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WAR POETRY: WILFRED OWEN AS A SOLDIER AND POET

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Abstract:

This work examines some war poems written by the English soldier and poet Wilfred Owen. It deals with the writing of the poet by relevantly presenting some of his biographical details and poetic productions before and during the war. The paper provides some analysis of Owen's poems in thematic and artistic perspectives. The poems discussed are "Dulce et Decorum Est," "Futility," and "Strange Meeting." The endeavor here is to discern the themes of the poems and try to link them to the poet's implied message. The main objective of the present study is to analyze these war poems of Owen so as to achieve a critical estimation at the end. Moreover, this paper in relying on the respective studies, will try to discern the message of Owen behind his works: his protest against war. He ironically views war as evil, and he expresses an attitude against the notion of mobilization in literature which urges men to join the front lines of war in search for honor. Through a close reading of the poems as primary sources and the use of the available critical works as secondary sources, an attempt is made to conduct a critical evaluation of these war poems in order to point out the main ideas and experiences reflected in his poems. The method which will be followed can be described as descriptive and analytical.

Keywords: *Wilfred Owen, War Poetry, Soldiers and Poets, Protest Against War.*

I. Introduction

The major themes in Owen's poetry of war that explicitly dominate his poems are included in the subject of war itself, pity, tragic death, horrors and protest against war. Subjects in his poetry are obviously shown in his famous speech "My subject is War, and the pity of War..." (Lewis 31). However, each literary piece has its themes which revolve around the war and its aftermaths.

Owen was talented in composing his war poems, for he added unique artistic methods that his poems were characterized by. For instance, the poet expresses a distinguished outlook in using his poetry as a testimony. He utters the realities of the calamitous events of war; such narration seeks to give the real picture of evilness of war and warn people implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, against war. Sometimes, the poet depends on using the child-like strategy to describe his emotion. He inserts child-like sketches in some letters that were sent to his brother Harold. He in a smart but painful attempt wants to evolve body parts into child-like sketches or even in a verbal witticism.

Another characteristic about the poet is that he uses some classic works as references in his poems. Owen employed some of the Homeric classic myths in his poem 'Strange Meeting'. He imitated the legends of the discourse between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles, and the imprisonment of the Titans by the triumphant of Zeus after the Titanomachy (Vandiver xxvii).

The imagination of Owen is saturated with horrors and bloody war pictures. The war experience launched his imagination and completely captivated his mind. His imagination is so active to respond and create a sense of responsibility toward/among various public categories all around the world. According to C. Day Lewis, a revolution and a force in Owen's mind inspires him to choose his subject of war precisely. It seems that the life, background, and family, alongside the military service have had the largest impact on

developing his imagination.

There are different aspects in Owen's poetry. Spiritually, his poetry can be understood in terms of warning, and protesting against war. Several of his poems reflect the nature of divinity and morality. Kendall says: "There is a conception of a 'whole edifice' in Owen's plans for 'Disabled and Other Poems', but ... [It] was obliged to note 'how very different all his poems are from each other'" (121). In general, the aspects of social, political, emotional and imaginative scope are tackled in narrative, descriptive, and didactic terms of Owen's war poetry.

Finally, the importance to convey urgent ideas and translate real scenes stimulates the poet to emphasize the meaning rather than musical details. It is noticeable that Owen's poetry promotes the consonantal rhyme, the rhyming of consonants but not vowels, and chiming sounds (Lewis 25). It seems that Owen by these aesthetic forms tries to express his real observations and experience of war.

This study is shedding some light on the poetic productions of the English soldier poet, Wilfred Owen as regards war. This kind of poetry is a genre versified by combatant and non-combatant war poets. More specifically, this literary genre is mostly associated with World War I, and it is mainly produced as a reaction to the events before, after, and during the war. Actually, war poetry has existed as long as the ancient conflicts among peoples were there displaying an important fact that war experience vary from one poet to another. While some poets write to glorify and encourage war, others write to express their rejection of violent conflicts and fighting.

The paper provides a background examination of Wilfred Owen: biography and poetic achievements by focusing on the impact of the pre-military and military life on his mind and art. The pre-military experience, particularly his mission in Dunsden, had a major role in illustrating his attitudes towards war. His tours in the poor slums of that area created the blackish vision of his writing. Moreover, his military life, extending from the first days of his military training to his trench life at the front, developed his mind so as to create revolutionary attitude. This will be demonstrated through a thematic and stylistic analysis of a number of his poems: "Dulce et Decorum Est," "Futility," and "Strange Meeting". The thematic analysis proves that Owen was against war and its tragic aftermath.

