

A critical appreciation of the poem 'exposure'



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I believe in Wilfred Owens' poem 'Exposure', there are many different purposes, and an equal number of methods, which he employs to achieve them. Throughout the poem, he uses a variety of different techniques but I think there are several which are most successful. The first and foremost approach Owen has used is that of the title, 'Exposure'.

Exposure means to 'Lay open to the weather'; it suggests being uncomfortable, and susceptible to the weather, typically in a less than desirable situation. In this poem, it is the weather that torments the soldiers most, and so this title is appropriate. This title is also clever and evocative, because it causes the reader to think about the contents of the poem before having read it. I consider the reference to nature, in particular, to be very important and effective. It is expressed clearly, in a physical sense, in the first line of the first stanza, although Owen does continue this use throughout the poem. 'Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...

'This line shows the 'merciless'/evil wind, nature, to have premeditated causing a pain to the soldiers. This, and that the wind causes a physical pain, 'ache', to the soldiers personifies the weather. The diction in this line, for example, the repetition of s sounds, called sibilance, represents the sound of the wind. It can be associated to hissing sounds, which we relate to a cat in anger and fright. This again personifies the wind and is in correlation with the soldiers feelings. In the fourth stanza, Owen again uses nature to represent a force fighting against the soldiers, 'Flights of bullets...

Less deathly than...snow,'This plainly shows that the weather is worse for the soldiers than the 'flights of bullets'; which, when described as flights are

likened to birds and therefore nature. This can be shown to mean that the weather is the worst of nature's ills, although this, I should think is obvious. Throughout the poem, Owen uses diction to convey sentiment and mood. 'We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,' Within this line, he conveys his compassion for the soldiers, by providing an easily visual image of their pain so we, the reader, can sympathise with them. That they are 'back on forgotten dreams' is easily imaginable too; we can picture them on their backs bleary-eyed and lost in their memories of happier times.

Owen maintains this use of diction to present vivid images of the soldiers' torment. For example, his use of colour to describe embodiments of otherwise ordinary entities is provocative 'With crusted dark-red jewels;' The language used in this line is rich and powerfully graphic. This depiction of fire so resembles blood, that it is comprehensible how the soldiers would associate the two. Another method Owen uses is the reference to religion. In the second to last stanza, the soldiers lose all faith in God. 'For love of God seems dying.' This shows that God has been an important aspect in the soldiers' lives because it is only now, when all hope is lost that they admit that their love for God is failing them. This is understandable because throughout the poem up to that point, God is evoking pain in order to test them.

Although, it is interesting that it is only when they are so close to dying themselves that they feel God's love is dying. Their religion fails them; this intensifies the feeling of hopelessness; that they have been forgotten. This theme is repeated elsewhere in the poem: 'Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war. What are we doing here?' This first sentence uses the adjective

dull to represent the soldiers' feelings about their situation, and where they feel they would rather be 'Far off.' Having been deserted they want to get to where the action is, as 'Far off' something is happening. It is also in this stanza that they question "Why have they been left to suffer?" This, again, relates to their religion failing them, and their God abandoning them. Owen uses the subject of death described with dexterous diction to provoke a feeling of empathy towards the soldiers. 'Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.

'The sibilance in this line is resemblance of the sound frost makes as it forms; the s' makes short sharp sounds, which are painful to the ear, regardless of the physical pain they cause. Again, his use of sound provides the rawest representations of war. I regard Wilfred Owen's key purposes in writing this poem to be: providing empathy for the soldiers' and illustrating the futility of war. I think that he does this very well using intense description in an echo of the style of Owen's favourite poet, John Keats.