## English Essay

### “Great Poetry reveals truths that are difficult to accept”

#### Introduction

“Dulce Et Decorum”, “Futility” and “Anthem for Doomed Youth” reveal three great truths which are difficult to accept. First, they shatter the “Old Lie” which conceals the reality of war from the home front. Secondly, they expose the destructive nature of war in terms of a “Youth[s]” potential being stolen. Lastly, they posit the pointlessness of creating human life. These truths are conveyed through the use of techniques such as the maxim, rhetorical questions and horrific imagery. Ultimately, Own forces us to confront these truths which are still relevant to our world.

#### Paragraph 1

In “Dulce Et Decorum” reveals the reality of war which shatters the “Old Lie”. The first three stanzas show a bleak overview of the horrors of war. For example, Owen uses the simile “like a man in fire or lime” to depicts the inescapability of the “Gas!” In contrast, the composer’s use of a maxim, “Dulce Et Decorum...” in an accusatorial tone to accentuate the hypocrisy of the home front. This is reinforced through the use of second person language which directly addresses his “friend” on the home front. Although this truth about the reality of war would have been hard to accept for the home front during WW1, it is less shocking to use today as we are well-acquainted with truth of war.

#### Paragraph 2

“Futility” and “Anthem for Doomed Youth” convey the pointlessness of war in terms of lost “Youth”. “Futility” presents this truth through the metaphor of “fields unsown”. This metaphor depicts an empty field representing a tabula rasa emphasising the years of life not lived. Similarly, “Anthem of Doomed Youth” exposes this truth through the simile “What passing –bells for these [Youth] who dies as cattle?” This simile portrays the inevitability “Youth” dying at war. Furthermore, the title uses an anthem as an emblem of the collective nature of war and therefore that the war is not confined to the death of a single youth. Consequently, these two poems sow the inevitability of death in war, making this truth more difficult to accept by reminding us of soldiers’ “Youth”.

#### Paragraph 3

Owen’s use of metaphors, rhetorical questions and personification shows the truth of the “futility” of life and the impossibility of giving life back to the dead. The metaphor “clays of a cold star” shows a whole planet being brought to life as opposed to a single human being, “still warm”. On the other hand, the rhetorical questions in stanza two which force us to consider why the Earth was created, for what purpose. The personification of “fatuous sunbeams toil” advances this truth by criticising the very creator of life. In this sense, the poem unveils a truth which transcends the war context to the universal experience or life.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the truths of war are easier to accept in our time as we understand the atrocities of war. On the other hand, these poems where written to the home front and the families of the home front did not understand war, their perceptions of war were clouded with a view of glory. Owen conveys these misconceptions through the use of a maxim, second person language, rhetorical questions, metaphors and similes. “Dulce Et Decorum”, “Anthem for Doomed Youth” and “Futility” exemplify how language techniques can be used to evoke these truths which the acceptance of is difficult for different groups affected by war.

*This is generally a stronger essay than the first. One thing to consider is that you can agree with the question by degrees and disagree with parts of the question at the same time. You might agree that the poem reveals some truth and that it might be difficult, but necessary to accept.*

## English Essay

#### “How does Wilfred Own use language to convey the horrors and suffering of war?”

#### Introduction

In “Dulce Et Decorum”, “Disabled” and “Mental Cases”, Wilfred Own uses language techniques to convey the horrors and suffering of war. In “Dulce Et Decorum” including techniques such as a maxim and second person language illustrates the horrors, the perceptions, of war, including the unrealistic impressions of the home front. Similarly, suffering is underpinned by the experiences of the soldiers. The use of language in “Disabled” reinforces the horrors of war in “Dulce Et Decorum” extends this to the perceptions of soldiers in the trenches. Disabled also builds on the ideas of suffering in a post war experience. Lastly, “Mental Cases” use of an oxymoron emphasises the perpetuated suffering of the soldiers. Ultimately, Owen uses language techniques to portray the atrocities of war, so that we can better understand their experiences and the longevity of the horrors and suffering of war.

