

Poetry comparison: mental cases and disabled by wilfred owen

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



The two poems 'Disabled' and 'Mental Cases', both written by Owen, are about war and cover similar but also very different situations. 'Disabled' displays the thoughts and feelings of a young man who has lost his limbs after suffering the injuries of war. 'Mental Cases', on the other hand, captures the damage to men's minds as a result of war. Owen's aim is to shock and to describe in stark detail the ghastly physical symptoms of mental torment. The main consequence that is explored in 'Disabled' is what the horrors of war can do to a person's physical state.

It is quite clear from the first line that the man described in the poem is in an awful state, as he is "sat in a wheeled chair". This same line then says that he is "waiting for dark". This suggests that the man is alone and isolated from everybody else. Similarly to 'Disabled', 'Mental Cases' also describes war's personal after-effects, but in this case it is dealing mostly with mental anguish. Using his own experiences, Owen describes the mental effects that the war had had on other soldiers. The opening line, where the speaker asks "who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?", suggests that the speaker has no idea who anyone else around him is.

This could be because he is either in a state of confusion, or he no longer recognises people. He notes that the other patients have "drooping tongues", which is a stereotypical image of someone who is perceived as "mental". However, 'Mental Cases' also describes the physical injuries that soldiers have to experience. Blood imagery is effectively developed through the compound words, 'blood-smear' and 'blood-black'. The impact is

increased further by the 'b' alliteration and the negative connotations of 'smear' and 'black'.

Owen also uses onomatopoeia to describe some of the sounds, "Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles"; he has done this to add to the reader's view of war. Another thing Owen has done in 'Mental Cases' is using his experiences and view of war, for example "Carnage incomparable and human squander", this displays the terror of war. It gives the reader haunting images, for example "Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets". This gives the reader the image of eyes being plucked out of their sockets, Owen has used such powerful imagery to build up tension and add to the suspense.

Both of these poems seem to hold an underlying anti-war message. We can see this in the numerous references to the terrible waste of war. In 'Disabled'; '... before he threw away his knees.' – which is emphasised by 'He thought he'd better join – He wonders why', showing us how effortless it was to make his first mistake. The comparative references within 'Mental Cases' are less clear, however can be found; 'Carnage incomparable, and human squander Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.' – the horror was too much for the men, sending them mad, I feel an implication of waste.

Expanding on the anti-war message, we can find hints of bitterness towards the 'System', or government. In 'Disabled' we see, 'Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years' – a very sarcastic line, referring to the recruiting officers knowingly sending a minor to war – this pins some kind of hopeless

blame onto them. 'Mental Cases' finishes off with a more generalised bitterness towards those responsible for the war, probably more vague to emphasise the subject of the poem, 'Paving us who dealt them war and madness. To conclude, Owen uses many different ways to describe the physical and mental consequences of war that the soldiers faced. He uses a mixture of onomatopoeia, alliteration, metaphors and imagery to create scenes of destruction and horror. One of the ways that the poems differ is, whereas 'Disabled' deals with loss of physical faculties, 'Mental Cases' deals with the loss of mental faculties – as their respective names obviously make out to describe.

This difference in subject, directly affects the tone of the poem. In 'Disabled' the focus is on one individual, and the effects of losing physical faculties on their life – this makes 'Disabled' more "human" in feel than 'Mental Cases'. After reading both of these poems, it is obvious to the reader that Owen was not a believer in war and thought it was pointless and wrong; he thought that the consequences the soldiers dealt with were enough to scar them for life.