

THE CONCEPT OF WAR IN WILFRED OWEN'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of war in Wilfred Owen's poems to familiarize readers and scholars with the most considerable concerns that were concentrated by the poet in his terrible experience in World War I. It consists of various sections, in which a critical analysis of each part is given. In its introduction, a general literary overview of Owen and a historical background of the First World War are focused on the first half of the 20th century which influenced his writing style and subject matter. Then, the idea of pity of war in the body of the paper is discussed as a result of his participation that let him feel all the disastrous consequences the war brought to the life of soldiers in the front and all people in the countries. This shaped and developed his effectual war poetry to warn the people about the reality of war which can be analyzed as his major aim in composing poetry. In addition, special attention is devoted to his concern about revolting against the glory of war and patriotism in another section. For that, his great poems such as 'Strange Meeting', 'The Disabled', and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' are taken into consideration to find his prominent features practically. In conclusion, the main critical characteristics of Owen's war poetry about the pity of war, rejecting the glory of war, and his depiction of the reality of war is summarized to guide readers to keep the most influential ones in mind.

1. Introduction

It is well known that World War I began in August 1914 and continued to November 1918, in which poison gas, explosive bullets, the filth and unpleasant of the trenches, the machine gun and barbed wire were the new realities of war, and millions of people were killed or disabled. This horrific aspect of the war soon silenced those who regarded war as heroism and beauty, and everyone became nostalgic and shocked about the war and its terrible consequences. That is what Wilfred Owen and other war poets wanted to portray in their way of composing poems to depict the pity and meaninglessness of the war (Safier, 2004, p. 762).

Thornley and Roberts (2013, p. 185) regard Wilfred Owen as the most famous English poet of the WWI who devours to describe the perspective of those people at home about the war in order to show them the horror and suffering encountered by soldiers.

Owen had the greatest impact on 20th century poetry as a poet who came to maturity in World War I. Though he was not healthy as a young man, he was put on the front line in 1915, experienced the horrors of the war, suffered a collapse, and was put in a mental hospital in England. Then returned and received a medal of Military Cross for his bravery, which can be viewed as an attraction and deception as well. It resulted in his murder seven days before the war ended (Safier, p. 955).

World War I poetry, as Day (2010, p. 53) writes, is technically traditional, but its subject matter is highly temporary. For example, Owen wrote sonnets that is a traditional style of writing poems, but his innovative was in subject matter as he focused on his terrible experiment in the WWI and the depiction of the contemporary reality of the 20th century. Even nowadays, one can see very clearly that the concept of war is an ever-ongoing phenomenon in most of the Eastern countries by Western sponsorship.

Hibberd (1987, p. 11) states that most critics now are agreed that Owen is one of the most principal poets of the war. And the war poets are simply those authors whose poetry about war seems to have attracted most critical attentions.

Owen is a poet whom Bloom (2002, p. 26) describes as a one of all times, all locations, and all wars for only one war exists: which is described as the war of men against

men. Bloom also thinks that Owen's poems are older than him because if a poet writes wonderful poetry, his poems will always be older than he is, and they will be timeless.

2. Owen's Purpose in Composing Poetry

Many readers may wonder about Owen's aim in writing war poetry. One can consider his own words, in which his attitude about poetry and war is explained as he says:

"This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honor, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War:

Above all I am not concerned with Poetry

My subject is War, and the pity of War

The Poetry is in the pity (quoted in Kennedy and Gioia p. 43).

Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is to warn. That is why the true Poet must be truthful" (*ibid.*)

The key words here are poetry, war, glory of war, and pity of war. Owen clearly makes a distinction between them. He means that he is not interested in poetry, but the experience of war encourages him to depict the reality of war which is pity not glory, and this is the business of a poet to be truthful in expressing the reality not shaping an illusionary world to deceive people to fight and kill honorably. That is what makes him an antiwar poet.

Kendall (p. 49) is concerned about Owen's letter that he wants to explain for his sister why he has always praised poetry as he says poetry is more accurately truthful in describing war than movies, cartoons, photos, stories, and plays because it is capable of a truth that transcends the scope of other media. Furthermore, Owen (as quoted in Rawlinson, p. 116) contends that he purposefully informed readers all of this to enlighten them on the realities of war.

However, after reading through Owen's poems, Edmund Blunden discovered that rebellion was present just as it had been in practically every soldier's mind. Murry believes that there is no longer any rebellion in Owen's poems, only pity, remorse, and the contentment of submission (quoted in Hibberd, p. 15).

