

Survivors and the dead-beat essay



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“Survivors” by Siegfried Sassoon and “The Dead-Beat” by Wilfred Owen have both similarities and differences in their illustrations of violence and horror during the war, despite the fact that Owen’s poetry is heavily influenced by Sassoon. To begin with, the very title ‘Survivors’ hints at a tragedy (which, of course, proves to be WW1), that the subjects have fought through in order to carry on their lives, the actual word ‘survivors’ could also be interpreted as showing the men as a select few, with others not being so fortunate as to hold out.

When delving deeper into the content of the poem, it becomes clear that the soldiers have not come out of this catastrophe unmaimed; “the shock and strained” graphically depicts the state of the soldiers minds, and the alliteration used for this puts even more emphasis on the point. Yet the title of Owens ‘The Dead-Beat’ gives the impression of a sluggish, hopeless figure, not one of action. This is a paradox in that ‘The Dead-Beat’ is actually the more graphic of the two poems, as well as being set (? at a faster pace: it opens with the words “he dropped-”, instantly beginning the poem without need for setting or description, composing pictures of dead bodies, of exhausted soldiers, immediately displaying the violence of the scene. In contrast to this, Sassoon begins his conversationally- “no doubt they’ll soon get well”, in a dispassionate tone creating an air of nonchalance whilst quietly mocking the ignorance of the general public. Despite Sassoon opening with a calm statement, he quickly progresses onto lucid narrations of the soldiers, with their “old, scared faces”, depicting how the horrors of their experiences have aged them.

Although not directly outlining the events that have been inflicted on these men, the result is nonetheless _____, as it leaves room for imagination, not only making it more personal but also more real. Owen also achieves this in depicting horror, not gory or macabre, but by showing the 'dead beat' being turned on by his own side. The shock of this event lies in its deviance, soldiers were supposed to stand together, support and protect each other. Yet in this, they are shown to be heartless and malevolent, stretcher-bearers "wink" and the doctor remarks "It's not these stiffs have crazed him; nor the Hun." They find it amusing, whilst the soldier lies there in suffering.