

Which of wilfred
owens poems do you
particularly admire
and why



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Personally I do not have a particular interest in war poetry, so when I was faced with this essay question I feared that I wouldn't admire any of Wilfred Owens poetry.

I was in fact wrong. My experience of war poetry was somewhat different to that of Owens. I believe this is due to the fact that Owen was writing about the First World War; this was indeed very different to any other war ever fought in the world before. Not only was World War One the first war in which the entire world was involved it was also the first war where the " young brave wives" (The Dead-Beat) saw actual pictures and footage of the war and its " carnage incomparable" (Mental Cases). Where before all people at home knew of war was " the old lie" (Dulce et Decorum est) written by civilians, most of which had never experienced the horror of war for themselves and were writing secondary sources.

Owen did not write to tell of the glory and honour of War or of the heroics and patriotism of dying for your country, like most of his time, instead he wrote to challenge and accuse an establishment that sent an entire generation to their doom, and to inform the ordinary people of the " untold truth" (Strange Meeting.) I see every one of Owens poems as admirable and inspirational, as he dared to do what no-one before him dared, he criticised and attacked a government that sent boys to fight in a mans war. Owen wrote not to inspire men into joining the army, but to change and dispute peoples conceptions and pre conceptions of war. Dulce et decorum est' was the first of Owens poems that I read and the one that I admire most. The poem begins ironically, the title meaning, " It is sweet and honourable (to die

for ones country). A title that was shocking and accusing to the nation rather than an invite for pity.

The first stanza sets the scene for the poem, showing a platoon of completely exhausted soldiers “trudging” back from the front line “like old beggars” they are clearly weary from a battle as their feet are “blood-shod” the men are so drained that they are oblivious even to “the hoots of the gas shells dropping. In this stanza the Owen portrays the soldiers are no longer being men, but as “hags” who have been robbed of their youths. It is because of this, I believe that Owen blames and accuses the “bold uncles” (The Dead Beat) that sent boys to meet their doom, in almost all of his poems; this condemning almost becomes a soul purpose in his poems. He directly confronts us as the reader with lines such as “pawing us who dealt them war and madness” (Mental Cases) even the way in which he talks of the soldiers leaving for the war as “wrongs hushed up” (The Send Off) seems to me as incredibly accusing.

Suddenly there is a change of pace as a gas attack causes panic among the troops. Here Owen uses direct speech “Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!” this adds realism to the poem. Realism is something that no secondary source poems have, and therefore also helps to add to the way in which Owen revolutionized war poetry. One soldier fails to fit the “clumsy” helmet in time and the others watch him drown “under a green sea” In stanza two the attention turns away from the soldiers in the gas attack and Owen begins to confront the reader by addressing them directly. Imagery he uses in this stanza is part of his persuasion, Owen writes that if we had seen “his

hanging face” or if we had heard “ the blood come gargling” we would not think it honorable to go to war.

Owen believes that it is far sweet or honorable to die for your country. The contradiction used in the title of “ Anthem for Doomed Youth” gives the poem an instant cynical tone. The word anthem has obviously deliberately been chosen to provide a sarcastic manner to the poem, as an anthem is something that it used in celebration and not when commenting on an entire generation that are being sent to war without a chance of survival. This poem is homage to the men that died “ as cattle”. In this poem Owen confronts the fact the soldiers receive no more than “ the monstrous anger of the guns” and “ choirs of wailing shells” as funerals. He takes the two juxtaposing ideas of war and a funeral and makes them fit together uncomfortably, he claims that there orisons will be said through the “ patter” of the “ stuttering rifles”.