#### Paragraph 1

The language in the final stanza of “Dulce Et Decorum” reveals the hypocrisy of the home front about the horrors of war. Owen uses the maxim of the “Old Lie” to create an ironic and sarcastic tone. This criticism is based on the officer corps of the army and the home front encouraging “innocent boys” to enlist for an unknown ordeal. This is reinforced by the use of second person language (“My Friend You...”) to address the reader with this criticism. The contrast between “glory” and the horrors of war depicted earlier in the poem such as the binary opposition of corruption and “innocence” (final stanza) heightens the effectiveness of the maxim. Dissimilarly in “Mental Cases” the soldiers “minds” are corrupted by “the dead” who fill their minds with horrors (“Purgatorial Shadows”). Thus, Owen’s use of language illustrates the naivety of those who form their perceptions having never experienced the horrors of war.

#### Paragraph 2

Owen portrays the horrors of war through the use of reflective language in “Disabled”. The reflective language such as “in the old times” and “now he is old”, creates a post-war perspective. The hindsight perspective allows the responder to better understand the horror, or atrocities of war. It does so by the contrast of the image of war, with the reality. For example, the juxtaposition of the alliterated “smart salutes” to the “dark... shivered.. ghastly, suit of grey” shows the persona’s disillusionment of the glory of war. Consequently, the persona and the responder must face the horrors of war.

#### Paragraph 3

The composer’s variance of pace and use of an extended metaphor of the gradual shutting down of the human body illustrates the soldier’s experiences of suffering in war. The change in pace from the abrupt language (“Gas! Gas! Quick, Boys!) to the steadier subsequent lines, accentuates the soliders protracted suffering. In “Mental Cases” Owen uses the oxymoron “slow panic” to communicate the idea. Owen also depicts the suffering of war using two extended metaphors. First, the imagery “men March[ing] asleep” and “in all my dreams” constructs the physical exhaustion of war. Secondly, the metaphoric use of “curs[ing] through sludge”, “thick green light” and “drowning” to represent the inhumanity of war. Ultimately, these metaphors and the change in pace symbolise the prolonged demise and associated suffering of human beings involved in war.

#### Paragraph 4

In contrast, “Disabled” deals with post-war suffering. This is shown by the soldier’s social isolation in the sense that he is unable to leave the “Wheeled chair” and the “rules” of “institutes”. This suffering is conveyed by the juxtaposition of the “glow-lamps” with the “air [growing] dim” symbolises the painful nostalgia the soldier feels as he has sacrificed himself to the war. His suffering is heightened by the analogy of “[throwing] away his knees’ as a representation of his inability to take part in what he loves, football. This analogy is supplemented by the hyperbole of “half his lifetime” being lost to the war. Therefore, Owen’s use of language prompts us to consider whether it is worth going to war only to feel the inevitable trauma.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the horrors and suffering of war trap the soldiers both physically and mentally, barricading them within their horrific memories. Own conveys this through the use of maxims, extended metaphors, juxtapositions, imagery, variance of pace and reflective language. “Disabled”, “Dulce Et Decorum” and “Mental Cases” exemplify how language techniques can be used effectively to evoke the total devastation of war on all touched by it.

*Richard Faludi*

*How does Wilfred Owen use language to convey the horrors and suffering of war?*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Horrors | suffering |
| Owen says, “The kind old sun will know.”* Symbol – refers to hope that God will be able to resurrect the dead soldier
* The tragedy is created because of a lack of faith in God, thus, he died for nothing. Furthermore, the closing lines of the poem suggest that even creation was a futile enterprise. God is unable to help man transcend the horrors of war and we have to face these horrors without His help and accept the meaningless of war and all existence. Created by the descriptive imagery of, “Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,Full-nerved -still warm -too hard to stir?” This descriptive imagery paired with the rhetorical question of “was it for this that the clay grew so tall?” shows the grotesque nature of bloodshed in the trenches, which has destroyed this youth, and questions the purpose of human existence.
 |  |