Ivor Gurney (quoted in Kendall, p. 52) acknowledges that Owen is the one who makes an effort to speak the truth, although a limited truth given his difficulty in doing so. While communicating the political and historical truths of the World War I, Owen's essential truth also manipulates these realities to a more complex vision that is dissatisfied with simply being correct.

In his later poems, Hibberd (p. 161) shows, Owen attempted to convey to readers the realities of battle as he experienced it. His excellent poetry combines elements that frequently only exist separately, such as conventional Romanticism and Realism, moral and political passion with a goal, and technical elaboration and control.

3. The Pity of War in Owen's Poetry

Hearing the word of war, a range of negative connotations possibly come to mind such as horror, disappointment, and pity. One feels pity for those who are killed in front of him if, of course, he is still in the scope of humanity. That is what Owen experienced in the battle field and pushed him to depict this horrific reality of war and its negative aspects.

Safier (p. 955) is concerned with the idea of what Owen calls the pity of war. He thinks that Owen's death is also pity. His terrible experience in the battles basically seems to produce his poems as he describes for his mother: 'I have not seen any dead. I have done worse. In the dark air I have perceived it, and in the darkness, felt.' The words death, worse, and darkness can possibly mean the pessimistic attitudes of the poet and the terrifying scene of the battle field that he describes.

He was among those who were against the war, but continued to fight. He was firstly encouraged by Sassoon's approval, friendship, and support he offered which helped Owen to build up his self-confidence. He aimed to capture the futility of war, the waste of life, the boredom, the horror, and the pity of the trenches in a vision to endure rather than the protest poems of Sassoon (Day, p. 251, 53). Consequently, his poems evoke a vast pity and sense of loss and combine all the force of a personal complaint in the way that Stephen (p. 94) describes.

Kendall (2006, p. 63) contends that despite Owen's influence on following groups of poets and audiences, his poetry is one of endings—the end of life, of old deceptions,

of patriotic sentiment, of the Creator, of optimism, of a literary convention, and of civilization.

Additionally, Thornley and Roberts (p. 185) believe that the discomfort, risk, and suffering of the soldiers, as well as the long-lasting harm that the war brought to their minds and happiness, are all powerfully depicted in Owen's poems. He penned one of his famous poems, "Strange Meeting," in which he envisions an encounter in hell with an enemy he has murdered who recalls of their shared humanity, in response to the official mindset of the British Army that implied their foes were not human people:

Whatever hope is yours
Was my life also (*ibid.*)

They both aim to kill each other and now they are dead, but for what and what they got? It shows how it is pity and nonsense to be killed and how they are regretful. That was in 20th century, but even now with the climax development of life, technology, education, science, and philosophy, people are killed for nothing except for the terrible materialistic aspect of humanity which is practiced by the force of power and money.

Looking into the deep structure of Owen's poems, one can possibly find Owen's association with the instruments of "Inspection," a private soldier's reflection of "Field Marshall God," and "The Last Laugh," which reuses the choric ordnance of "Anthem for Doomed Youth" to ridicule the dying's final words. This is exactly what happens when the supernatural or inanimate objects in poetry use their power to alienate people from warfare. Contrarily, "Dulce et Decorum Est" claims that individuals who advocate for war as a desirable and suitable state of affairs lack humanity, which is what causes war to be inhumane (Rawlinson, 2007, p. 114-124).

In 'Strange meeting', Owen shows how the soldiers and people there suffer and cry out their suffering due to the difficulties they encountered in the battle field during the war, and he depicts that it is unfair that so many young people have lost their life and many others like him will do for nothing, and nations will be deprived from their human resources, properties, and economics. The two killed soldiers share the same pain. This makes the poem and the poet universal which speaks for everybody every

now and then. Owen's great concern is "the truth untold" which is the idea of hiding reality of war from the public so that they can encourage people and deceive them to fight for their nation. However, it is for their interests. This is what Owen finds meaningless and pity in the real nature of war and battlefield in his poetry to warn the readers about the real nature of war, not about the aesthetic value of poetry (Othman, p. 39-41).

4. War Consequences in Owen's Poetry

It is generally known that World War I had horrible consequences such as killing thousands of people, destroying many cities and civilization, exploiting nature and historical heritages, and thousands of soldiers were wounded and disabled. It shook all the corners of life, and shocked the psychological state of remaining people which led to disappointment and alienation of the new generation.