Although there are several studies on the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, the necessity to investigate the literary and the intellectual aspects of Owen's poetry often emerges to reconsider his experiences and characteristics so as to fill a gap in cultural or literary studies. Such an attempt to examine some works of Wilfred Owen will add somehow knowledge to the available studies on the poet. Hence, the main objective here is to dwell on his war poems and conduct a critical study on both levels: the artistic and the intellectual.

It is believed that this study is relevant and significant because it explores war poetry through a critical approach and in a new sense of construction by exploring the personal experiences and the poetic traits produced by an English figure who has a celebrity as a war poet. The poet rejects war because of its human tragic consequences. Through his war poems, it can be noticed that he has poetic techniques, and styles that convey the pains, aesthetics of suffering, pity, grief, protest, and above all the tragic human loss as well as the stance of the poet.

Some light will be shed on the key themes, styles, and the personal attitudes of the poet. The reason behind writing about this field, war poetry, springs out from the catastrophic conditions of Arab reality due to the fatal war conflicts in several areas. Finally, signals of sufferings and horrors of war reflected in the poetic works of the English soldier-poet Wilfred Owen is worth mentioning as a literary phenomenon and a warning to the whole world about war and its tragic consequences.

II. Discussion

Wilfred Edward Owen is an English soldier-poet. He was born on March 18, 1893 at Plas, Wilmot, Oswestry, Shropshire, in the house of his maternal grandfather, Edward Show. On June 11, 1900, Wilfred Owen joined Birkenhead Institute and remained there until 1907. In 1907, he began attending the

Shrewsbury technical school as a day boy. In September 1911 he was enrolled at London University. From October 1911 to summer 1913, he was at Dunsden Vicarage, Oxfordshire as pupil and lay assistant to the reverend Herbert Wigan. On August 1913 he was assigned as English tutor at the Berlitz School of languages, Bordeaux. On July 1914, he left Berlitz School, became tutor to two boys in a catholic family in Bordeaux. On September 1915, he returned to England and commissioned in Manchester regiment on October, 22. On December 29, 1916, he sailed to France on active service, attached to Lancashire Fusiliers. On March 19, 1917 he was sent to the 13th casualty clearing station. Owen returned to his battalion early in April. In May he was sent again to the 13th casualty clearing station, and from there to 41st stationary hospital. In June, he went into No. 1 General Hospital, from which he was returned to England, arriving to the Welsh Hospital, Netley, about June 18. On June 26, 1917 he was evacuated to Craiglockhart War Hospital, Edinburgh. On November 1917, he was discharged from Craiglockhart: posted to northern Cavalry Barracks, Scarborough. On August 1918, he returned to France for active service and in October he awarded Military Cross. On November 4, 1918, he was killed in action, trying to get his men across the Sambre Canal (Lewis ix-x).

A good number of Owen's war poems were written between 1917 and 1918, and this matter perhaps made several critics describe him as an enigma. During Owen's life, only four of his poems were published, while his celebrity was posthumous. The authenticity and grandeur in the language of his poems, the blending of harsh realism with a sensation, and the portrayal of horrors, proved that Owen is a remarkable poet and his poetry is mature as well. It was not a gradual development that made his work mature, but a kind of revolution in mind that enabled him to recognize his subject clearly: "war and the pity of war". This subject inspired Owen to write his poems that contributed to a radical change of citizens' attitudes towards the war: not to think of war as anything but evil (Lewis 11-12). There were different experiences and circumstances that had impact on developing Owen's talent in writing poetry. Seemingly, the tour in trenches during his military activities produced the emotional and spiritual aspects. Owen also was in admiration of the English poet, Keats, who influenced his writing verse in a pseudo-Keatsian manner.

Owen's father was a man of adventurous spirit, whereas his mother was raised in a Calvinistic religious doctrine, emphasizing the omnipotence of God and the salvation of the elect by God's grace only, and a rigidly Victorian atmosphere (Lewis 12). It was believed that this contradictory nature of his parents was behind the tensions between opposites that often create a poet, and develop his mind. Furthermore, the cultured atmosphere in Owen's home had a strong impact on the rapid development of his writings. During his military service he was writing letters to his family, showing his childish feelings to his mother, and the sense of responsibility toward his sister and younger brothers as if he was their father (Lewis 13). Owen's sense of responsibility for his younger members of the family and for his widowed mother embodied his feeling as a soldier and poet towards his men and towards all soldiers on the front. During working in Dunsden for a little wage, he was conducting several tours among the rural slums there and was reared hard against some facts of life: misery, ailment, and poverty. This experience must have rang the bells in his mind, and seemingly left a pragmatic impression which obliged him to look at the real world. Thus, the massive power of furious pity in his war poems has not only originated from the front, but also from the sense of social responsibility towards the painful life conditions connected with Dunsden's people.

