

Wilfred Owen and his pity of war

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Wilfred Owen was an officer in the First World War who, after being hospitalized and being inspired by war poet Siegfried Sassoon, used his poetry to express strong anti-war sentiments.

In 'Dulce et Decorum Est', 'Disabled' and many other poems he uses a range of poetic techniques to express the pity of war and evoke a wide range of emotions in the reader. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is written from the first person perspective, allowing Owen to share his personal experiences and to forge a connection with his audience who will have a stronger emotional response as a result. He builds a relationship with the audience throughout the poem and evokes their sympathy with his graphic descriptions of his recurring nightmares about the man drowning in gas who "plunges" at him, "guttering, choking, drowning", using the semantic field of water to emphasize the similarity between drowning and being killed by gas. After building this relationship with his audience he is ready to address them directly at the end to appeal to them personally to not spread popular but false notions about the glory of war. In these final lines, Owen warns the reader not to tell their children "Dulce et Decorum est Pro Patria Mori", which means "it is sweet and right to die for your country" in Latin and it is from this that Owen takes the title. Upon reading the title, the reader will expect the poem to have a pro-war stance, which increases the shock factor of the frank depiction of the horrors of war in the poem.

The stanzas are also arranged into two sonnets which is obviously a very unexpected choice of poetic form given the content of the poem and this contrast also increases the horror that the audience will experience from learning of Owen's experiences. In 'Disabled', Owen also discusses the false

ideas that people have about the nature of war. This poem is written from the third person perspective which, while Owen creates a great amount of sympathy for the soldier through various poetic devices, creates some distance between him and the audience to increase the sense of the man's loneliness. The poem begins with a stanza describing the man in his current state, "legless, sewn short at elbow", and overwhelmingly alone. We are then taken back in time to when the "Town used to swing so gay" to show how sweet life was "before he threw away his knees".

By describing the man as throwing away his knees, rather than as passively being injured, Owen places some blame on the man for his decision to go to war, making it clear later in the poem that "when he'd drunk a peg, he thought he'd better join". Owen also draws a contrast between how women treat the soldier, comparing before the war when "there was an artist silly for his face" and since when girls "touch him like some queer disease".

There is also a sense of great ageing over the course of just a year: his face "was younger than his youth, last year. Now, he is old; his back will never brace", showing the extent of the damage that war can cause and emphasizing the man's loneliness. It is evident that by showing the horrors of war and directly addressing the ideas that people at home have about going off to fight for glory, Owen finds the propaganda machine of the time deplorable and feels that the men fighting for their country are being lied to about what going off to war really means. His poetry creates a strong sense of pity of war to give his audience a more realistic idea of what is actually happening in the hope that if people's opinions on the war change, the war will end.