Thornley and Roberts (p. 186) consider one of the consequences of war which is related to those soldiers whose bodies would be permanently marked by the effects of battle when they are wounded and disabled. Owen brings this horrific scene into his poem, Disabled:

Now he will spend a few sick years in institutes
and do what things the rules consider wise
and take whatever pity they may dole (*ibid.*)

This can be viewed as the depiction of those who are not dead physically, but worse than a dead mentally as they have might lost sight, or any part of their body, and are forced to suffer and to live disabled and uncared. Those may wish to die every moment since they cannot provide their family and themselves the basic needs of life. In 'strange meeting', Stephen (p. 107) supports the idea that Owen seems to have an effort to have a universal significance, rather than merely being a poem about the First World War in which no particular names or references are mentioned within the poem. Additionally, it is simply believed that history repeats itself, and the idea of war is an ongoing harsh disease which destroys the world every now and then. It has never stopped and never will. War nowadays is practiced in East, African countries and even in Europe such as in Ukraine, and there are thousands of people who are killed,

disabled, or suppressed without a reasonable excuse. Powerful countries feed terroristic military groups to impose their political and economic interests on other countries and take all their raw materials. That is what can be called colonialization. The only way of escaping this reality and the horror of battle is by means of death. Many people wish to die, rather to live such a meaningless life as there may be equality and forgiveness in death when Owen says: 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend'. They were enemies in the battlefield in their life, but now they are dead and are friends because they share the world of underground and death which is about equality, humanity, and naturalness. Thus, Owen, as Stephen (p. 93) mentions, always demonstrated the ugly and terrible side of war and its consequences for the world. Moreover, Hibberd (p. 55) concentrates on another aspect of Owen's poems. He believes that Owen understood the dread at specific moments since he is the primary observer of how the conflict affects the human spirit. He is at his best in "Strange Meeting" when he considers the day when people will once more choose to disregard the true nature of war:

Men will go content with what we spoiled
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled
They will be swift with the swiftness of the tigress
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress (*ibid.*)

Thus, Owen's concentration is on the consequences and the terrible effect of war on the life of soldiers who encounter death and the fear of the battlefield.

5. Owen's War Experience and his Development

Experience always provides writers a good chance to develop themselves and their career. When a poet like Owen experienced the war as a soldier, he would depict the war and its consequences more realistically as it is believed by Kennedy and Gioia (p. 42-43) that in 1914, Owen was only 20 when the First World War began. Twice injured in combat, he advanced quickly and eventually rose to the position of company commander. Since most of his war poems are, as Rawlinson (p. 119) concurs, inspired by his experiences in the first five months of 1917 during the war, he developed from

an ordinary insignificant poet to the most significant English language poet of the war as a result of the horrible and astonishing brutality of the war.

War is the struggle between beauty and ugliness. Bloom (p. 14) assumes that as he continued to fight, Owen made a conscious decision to contrast the ugly nature of the war with the beauty it was destroying. The world was beautiful, but war destroys its beauty and brings ugliness. According to Rawlinson, Owen's name is linked with the poetry of war. The war trauma and the unexpected horror of trench warfare transformed Owen into the poet we now regard so highly and respond to with such gratitude. Owen is an iconic sufferer and scapegoat.

Murry (quoted in Hibberd, 1987, p. 15) declared Owen to be the greatest poet of the war because there are certainly other war poets, but he was a different kind of poet. He wasn't a poet who took use of the chance presented by war; rather, he was a poet whose being was infused with an odd experience as he submitted to the horror of war to the point that it pierced his soul. Owen considers war as poetry's realization since it converts falsehood into truth, turning rhetoric into reality. Since experience is finally mirrored in a poet's language and cannot be rejected in his poetry, true poets will be sincere in their writing (Kendall, 2006, p. 64).

In addition, bloom (p. 24) urges that humans are turned not only against one another during war, but also against themselves. The actual death of the soldier symbolizes the spiritual demise of both the individual and society since the soldier's wartime experiences cause him to lose his capacity for empathy and identification with all mankind.

6. Glory of War and Patriotism

War poetry is simply that poetry written about war. The name of War Poets is given to the British poets of the WWI (1914-18), such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and Edward Thomas whose subject matter is about war. The term appeared as a result of First World War which produced a distinct and unique body of poetry about that war written by young men who participated and some were killed. The England's army was not enough to fight, so mass conscription had to be

introduced such as poets to promote soldier's self-confidence to fight for their country honorably (Stephen, 1984, p. 81, 93).