During this period Owen suffered secondary diseases from which he became a bit of a hypochondriac (Lewis 17). He had reported in detail that he felt depressed about his future and had no specific conviction as to what he should do with his talent. When war broke out, Owen was living in a rural society. At the beginning, Owen opposed the war in terms of a naïve, violent and deadly serious manner. He had been barely influenced by the war and his firm belief was that the war is a severe annoyance of the private life. But after the first witness of a real case of injured soldier in Bordeaux Hospital, he in a ruthless and sharpness tone recounted the actualities of war. Then he was enlisted in the military service, and

appointed to the artist's rifle. He indulged in a tough and tedious life while he was obtaining his training. The military expressions impacted his language in terms of sharpness and toughness which mostly featured his writings (Kerr 289-290).

According to Kendall, Owen used the poetry as a way of therapy. Psychologically, he aimed to forget the painful memories on which the poems themselves revolve. Through recurrent writing of the same memories he wanted to keep himself away from unholy motivations and to free his mind from the worst record ever. Owen's war poetry resides 'in the pity,' he referred to pity, for friend and foe alike, at a point where the real experience should have overcome any other kind of literary celebration, such as glories, heroism, and patriotism. He reinforced this vision in that the best war poetry is a combination of bitterness and nostalgia as it was seen arising out of the grand disillusion of the First World War.

Owen was an innovative poet; he inserted some new advanced methods and played with vocabulary in a way that make the reader indulge in the breast of the situation. Touch, for him, became the ground of both testimony and trauma.

A month before his death, Wilfred Owen wrote to Siegfried Sassoon about his servant Jones, 'shot through the head, lay on top of me, soaking my shoulder, for half an hour'. He goes on to elaborate: "Catalogue? Photograph? Can you photograph the crimson-hot iron as it cools from the smelting? This is what Jones's blood looked like, and felt like. My senses are charred. Owen here struggles with the paradoxical notion of sense experience: on the one hand, it is intensely private and stubbornly resists translation, and on the other hand, for it to be shared and communicated, it has to create a retrospective narrative. In order to evoke the judder of the moment, he has recourse here to certain literary devices: images, alliteration, and metaphor. (Kendall 73-74)

The first experience that happened to Owen with 'the actualities of war' was in a hospital in France. He wrote a letter to his brother Harold characterized by realism, pity and writing as testimony. At the same time, there was a full involvement of the body in pain formulated into child-like sketches or verbal witticism. However, the rich diversity in Owen's imagination, drawn back to Owen's pre-war letters were saturated with depictions of illness and pain. Owen's war poetry which widely attributed to the actualities of the trench life, in large, formed the 'modern memory' of the war. The vivid images of darkness, guns, mud, rain, gas, bullets, shells, barbed wire, rats, lice, cold, and trenches enriched the modern war poetry.

'Dulce et Decorum Est', is one of Owen's major poems. It was published posthumously in 1920. The title is an ironic allusion to a line taken from a Latin poem for the Roman poet Horace, "Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori", which means it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. Owen wrote the poem as a response to the patriotic poetess Jessie Pope whose recruiting poems encouraged many young men to fight in the futile war. Ironically, Owen referred to Jessie Pope in line 25 using the term 'My Friend', but how come to be a friend while her poetic works performed as an enemy toward the humankind. The poem is known as 'a gas poem' in which Owen employed both senses of experience and language in their extreme limits. Although the phrase 'gas poem' does not fully convey the aspects of poetic and thematic issues, the desperate moments during and after the gas attack weep through the whole lines of the poem. Bloom thinks that, "Owen's goal from such title is to attack the concept that sacrifice is sacred, and to destroy the glamorized decency of the war" (Bloom 15).

In 'Dulce et Decorum Est', Owen in a scenic way, infers the details of the instant and direct effects of a gas attack. Moving from the bloodied feet to the bloodied mouth of the soldier, he discussed different main points in the subject of war: night march, a gas attack, and traumatic neurosis. The soldiers were fatigued and exhausted by the battle, so they withdrew from the front lines to the back lines of the battle to have a short break and to rearrange their selves before going back to the battle field. They were extremely tired to the limit that they did not feel the falling down of the bombs, and did not hear the explosion sound of

the gas projectiles dropped behind them. They tried to put gas masks on quickly, but one soldier had not enough energy and was late to put the mask on in time. Owen kept a helpless and powerless observe from behind the saving panels of the mask to the situation in which the man had no ability to breathe in a sea of gas. What is a value of a life restricted in a trivial and cheap-price mask panels? Those panels represent the distance between life and death. However, the brutal vision of a soldier agony of dying through the gas haunted the poet in all his dreams.

