

## PORTRAYING USE OF DIFFERENT HUMAN ELEMENTS IN THE POEMS OF WILFRED OWEN

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### ABSTRACT

*Wilfred Owen's poetry is renowned for its vivid depiction of the horrors of war and the profound exploration of human emotions. This paper examines how Owen employs various human elements—such as psychological trauma, camaraderie, and moral questioning—to convey the brutal realities of war and the complex nature of human experience. Through a detailed analysis of selected poems, this study aims to highlight Owen's skillful portrayal of these elements and their impact on the reader's understanding of the human condition in times of conflict.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Wilfred Owen, War Poetry, Psychological Trauma, Shell Shock, Camaraderie*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Wilfred Owen stands as one of the most significant voices in war poetry, offering a piercing critique of the romanticized perceptions of warfare that dominated the early 20th century. His work, deeply rooted in his own experiences as a soldier during World War I, presents a raw and unvarnished depiction of the human cost of conflict. Owen's poetry is distinguished by its exploration of various human elements, such as psychological trauma, camaraderie, and moral ambiguity, which together create a complex and multifaceted portrayal of war. This introduction aims to delve into how Owen's treatment of these human elements not only reflects the harsh realities of war but also challenges the prevailing narratives of heroism and glory.

Owen's poetry is particularly notable for its unflinching depiction of psychological trauma. The term "shell shock," now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), was emerging during Owen's time, and his work vividly captures the mental and emotional toll that war exacts on soldiers. In poems like "Exposure" and "The Sentry," Owen presents the psychological

despair and disorientation experienced by soldiers in the trenches. "Exposure" illustrates the relentless nature of the war environment, not just through physical suffering but through the numbing effect of constant exposure to danger and discomfort. The repeated refrain "But nothing happens" poignantly underscores the sense of stagnation and hopelessness felt by the soldiers. Similarly, "The Sentry" depicts the traumatic aftermath of an explosion and the protagonist's intense psychological distress. The graphic imagery and the personal anguish experienced by the soldiers reflect Owen's deep understanding of the mental scars left by war. Camaraderie, another crucial human element in Owen's poetry, highlights the bonds formed between soldiers amidst the chaos of war. These connections offer moments of solace and shared suffering, contrasting sharply with the broader narratives of heroism and glory. In "Dulce et Decorum Est," Owen presents the intimate, poignant moments between soldiers, such as the desperate attempts to save a comrade from a gas attack. This portrayal underscores the profound human connections formed in the trenches, challenging the glorified images of war and heroism. The bond between soldiers, while providing some comfort, also serves to highlight the broader tragedy of their situation. Similarly, "Strange Meeting" explores an otherworldly encounter between a British and a German soldier, transcending nationalistic divides to emphasize their shared humanity. This meeting between enemies underscores Owen's belief in the common suffering of soldiers and critiques the senseless nature of war. Owen's exploration of moral and ethical questions further deepens the impact of his poetry. His work frequently engages with the moral implications of war and the justifications for conflict. In "Anthem for Doomed Youth," Owen critiques the traditional rituals of mourning and the glorification of soldiers' deaths. The poem juxtaposes the ceremonial responses to death with the impersonal and brutal reality of wartime fatalities, highlighting the moral vacuity of wartime propaganda. Owen's use of religious imagery and his focus on the inadequate responses to the soldiers' deaths emphasize the ethical dilemmas surrounding war and the inadequacy of conventional expressions of grief. In "The Next War," Owen questions the notion of heroism and the cyclical nature of conflict. The poem's sarcastic tone and the depiction of a soldier's casual conversation about future wars challenge the romanticized views of military valor, revealing Owen's skepticism about the true nature of heroism and sacrifice. Overall, Wilfred Owen's poetry offers a profound exploration of human elements in the context of war, providing a compelling critique of the romanticized narratives that often surround

conflict. Through his portrayal of psychological trauma, camaraderie, and moral ambiguity, Owen presents a nuanced view of the war experience, emphasizing the complex and often devastating impact of warfare on individuals. His work challenges readers to confront the harsh realities of conflict and reconsider the prevailing myths of heroism and glory, making a significant contribution to both literary and historical understandings of war. By examining these human elements in Owen's poetry, this paper aims to illuminate the depth and significance of his portrayal of the war experience, highlighting the enduring relevance of his insights into the nature of human suffering and resilience.