In *Futility* by Wilfred Owen there is a gradual transference from hot to cold imagery in the first stanza of the poem. The first line of the poem establishes this warm tone until the fifth line where the cold tone is recognized. This change in imagery and tone is suggestive of the sense of hope and warmth that the persona feels in the past and it has an almost nostalgic character to it. However, the cold atmosphere that is established in line five is implying of the futility in which the persona feels towards the future of mankind. However, this helplessness is first established in the first line of *“Move him into the sun”* which suggests a cohort of soldiers moving a wounded man into the sun in order to wake him, which is a futile situation. (imperative tense – gives it the tone of an order) The first line is based on a futile action which gives the persona a sense of hope. In an allegorical sense, Owen uses the sun to symbolise God and this is further established through the poems consistent personification of it. Hence, the first line is suggestive of a wounded soldier being moved into Gods presence. The recognition of a higher being in this poem is furthermore implied with the personification of the sun in the second line of *“Gently its touch awoke him”* which also implies of a solider being moved into the arms of God to be healed and awoken from death.

In *Parable of the Old Man and the Young* Owen uses language to convey the horrors and suffering of war by juxtaposing his writing to the biblical narrative of Abraham and Isaac. In the biblical story Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. In *Parable* Owen gives insight into the story and contrasts this story of sacrifice with the harshness of war by inviting the reader to recognize Abraham as England and Isaac as men being offered for sacrifice. In doing this Owen furthermore gives the reader a deeper understanding and insight into his perspective of war as in the biblical story a binary is presented in the form of an *“A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns”* stated in line thirteen. This binary represents the choice within war-- the choice between going to war and finding an alternative means of resolution.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Owen conveys the horrors and suffering of the war and questions the purpose of battle. Furthermore, he measures the scale of devastation that the war brought to Europe and the cause of the tragedy.

|  |
| --- |
| And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son. – sibilanceAllusion – unlike the Biblical Abram, he chose to destroy his son rather than sacrifice “the Lamb of Pride”. In this way, the act of slaughter is an act of pride, the greatest sin in Christian theology, and brought horror and suffering to the world. In this way, Owens’s Abram is the diInstead of being the father of nations, Owen’s Abram is the destroyer of nations, making him the diametric opposite of Abram.  |

The final lines of *“But the old man would not so, but slew his son, and halt the seed of Europe one by one”* of *Parable* and the eighth of *Futility* of *“Think how it wakes the seeds”* both suggest the horrors and suffering of war-- the former, on a surface level, shows the reader how Abraham, by slaying his son, has not only killed his son, but the potential sons of Isaac too. This same principal applies on an allegorical level, with Owen, bringing forward the fact that for all the men that are killed in the process of battle, so too is the potential offspring of these men.

In “Futility” Owen explores the horrors and suffering of the war and gives the reader a deeper understanding of his perspective on war. Owen implies that he believes that mankind will destroy itself through the act of war. This is suggested on line nine of *“Woke, once, the clays of a cold star”* which alludes to the creation of man from the Earth. This line corresponds with line twelve of *“Was it for this the clay grew tall?”* which is bitterly sarcastic and implies that the persona feels that mankind was created for the sole purpose for the futile action of destruction and murder. Furthermore, by comparing clay to men, Owen is to some extent personifying the Earth and showing that how by killing one another we are ultimately destroying the Earth itself. He is destroying all the potential for regeneration on earth after its devastation by war which will continue after the final truce, making the reflection on the horrors and suffering of war more potent.

In *Parable* Owen uses biblical archaic language typically used in the King James bible to give the poem this sense of grandeur which juxtaposes to the actual content of the poem itself and thus gives a extra depth to the satirical nature of the poem.

Owen touches on the horrors of war in line five of *“Behold the preparations, fire and iron”* which eludes to the harshness of the battlefield. The *‘fire’* coupled with the *‘iron’* shows the reader the