Owen apparently wanted from 'Dulce et Decorum Est' poem to warn the public of the lie that "it is a sweet and fitting to die for one's country", since Owen himself was wholly convinced it was a lie. The initial fourteen lines describe the set of circumstances and the situation in which the soldier found himself. The other fourteen lines display the effects of what happened and Owen's serious thoughts and his echoes on them. However, the last four lines warn the reader to avoid similar suffering and misery in the future. With awareness or familiarity gained from the sad experience of that soldier who died in a gas attack, Owen sends a message to the whole world in that it is a must that 'not [to] tell' lies to children 'ardent' for glory.

Owen did not save any effort in portraying the terror of the gas attack. In a genius dramatic outlook, he employed his harsh commentating knowledge flavored with both tones and cadences in using a reportage, direct description, and documentary portrayal by which he made the distance between the miserable scene of the gas attack and the reach of reader's imagination so close. What made the opening of 'Dulce et Decorum Est' so exceptional is that in the first line of the first stanza, Owen takes us directly to the field yard. The scene is vivid and live, and brings the body into the field of vision against the surreal backdrop of the gas flares and the sound of the 'Five-nines'. In the first two lines of the poem, he depicts the soldiers who were placed in an unromantic setting in a very unromantic and unheroic way as: 'bent double' 'knock kneed' 'coughing' cursing through 'sludge'. The soldiers were like "old beggars" and "hags". The third and fourth lines positively might give some hope, but the 'rest' towards which they 'trudge' is 'distant'. Peter Cash states that: "It is an oxymoron in that it suggests an unnatural conflict between moving and resting" (7). This depiction passively proposes the severe exhaustion and the integral absence of hope at the potential moving away from the front lines of the war and the 'haunting flares'.

Taking into account how risky the gas attack was, Owen in 'Dulce et Decorum Est' translates a horrifying picture of the soldiers 'fumbling' with their gear. Most of them succeeded to manage 'just in time' but 'someone' has instantly set apart from other men. The sufferings of the succumbed soldier prevail over the rest of the poem, he screams, lose his balance, and resists in order to breathe. This tragic experience is reduced to a dream as Owen's dreams were haunted by those painful scenes, and by the soldier who 'plunges' at him ; a word which bears frightening connotations, as if the soldier is taking an aggressive action against Owen. The diegesis is increasingly observed by the accumulation of the words: 'guttering,' 'choking,' and 'drowning'. The use of such words is extremely painful, and it causes feeling of disturbance, particularly, when the readers imagine that a powerless man meets his vain death due to the lack of oxygen.

It should be noted that Owen uses special techniques of sound representations in his poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est'. He moves from visual impressions to visceral processes in the description of the gas attack. He fluctuates from sounds produced between the body and the world-fumbling, stumbling, flound'ring, drowning-to the sounds within the body itself: guttering, choking, writhing, gargling (Kendall 84). Also, he uses the aesthetics of contradictions in the 8th line: "Of gas-shells dropping softly behind." He describes the 'dropping' of the deadly 'gas-shells' in a confused perspective when he says that the shells were dropped 'softly'. How come fatal bombs dropped in a soft scene! At the same time he says that the shells were dropped 'behind.' The panoramic scene here is so confused to have a deadly bombs dropped softly and behind. By these contradictions of expressions, Owen apparently wants to emphasize the horror experienced by the soldiers and the readers alike. At the time the life of the soldiers was controlled by the death in the front lines, it was also dominated by death from behind.

The scene is continued at the same 9th line. The first four short sharp words with exclamation marks: “Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!” (Lewis 55) make it clear that the danger is so close and comprehensive, but what makes the scene ambiguous is the use of the word 'ecstasy' that followed up those four warning words. It might be that Owen wants in using this word to throw some focus on the uncontrollable fear of his men and himself as well. According to Kendall, the word 'ecstasy' Comes from the Greek word 'ekstasis', which means 'a standing outside of oneself' (ekout of, stasis position, a standing). It could be said here that the word indicates the sense of inherent in a moment of frenzy, or it refers to a quick shift for the narrator from participant to be an observer over a short pause in the line. Psychologically, the combination of the ecstasy and horror may reflect the despair of these moments (84).