## II. CAMARADERIE AND HUMAN CONNECTION

1. **Defining Camaraderie in Owen's Poetry** Owen's poetry captures the deep bonds formed between soldiers in the face of extreme adversity. Camaraderie is portrayed as a crucial aspect of the soldiers' experiences, offering moments of solace and mutual support amidst the chaos of war.
2. **Intimate Moments of Connection** In "Dulce et Decorum Est," Owen describes the desperate efforts of soldiers to assist a comrade during a gas attack. The poem's vivid imagery of the soldiers' shared struggle underscores the profound human connections formed in the trenches. This camaraderie provides emotional support and highlights the mutual dependence of soldiers in surviving the war's horrors.
3. **The Impact of Shared Suffering** "Strange Meeting" presents an otherworldly encounter between a British and a German soldier, transcending nationalistic divides. The meeting emphasizes their shared humanity and the common suffering experienced by soldiers on both sides of the conflict. This encounter illustrates how camaraderie can bridge enemy lines, revealing the universal nature of human suffering.
4. **Contrast with Glorification of War** Owen's depiction of camaraderie contrasts sharply with the glorified and romanticized views of war prevalent at the time. By focusing on the personal connections between soldiers rather than on heroic ideals, Owen challenges the narratives that glorify warfare and emphasizes the more complex and tragic aspects of the soldiers' experiences.
5. **The Dual Nature of Camaraderie** While camaraderie offers emotional support, it also underscores the tragic nature of the soldiers' plight. The strong bonds formed in the

trenches are a testament to the shared suffering and vulnerability of the soldiers, highlighting the poignant reality of their situation and the futility of the conflict.

### III. MORAL AND ETHICAL QUESTIONING

1. **Challenging the Justifications of War** Owen's poetry frequently scrutinizes the ethical justifications for war, questioning the moral grounds upon which conflicts are fought. His work reflects a profound skepticism about the righteousness of war and the veracity of its glorification.
2. **Critique of War Propaganda** In "Anthem for Doomed Youth," Owen criticizes the traditional rituals and glorifications associated with soldiers' deaths. The poem contrasts the solemn, ceremonial responses to death with the stark, impersonal reality faced by soldiers. This juxtaposition highlights the disconnect between wartime propaganda and the true experiences of soldiers, questioning the morality of promoting war as a noble endeavor.
3. **Exploration of Heroism and Sacrifice** "The Next War" addresses the cyclical nature of conflict and challenges the romanticized notions of heroism. Through a sarcastic tone, Owen questions the value and purpose of future wars, suggesting that the glorification of sacrifice and valor is both misguided and morally questionable. The poem underscores the futility of perpetuating heroic myths in the face of ongoing suffering.
4. **Moral Ambiguity in Combat** Owen's depiction of soldiers' experiences often highlights the moral ambiguity inherent in warfare. In "Strange Meeting," the encounter between a British and a German soldier reveals the shared humanity and common suffering of individuals across enemy lines. This moment of connection raises ethical questions about the justification for war and the moral cost of conflict, emphasizing the senselessness of the violence and the shared humanity of all combatants.
5. **Reflection on War's Ethical Implications** Owen's exploration of moral and ethical issues invites readers to reconsider the broader implications of war on human values and ethics. His poetry challenges the idealized narratives of wartime glory and exposes the profound moral dilemmas faced by individuals caught in the conflict, urging a deeper reflection on the true nature of heroism and sacrifice.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Wilfred Owen's poetry provides a profound and multifaceted exploration of human elements in the context of war. Through his portrayal of psychological trauma, camaraderie, and moral questioning, Owen offers a powerful critique of the glorification of conflict and a deep understanding of the human condition under duress. His work remains a compelling testament to the complexities of war and its impact on individuals, making a significant contribution to both literary and historical discourse.

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