There are always national and political concerns about praising war and regarding it as a glory to sacrifice your soul for the sake of your nation which is quite contradictory of what Thornley and Roberts (p. 185) indicate about Owen as he states that soldiers who suffer and die in the conflict are involved, not superhuman heroes, so he rejects the romantic patriotism of Rupert Brooke and represents the notion that dying for one's country is honorable and right as 'the old lie'. This idea of old lie which is put into theory by politicians to attract people to fight for their country and sacrifice their life seems to lead endless wars and uncontrolled circumstances. However, in each war, the interest of powerful parties' matter and the poor will suffer. Owen, according to Day (p. 242), was highly instructed about this issue and inspired by the Romantic poet, Keats, and strongly influenced by his mother's evangelical Anglicanism which can be seen in his clear effort to show people the ugliness side of war and he rejects the honor of fighting for your own country.

Bloom (p. 15, 23) considers Owen's goal in writing poetry which was intended to undermine the idea that sacrifice is sacred and to demolish the war's romanticized goodness. The job of the poet is forced to change because countries lead their youth into warfare like lambs to the slaughter. His new goal must be the "truth untold," and his purpose must shift from being purely individual or aesthetic to one that is societal and political.

According to Hibberd (p. 56), the fundamental theme of Owen's poetry is the condemnation of the myth of the glory of war as the country is split into two parts: one talks about and approves of war, while the other really engages in it and suffers. He was actually one of the rare representatives of the common soldier who opposed those who extolled the virtues of war. This theory is supported by Kendall (p. 51), who continues by stating that Owen, like Sassoon, uses physical acts of violence to disprove delusions of grandeur, views German soldiers as fellow victims, and labels warmongers on both sides as the actual adversaries.

7. Discussion

Whenever there is a piece of writing, there will be critical points of views about it that makes the work more effective not always less. Owen's negative aspect of war certainly carries more critical views which made him famous only after his death when people understood what war destroyed. According to Bloom (p. 14), Yeats deemed Owen "unworthy of the poet's corner of a country newspaper" because "he is all blood, dirt, and sucked sugar stick." This is evidence of Yeats' criticism of Owen. That is just abusive, but Yeats' more formal justification is equally shocking: passive suffering is not a suitable subject for poetry. The guy who dies has joy in all major tragedies. If warfare is essential in the world we live in today, we should try to forget its pain just as we would a fever.

As Graves advised Owen in December 1917, "For God's sake cheer up and write more optimistically—The war's not ended yet but a poet should have a spirit above wars," Owen's concentration on denial, refutation, and negation may be mistakenly seen as a limiting factor throughout his mature work. However, Owen's spirit rises above and falls beneath battles. He unquestionably finds all the necessary topics—God, fear, death, exultation, love, joy, hell—which are brought together and heightened by conflict on the battlefield. On the other hand, Siegfried Sassoon admires Owen and valued him as a friend. He was unable to attempt to evaluate Owen's work objectively. He claimed that Owen was a person of unwavering moral integrity since he never composed poetry to convey a personal message and pitied others rather than himself (Kendall, p. 64, 53).

Thus, there are always controversial debates about being truthful and being optimistic. To express the reality of life and to perceive what is going on in the society, one will be considered pessimistic as it is the case with Owen. He truthfully puts the reality of the war on a paper to be known by the public, but he might have been considered unrealistic, emotional, and pessimistic. It is totally right that he was negative, but it was the reality that created by political and military forces not by himself. He just attempted to indicate the realistic image of the war just like a newspaper's reporter and camera.

8. Conclusion

It can be thus concluded that Owen experienced all the consequences of the World War I and suffered from that disastrous incident which caused to kill and disable millions of people, and this provided him a great chance to develop his genius as a poet and to start composing poetry in a realistic way in order to depict the real image of the war.

In his poems 'Strange Meeting', 'The Disabled', 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and others, He basically attempted to show the consequences of war such as its horror, suffering, alienation, and disappointment that can be felt in the front by the soldiers who are deceived to fight for their country as a glory, which is in fact not a glory, but it is a betrayal conspiracy against the poor ordinary people for the sake of political and military leaders' interests. So he rejected the idea of patriotism, and regarded war as meaningless. And he was the real voice of the ordinary man to condemn the war's ideology.

Thus, his great concentration was to show the negative side of war, the pity of war and the futility of war, for it destroys the nations' economic interests, it corrupts the beauty of nature and environment, and it damages the life of people as it affects all over the world. This made him a recognizable and prominent figure of the war poetry all around the world in a way no one even now can deny his greatness in depicting the reality of war through his experience in the war.