Owen set a style of alliteration in the poem commencing from the title. He used similar sounds 'et' and 'est' to link 'Dulce' and 'Decorum'; the controversial and metaphysical nouns which mean 'sweet' and 'honourable'. In an attempt to achieve some noble aims, Owen comes back to the title once again in the final line of the poem to remind the reader with 'the old lie' and to confirm that the futile death for one's country is still a lie. The alliteration moves from the title through the whole poem to show the inescapable conditions that the soldiers suffered. For instances, the 'B' sounds are represented in the description of the soldiers who 'Bent' like 'beggars' and who 'cough' and 'curse'. Also the 'm' sounds are appeared at the 5th and 6th lines: 'Men marched asleep'/ 'Many had lost their boots'/ 'But limped on ...'/ 'All went lame'. Owen used alliteration to point out that the pain was gradually getting worse. In the word 'wagon' Owen urges us to 'watch the white eyes writhing', he was drawing the horrible moments that the soldier exposed to while he was dying. At last, he asks the reader to imagine 'vile incurable sores on innocent tongues'. This final alliteration of 'I' sounds marks an amazing contradiction between the 'incurable' nature of the injury and the 'innocence' of the victim.

Owen used the word 'All' twice in the 6th line. It is assumed that the word 'All' was repeated in an attempt to convey the denotative meaning of that 'all' soldiers were touched by the gas attack. In the 9th line Owen also created a sense of tension in repeating the words 'Gas! GAS!'. The advantage of such repetition, pushes the reader to realize how tragic the gas attack was. The word 'drowning' pause at the end of 14th and 16th lines is used to emphasize how it is hard for Owen to be freed from the image of the man's 'hanging face'. At the beginning of 16th and 20th lines, 'If ... you' structure was repeated to direct the impotence outrages that Owen cannot cope with to the reader, and is a smart rhetorical device to change the sensation of guilt to a sensation of protest. The victims' fate was so pitiful, but the lines reveal the main idea of fury (Kendall 565).

The tone of this poem is characterized by wrath and its voice plays the role of cathartic release. Owen emotionally loads the poem in self-accusation due to the paralysis he was exposed to. He explicitly dwells on the details of horror and misery for the sake of release and relief from the strong or repressed emotions. He wants to create a sufficient distance between the memories and his consciousness. At the same time he wishes to maximize the impact on those who tell the 'old Lie'. Kendall declares that this poem: “First of all, [...] persuades us that it [gives a true nature of pain]; secondly, that its truth is shocking; and thirdly, that we should do something about it. (564-565). Accordingly, Peter Cash thinks that the "Dulce et Decorum Est" is a satirical poem that attacks the jingoists who sit by their home fires, urging young men to 'trudge' through the mire to their gruesome deaths. It is introduced in a strategy of confronting this jingoistic sentiment with a graphic description of trench warfare, thereby embarrassing it, even humiliating it (6-7).

In the poem entitled “Futility” Owen observes a strange phenomenon of symptoms of what the eyes and ears had witnessed. Owen wrote “Futility” in May 1918 during the war. It appeared in *The Nation* during 1918, and it was published posthumously in 1920. The setting of this poem is a trench in the cold winter of 1916-1917 in which Owen and his soldiers suffered from the continuous gunfire of the enemy

and from the severe cold weather as well. Kendall believes that the poem does not match Owen as realistic or satirical personality although they apparently represent the formal and thematic broad characteristics of his works. At the very moment of the poem's creation, Owen turns his attention to a corpse, a body whose anonymity takes shape, and none of its details are obtained, and he offers it what little he can: the attention, solace, and compassion (Kendall 499).

The poem is a piece of anti-war, pro-country, and public propaganda through which Owen wants to produce a sentimental effect in a nostalgic induction to home. It is noticeable that the shadow John Keats has loomed over this poem as similar as of much Owen's trench poetry. The life of sensation rather than thoughts has dominated over the poem implicitly. So the poem's form denies any thoughts of militarism or celebration of battle. The varied rhyme and half rhymes ('sun', 'once', 'half sown', 'France', 'snow', 'now', 'know') and to home traveling rhythm ('think how it wakes the seeds-/ woke once the clays of a cold star') themselves completely abolish the existence of the identity of militarism in the poem and support the romantic outlook of the poem. Even nationalism here is subjected to the nostalgia for English fields. The poem is anti-militaristic in the rhythms of its individualized elegiac voice, specified with a quiet and contemplative balance.

