actually suffered any physical disfigurement as those in *Disabled* their mental state can be seen in their physical appearance. This is made clear through animal imagery, 'drooping tongues that slob their relish' and through death imagery, 'Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked'. The torment is emphasized in how various aspects that lead to their mentally deteriorating state are personified, such that 'the Dead have ravished', 'memory fingers' and 'misery swelters'. This shows how the horrors of war have completely engulfed their victims and left them incomplete as 'purgatorial shadows'. The idea of the never-ending torment is seen in how their pain is giving a slow pace and it continuously lingers on. The use of blood imagery is another key tool used to convey this idea. Any hopes of a peaceful night are put down in how 'night comes blood-black', whilst at the traditional idea of a new day bringing new opportunities

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at change and improvement is subverted into the idea of a new day that brings only the same reoccurrences of that never-ending pain.

These people suffering from mental trauma are not helped whatsoever and are looked down upon and not shown the appreciation they deserve. Owen expands into the way these sacrifices are not acknowledged in various poems particularly *Inspection* and *Disabled*. In *Inspection* we see another instance of blood imagery. Here the blood imagery is meant to portray sacrifice. This sacrifice however is not valued, ' blood is dirt'. The soldier is also punished for showing his sacrifice. Owen presents to us a harsh idea which is in fact true, that the authorities disapproved of any demonstration of sacrifice despite their full knowledge of it, ' young blood's its great objection'. This is done in order to keep to ' The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est Pro patria mori.'

In *Disabled* we see the authorities' work being done in *Inspection* taking its effect on the public since no one acknowledges the soldiers' sacrifice and they remain indifferent to what they passed through, since they do not know of it. Owen wants to evoke this pity in his readers in order to compensate for this indifference towards the victims' state. The women who had ' glanced lovelier as the air grew dim' now see him as ' some queer disease' and they shun him and abandon him, not even trying to acknowledge what brought him to that state. Apart from the women a broader section of the general public as only ' Some cheered him home'. This shows the heavy lack of appreciation for the soldiers' sacrifice. These victims of war that suffered on the battlefield continue to suffer even after when they are not acknowledged of their sacrifice. Owen expands on the harsh environment on the battlefield

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as well, so as to give us a full picture of what they had to suffer through before, during and after the war.

The battlefield is clearly brought out in poems such as Anthem for Doomed Youth, Dulce et Decorum Est and S. I. W. Owen first creates the horrific landscape in the former two poems through aural imagery and a description of the soldiers' state respectively. Owen then shows the response to this environment in the S. I. W. As stated before, in Anthem for Doomed Youth the poet makes use of various aural images to truly portray the battlefield. Through the use of various alliterations and onomatopoeias we are brought into contact with the disturbing sounds made by the 'wailing shells' and the 'stuttering rifles' rapid rattle'. Various harsh sounds also help to vividly show the bleak future that awaits them after leaving the battlefield. Another aural aspect of this poem is the contrast between these same harsh sounds and the soft sounds used to describe the peaceful homes of the soldiers. This contrast continues to bring out the harsh reality on the battlefield. In Dulce et Decorum Est Owen then explores the soldiers themselves where they are suffering through weariness and exhaustion and have to live in a severe environment.

Men marched asleep. Many lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame;
all blind; Despite living in these conditions they need to stay alert and ready for anything that might happen. This can be seen in how later on in the poem they are victims to a gas attack. This idea is explored more in S. I. W.

Owen correctly presents the soldiers as being under constant fear of death. It is ironic however that they are afraid of death since they actually long for it since it is the only means of escape that they have. The way 'the misses teased the hunger of his brain' shows how much 'the Dead have ravished' (Mental Cases) him and what state he is left in. The soldier introduced in S. I. W. is seen to be unable to survive those conditions such that he eventually commits suicide. The fact that death is the best and only solution that the soldiers have can clearly show us how desperate they were to leave the battlefield. We can however, also see that the soldiers did not merely give up at once but endured through the whole experience to the point that they could not take any more, 'Courage leaked, as sand From the best sandbags after years of rain.'

Owen also highlights the indignities suffered by the soldiers on the battlefield through the use of various features seen in different poems already mentioned above. In Anthem for Doomed Youth he compares the soldiers to 'those who die as cattle'. This comparison shows the insignificance of their deaths in the eyes of the public and the authorities. I believe that it also highlights the large amount of men that die in war which leads to the soldiers appearing only as numbers and not humans. Another example of the indignities suffered by the soldiers is seen in Dulce et Decorum Est. Instead of being appreciated of their sacrifice they are only seen as 'old beggars' and 'coughing / hags.'

'This book is not about heroes.' Owen truly does not speak about heroes but rather about those that merely lived after the war. He does not portray them as survivors since in one way or another they left the battlefield incomplete

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and eternally scarred. He therefore seeks out to evoke pity for those that did live and not for those that died since death was the next best thing after leaving the battlefield unharmed, because they would not suffer for long.