Owen describes any prayers or bells that are said for the soldiers by the authority as “ mockeries”, as the men and boys were sent deliberately to fight and die. Owen writes with tender respect for the dead soldiers throughout this poem and yet he also shows complete disgust for the establishment that damned so many young men to die in horrific circumstances with not so much as a candle to “ speed them all”. He writes how the only candles lit for the dying are the “ holy glimmer of goodbyes” that can be seen in their own eyes as they slip away. This poem along with many others of Owens shows “ the pity of war” (Strange Meeting”.) Owens disgust is shown not only in Anthem for Doomed Youth but in many others of his poems as well. In The Send Off Owen comes across as believing that <https://assignbuster.com/which-of-wilfred-owens-poems-do-you-particularly-admire-and-why/>

there is a conspiracy lead by the establishment that is sending young men to fight in the war.

The believes that they are being sent “ secretly, like wrongs hushed up” and describes their departure as very secretive, “ signals nodded, and a lamp winked to a guard. ” Owen believes that they are being sent from “ darkening lanes” and in secret so people don’t realise how few “ creep back” to the villages to which they belong. It is as though they leave silently so people don’t notice how many have left, which in turn allows the fact that so little of them return, to be hidden by those in power. Owen shows in this poem, as he does in The Dead Beat his belief that the government are using deceiving propaganda to hide the “ multitudinous murders” (Mental Cases) that are taking place everyday. In The Dead Beat Owen describes how a man falls “ sullenly” at the front line due to complete mental exhaustion.

Whilst the man is down he is kicked several times and has a revolver pointed at his head to get him to his feet, but he is so tired mentally that he just “ blinked blearily”. He is so mentally beaten that he doesn’t “ appear to know a war (is) on. ” In this particular poem Owen is making an attack on those of higher rank, that are at the war but not in the front line, he shows how people didn’t understand the mental as well as the physical pain caused by being in the front line. He tells how the man that is “ dead-beat” is described by the stretcher-bearers as “ malingering” and by a doctor as “ scum”. This poem shows the cruel incomprehension of others towards the soldiers that couldn’t cope mentally in the war. It also places the blame of the “ crazed men” on to “ Blighty”, the British government, as it is them that “ dealt them (the soldiers) war and madness” (Mental Cases), not the “ stiffes.

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.. nor the Hun". This poem ends disturbingly with a line of speech from the doctor to which the mentally ill man was sent, " that scum you sent last night soon died. Hooray! " Despite the " human squander" (Mental Cases), caused by the war, young men still signed up by the hundred every day to fight. This was mainly due to the propaganda of the government, a lot of which was done in the form of poetry.

Young men were made to believe that " there is no fitter end" (In Memoriam S. C. W, Charles Sorely) than to die for ones country. The reality of war is masked in this poem with the first and last line, " sacrificing swift night". This of course is exactly what Owen refers to as the " old lie" (Dulce et Decorum est).

People were made to believe that it was their duty to " do and die" (The Charge of the Light Brigade, Alfred Tennyson). A key example of propaganda in world war one is shown in The Volunteer, Herbert Asquith. The prime minister of Britain wrote this poem at the same time that Owen was writing. Its ideas however are very different to those used in Owens. The Volunteer is full of patriotism, the poem talks only of honour and valour of dying in battle, and hides the real consequences of war.

The poem is used to glorify death and to encourage and persuade other young men to do as the soldier in the poem has and to have their " lance broken but... lie content", or as Owen would have said, to be mentally, and physically battered and then buried with no funeral. The Soldier, Rupert Brooke, does the same and hides any realism of war. It is pure patriotism, and a celebration of England and her glory.

The land that the dead soldiers are buried in is described as “ rich earth, a richer dust concealed. This poem is what Owen challenged in all of his poems, as he believed it to be the “ old lie” and its author, Rupert Brooke, is exactly the kind of person he was writing to inform and educate about the horror of war. Before Owen war poetry oozed with glory, duty, heroism and honour. By careful use of propaganda it became believed that the glory of dying for your country “ will never die”, it was all these fairy tail ideas if war that Owen challenged and fought with his realism and honesty. I respect and admire every one of Owens poems, for they are the vicious truth.