The triumph of nature over men was the traumatic sense about war, the invisibility of the enemy, and randomness of death. Hence the cold weather capsulated the unseen enemy who belongs to a miraculous force, the nature, that relatively could not be defeated. In its dynamic opening, the poem directly narrates an isolated incident from the trenches in a severe cold weather. The soldiers are asked to move the body of their dead friend into the sun: "Move him into the sun/Gently its touch awoke him once, /At home, whispering of fields half-sown" (Cash 12). The sun exaggeratedly stands here as a symbol of life, and the hope of moving the soldier into its shine, in spite of the cold weather, might warm his body and revive him.

'Mourning at death' and 'futility' have been interchangeably expressed in the poem. On the one side, the poem speaks directly to humanity and puts the agony of the individual soldier in a universal frame. Owen strongly tends to write powerful and moving poetry about the truth of war by expressing the sorrow and sadness for this man's death. On one side, the theme of 'mourning at death' primarily dominates the first section of the poem in which Owen laments the death of a young farmer whose life was finished pointlessly in the war. The death of that soldier represents the death of all soldiers in the war and it is recognition that the death of this anonymous warrior is a title of the fate of many unknown warriors. The name of the soldier is not known to stand for the many other soldiers who died in the First World War. Owen evokes a sense that this soldier's death stands for the death of thousands of others and that the speaker's authenticable personal witnessing of this death can stand as a wider argument about the futility of war.

On the other side, the unnecessary and pointless death of the soldier refers to the theme of futility. The title of the poem itself epitomizes the aspect of futility as a result of war. "Futility" is an extremely moving poem because it moves from mourning a dead soldier to the futility of human life, and it focuses on a futile death and recites the commemoration or mourning. It is wholly characteristic of Owen that it focuses on the fate of one private soldier, the eponymous soldier who was struggling to live.

Focusing is not only on the soldier pathetic reaction, but also on the haunting dreams of Owen. The explicit reflection of the grief, and the lament of the dead in the poem made critics consider it an elegiac voice. The soldiers tried in vain to do what they could to revive their dead friend. Nature was the first thing that came to Owen's mind at that moment. He meditated that the sun can help their dead friend but unfortunately, the contemplation in nature's power was futile.

A questioning about the meaning and value of the individual even after his death as well as the futility of human existence emerges. The limited capacity and trivial position in front of a nation submitted to war, describe in a sense of sad despair the futility of the soldiers' attempt to rescue their friend. The sun is

able to “wake the seeds, and “Woke once the clays of a cold star”, but sadly, does not wake the soldier:

Cox and Dyson claim that this poem is about "premature". [They consider 'Futility' here] not only a social protest but a religious questioning. It faces the mystery of life in sentiments that would remain profoundly true for the bereaved, even if war itself could by some miracle be abolished. The 'futility' of the title does not refer simply to human follies; it refers beyond these [...] to the human condition itself. It is one side of the tragic vision of man - the perception that if man is the jest and the riddle of the world, this is only because he is first and chiefly its glory. (Abu Baker 130)

Owen was one of the first war protestors of the 20th century. At the end of the poem, he reveals a sense of protest against the notion of a pointless existence of human beings. As if he asks: are people created merely to die? The last three lines constitute a form of questions that go above and beyond the mere mourning of a dead soldier: “Was it for this the clay grew tall? /-O what made fatuous sunbeams toil /To break earth's sleep at all?” (Lewis 58). They give a sample of pantheistic queries about mankind situation in this world. Owen brings the miraculous notion of "creation of man from clay" in a poetic diction that 'clay' is a metonym for 'man'. In this artistic technique, he raised a serious questioning of the purpose of human life. What is its purpose if it is merely to end in the mud of the battle? If the aim of human being is to live for this, and if this is the case, then “Oh” regretfully, our existence seems senseless.

According to Peter Cash, Owen, through the means of imagery, rhetorically asks about the Christian morals of the afterworld. The un-ironic use of the sun-image invites a distinct answer: namely, that the existence of the man has no meaning as long as it will end up in a worthless space. In this matter, Owen, then, is pointing not only to the 'futility' of war, but also to the futility of human existence itself. “If men were put on this muddy earth merely in order to make one another suffer such misery, then what's the point?” (13).