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چه مکی شهر له شیعره کانی ویلفرید ئۆین

پوخته:

ئەم تووژینه وهیه لیکدانه وه بۆ چه مکی شهر ده کات له شیعره کانی ویلفرید ئۆین به مه به سستی ئاشنا کردنی خوینهران و تووژهران به نیگه رانیه کانی شاعیر له هه مبه ر ئه زموونی خۆی له جه نگی جیهانی یه که مدا. تووژینه وه که له چه ند به شیک پیکدیت، که تیبدا شیکاری ره خنه یی سه باره ت به هه ر به شیک ده خاته روو بیسه کی تووژینه وه که خوینهر ئاشنا ده کات به تیروانینیکی گشتی ئه ده بی ده رباره ی ئۆین و پاشخانیکی میژوویی جه نگی جیهانی یه که م له نیوه ی یه که می سه ده ی بیسته مدا که کاریگه ری له سه ر شیوازی نووسین و بابه ته که ی هه بووه. پاشان، تووژینه وه که تیشک ده خاته سه ر بیروکه ی به زه یی جه نگ. جیگایی ئاماژه بۆ کردنه که ئەم بیروکه یه ش ده رئه نجامی به شداریکردنی شاعیره له جه نگدا که وای کردووۆ هه ست به هه موو ئه و ده رئه نجامه کاره ساتبارانه بکات که شهر به سه ر ژبانی سه ربازان ی به ره کانی جه نگ و خه لکانی بیتاواندا هیناوه . هه رئه مه ش هۆکار بوو که شاعیر په ره به شیعی جه نگ بدات و خه لکی لی ئاگادار بکاته وه و ببیته ئامانجی سه ره کی شاعیر له نووسینی شیعردا. سه رباری ئه مانه ش له به شیک تری تووژینه وه که تیشک ده خاته سه ر گرنگیدانی شاعیر له هه مبه ر یاخیبون و ناره زای ده ربیرین له دژی شکۆمه ندی شهر و نیشتمانپه ره ری. بۆ ئه وه ش شیعره به ناویانگه کانی وه ک 'Strange Meeting', 'The Disabled', and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' ده خرینه بهر باس و لیکۆلینه وه بۆ دۆزینه وه ی تایبه تمه ندیه دیاره کانی به شیوه یه کی کرداری. له ده ره نجامدا، تایبه تمه ندیه سه ره کییه ره خنه ییه کانی شیعی جه نگی ئۆین

سه بارهت به بهزهیی شهړ و ره تکرده وهی شکومه ندی جهنگ و ویناگردنی واقعی جهنگ کورتکراوه ته وه بوئه وهی خوینه ران خوینه ران کاریگه رترینه کان له بهرچاو بگرن.

مفهوم الحرب في قصائد ويلفريد أوين

الملخص

تستكشف هذه الورقة مفهوم الحرب في قصائد ويلفريد أوين لتعريف القراء والعلماء بأهم الاهتمامات التي ركز عليها الشاعر في تجربته الرهيبة في الحرب العالمية الأولى. وتتكون من أقسام مختلفة ، يتم فيها تقديم تحليل نقدي حول كل جزء. في مقدمتها ، تركز نظرة عامة أدبية عن أوين وخلفية تاريخية للحرب العالمية الأولى في النصف الأول من القرن العشرين والتي أثرت على أسلوب كتابته وموضوعه. بعد ذلك ، تمت مناقشة فكرة شفقة الحرب في متن الورقة نتيجة مشاركته التي جعلته يشعر بكل العواقب الكارثية التي جلبتها الحرب على حياة الجنود في الجبهة وجميع الناس في البلدان. شكل هذا شعره الحربي الفعال وطوره لتحذير الناس من حقيقة الحرب التي يمكن تحليلها على أنها هدفه الرئيسي في تأليف الشعر. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يتم إيلاء اهتمام خاص لاهتمامه بالثورات على مجد الحرب والوطنية في قسم آخر. لذلك ، تم أخذ قصائده العظيمة مثل "لقاء غريب" و "معاق" و "مؤسسة دولسي وديكوروم" في الاعتبار لإيجاد معالمه البارزة بطريقة عملية. في الختام ، تم تلخيص الخصائص الحاسمة الرئيسية لشعر أوين الحربي حول شفقة الحرب ، ورفض مجد الحرب ، وتصويره لواقع الحرب لإرشاد القراء إلى وضع أكثرهم تأثيراً في الاعتبار.