The poem "Strange Meeting" is also a model of a major poetic work by Owen that illustrates the theme of war and its aftermath. It was written at some point of the first half of 1918, and published in 1919, the direct year after Owen's death. It is argued that the poem is the most renowned work, and it alongside other poems played a significant role in widening Owen's poetic fame. The poem itself is a debate; different opinions by some critics are expressed about it. Osbert Sitwell claimed that the poem is a “great poem as exists in our tongue” (Kerr 174). John Middleton Murry introduced the poem in terms of aesthetic and spiritual mode as “a true poetic style”, “discovery of a genius”, and “imaginative sublimation”. This introduction reflects the fact that the poem is a unique complete masterpiece produced by a mature talented poet who facilitated the way beyond superficial realism. The general distinguished atmosphere of this poem, according to Murray, was the main factor behind the celebrity of Owen (Kerr 175-176). Siegfried Sassoon described the poem as Owen's “passport to immortality, and his elegy to the unknown warriors of all nations” (Bloom 22).

The poem was coined to show a critical sensation about the war. Owen used perfect expressions and techniques to convey the sardonic vision of "Foolishness of War". He wanted to draw attention to "Foolishness of War" as a theme dominating the whole poem. Although he tried to avoid the realistic description of the horrors of war and going this time towards an imaginative projection of emotion, realism in this context was seen as a political connotation to protest against war. Edmund Blunden felt that there was a need to insist that the poem had its roots firmly planted in realism:

it was peculiarly a poem of the Western Front,” he said, "a dream only a stage further on than the actuality of the tunneled dug-outs. The debate about the nature of Owen's [realistic poetic] achievement [...] continued, on the grounds of this poem, trailing its difficult questions about the political meaning of a poet's 'acquiescence' or 'protest,' questions which were themselves bound up with the nation's and Europe's struggles to understand the Great

War. (Kerr 177)

The poem was seen as an incomplete work; and it was believed that the poetic rather than the editorial reason was behind this assumption. In the last line: “Let us sleep now. . . .”, the poem seemed unfinished. Some critics see that Owen left the end unfinished to give an indication of future conflicts between nations. As if Owen was saying that war is not a restriction to a specific generation rather than another; he was sadly prophesying future conflicts. Douglas Kerr explains in this respect:

This unfinished poem, the most remote and intimate, tranquil and dynamic, of all Owen's imaginative statements of war experience, ... demanded a special place in the foreground, and again this seemed to have to do with its prophetic content, and with its status as somehow Owen's last testament. ... Blunden had first commended "Strange Meeting" as a prophetic poem when he reviewed Sassoon's edition in the *Athenaeum*, 10 December 1920 (176-177).

The opening of the poem is dramatically magnificent. It is like “Futility” in speaking directly to humanity and put the agony of the individual soldier in a global and worldwide context. It does not only tackle the truth of war, but it is also one of the first anti-war propaganda of the 20th century. Owen employed his persuasive abilities to speak and write about millions of soldiers with whom he lived the same war experience. His rhetorical protest was powerful because it was sprung out from the actualities of his own war experiences. He saw the war as a pathetic crime against nature, humanity, and against humankind existence itself, therefore, in his perspective, no war can be justified. He completely got rid of the personal restrictions and presented his technique in graphic imagination to convey the universal truths about war. Owen also gave a voice that futility of war is a form of the blind hatred of humanity. In a sense of escape, he dreamt of being underworld, protected from the horrible experience of war, but finally realized that he encounters a subterranean suffering and the escape is a mere illusion. Despite the fact that escape from suffering was an impossible demand, Owen still had a hope in forgetfulness of that suffering as the one and only therapy from the painful actuality.

This poem can be analyzed on two levels: the psychological and the physical. It can be seen as a sense of unconsciousness and as a poignant dream in which the poet found himself conducting a dialogue underground with a dead soldier. The traditional place of the dead (dug out), the physical distortion of bodies accompanied with guilt seen on their faces, and many other piteous images, as results of wars, reflect the feelings of despair that dominated all over the poem. Owen wrote about the devastating World War I, embraced the ancient mythology. According to Elizabeth Vandiver, he used mythological references in his work “Strange Meeting” in reference to some Homeric elements (xxvii). The phrase 'titanic wars' in the line: "Through granites which titanic wars had groined" (Lewis 35), he summons up the classic myth reference of the imprisonment of the Titans in Tartarus by the triumphant of Zeus after the Titanomachy. Also in the lines: “‘Strange friend,' I said, 'here is no cause to mourn’”. “None”, said the other, save the undone years,/ The hopelessness” (Lewis 35), Owen referred to the legendary discourse between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles in the *Odyssey* as it is stated: “Do not grieve, even though you are dead”, says Odysseus, and Achilles replies, “Do not console me for death, shining Odysseus” (Vandiver xxxii). The following lines from the poem justify some of what was said:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull, tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred
Then, as I probed them, one sprung up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,

Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
 And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,
 By this dead smile I knew we stood in Hell (Lewis 35)

Owen voices his despair and regret at the unavoidable loss of humanity. He has first-hand knowledge of war, the ability to tell the facts of war, and the courage to express his protest against the war. Thus he could have stepped aside and avoided the march that -led humanity into her own destruction:

“Strange friend,” I said, “here is no cause to mourn.”
 “None”, said the other, “save the undone years,
 The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
 Was my life also; I went hunting wild
 After the wildest beauty in the world,
 Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
 But mocks the steady running of the hour,
 And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here. (Lewis 35)

Owen expects a post-war period with the world changed for the worse by war. He expresses his fear that “Men will go content with what we spoiled,” that they will accept the shattered world as the norm. The alternative will be 'discontent' and further regression into 'this retreating world'- a frightening (and accurate) prediction of events:

For of my glee might many men have laughed,
 And of my weeping something had been left,
 Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
 The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
 Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
 Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled. (Lewis 35)

The poem expresses most profoundly the idea of the “greater love” which is the “truth that lies too deep for taint”. Love is essential to purify the world cleanly with truth. Owen makes an attempt to convey the message of human brotherhood to us. He suggests that had he not been killed, he is probably foreseeing his death and the impossibility of carrying out his mission; he would have spent all his energy to cleanse the world from the blood of war, yet not through wounds and war but with the sweet water of his poetry, that is teaching humanity the lesson of the greater love. “Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot wheels,/ I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,/ Even with truths that lie too deep for taint./ I would have poured my spirit without stint/ But not through wounds; not on thecess of war.” (Lewis 35-36). Another implicit theme is the need for reconciliation in the world. He uses his poetry as a manner of his philosophical manifestation about the pity of war and 'the truth untold' (line 24) to clarify how much the world is in need for reconciliation. “Hunting wild after the wildest beauty in the world” (line 17) is another theme which Owen explores. In the manner of Keats, he searches for beauty in a land in which there is no beauty. Due to the horrors of war, the beauty was replaced by the ugliness. His search for beauty and truth was inspired by his reading of Keats.

In order to stop this flow of catastrophic events, Owen refers to the power of poetry and suggests ways in which poetry and pity can restore the human spirit. The poet has the courage and wisdom to halt “the trek from progress” (line 28). When this futile murdering and destruction can go no further and the nations retreat into 'vain citadels that are not walled'(line 33); when 'much blood had clogged their chariot wheels' (line 34), the poet will 'wash them from sweet wells' and reveal 'truths that lie too deep for taint' (line 36). In order to achieve this, Owen- the poet, the strange friend, the Christ figure- 'would have poured my spirit without stint' (line 37).

At the end of the poem the “other” reveals himself: “I am the enemy you killed, my friend./ I knew

you in this dark: for so you frowned/ Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed./ I parried; but my hands were loath and cold./ Let us sleep now..." (Lewis 36). To Loni Kreis Taglieber, it becomes clear that the poet is both the killer and the enemy of whom he had killed the day before. Owen is saying that in killing the other, man kills himself if not physically but at least spiritually, because in killing his brother he loses his humanity. But the deepest truth Owen reaches in this poem is that brotherly love must be learned not in the death struggle between enemies but before such a struggle can come about. He states: "If a man is willing to sacrifice his life for the other he must learn in time of peace to live for him" (79).

III. Conclusion

Through his poetry, Owen has given a voice to protest against war that desolated the life of people over a long time. He inserted the techniques of irony, rhetorical questions, sarcasm, and sometimes the direct denunciation to reveal his rejection of war, in particular, the war he witnessed: the First World War. Apparently, his first-hand experience in the trenches as a soldier had a critical role in developing his poetic talent. In addition to those horrific events that he lived in the front with his men, Owen's pre-war circumstances that were characterized by despair and black vision of the life during his work in Dunsden, established what is known as revolution in his mind which motivated him to write in such painful method. His poetic writing depicted the real painful side of life.

Owen accused the politicians who were, in his opinion, the reason of the bloody armed struggles in the world. He conveyed an exceptional message to those who thought that the war is merely a title of heroics and glory. He made them see the other evil side of the war. At the same time, he warned them against contributing in the emergence of wars by one way or another. He bore his responsibility toward this case and overtly announced that it is not a kind of pride to die for the country. He hoped that the war will stop in the future but he died before. Although his poems contain some wild and sharp words, they still provide wonderful artistic masterpieces that tell the whole world: the armed conflicts will never solve any political issue whatever it is; on the contrary, they will bring only destruction and human tragedy instead.

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