



# Wilfred Owen

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## Close Study of Text

Ms Taoube

# What does close study mean?



- ❧ What does Owen want to say? Themes/ideas
- ❧ How does he say that through structure?
- ❧ How does he say that through techniques?
- ❧ How do his poems make me feel?



# Context



- ∞ First World War
- ∞ New weapons-  
technological- caused  
the deaths of many
- ∞ The spirit before the  
war and after
- ∞ Exploitation of youth  
and playing to their  
hero complex





# Sonnet Form



- ☞ Sonnets usually have TWO contrasting ideas or beliefs or actions or images. In juxtaposing these two ideas, the poet emphasises their distinct message. Which of the poems uses the sonnet structure?
- ☞ How many lines in a sonnet?

# Language Techniques



☞ You should have already done plenty on techniques so this will not repeat the work except to say:

**REFER to SENSORY IMAGERY**

**Owen is known for it...**

# Dulce Et Decorum



- ❧ 1918
- ❧ Written at a time when men were still being asked to enlist
- ❧ The horrors on the frontline have not yet been effectively communicated so he is essentially challenging the status quo



# Dulce



- ❧ Challenged patriotism
- ❧ Anti-recruitment poem
- ❧ Represented trench warfare – senselessness  
mowing down of men,  
water-logged, rat-  
infested, cold- HELL





# This is what people at home saw...



Ms Taube



# The Reality



*Bent double, like old beggars under s\_\_\_\_\_,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like h\_\_\_\_\_, we cursed through  
s\_\_\_\_\_,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
And towards our d\_\_\_\_\_ rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all b\_\_\_\_\_;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.*

# Dulce



*GAS! Gas! Quick, b\_\_\_\_\_!--  
An e\_\_\_\_\_ of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets  
just in time;  
But someone still was yelling  
out and s\_\_\_\_\_  
And fl\_\_\_\_\_ like a man in  
fire or lime.--  
Dim, through the misty  
panes and thick green light  
As under a green \_\_\_\_\_,  
I saw him drowning.*



# Dulce



*In all my d\_\_\_\_\_,  
before my helpless sight,  
He pl\_\_\_\_\_ at me,  
guttering,*

*ch\_\_\_\_\_,*

*d\_\_\_\_\_.*





# Dulce



*If in some sm\_\_\_\_\_ dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we f\_\_\_\_\_ him in,  
And watch the white eyes w\_\_\_\_\_ in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted l\_\_\_\_\_,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,--  
My f\_\_\_\_\_, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate g\_\_\_\_\_,  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.*

# Structure



- ❧ Four unequal stanzas
- ❧ First two in sonnet form and the last loose structure-why?
- ❧ The reality of war vs the distortion of war

# Themes



- ❧ Distrust of authority and institutions
- ❧ Challenging the myth of war – glory and heroism
- ❧ Emphasising the horrors of war
- ❧ Emphasising the senseless waste
- ❧ Highlighting the psychological consequences of war
- ❧ Dehumanisation of individuals



# Anthem for the Doomed Youth



What passing-bells for these who die  
as c\_\_\_\_\_?

– Only the m\_\_\_\_\_ anger of the  
guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid  
r\_\_\_\_\_

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them; no  
prayers nor bells;

Nor any voice of mourning save the  
ch\_\_\_\_\_, –

The shrill, demented choirs of  
w\_\_\_\_\_ shells;

And bugles calling for them from  
sad shires.



# Anthem for the Doomed Youth

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What c\_\_\_\_\_ may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy gl\_\_\_\_\_ of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their p\_\_\_\_\_;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of bl\_\_\_\_\_.

# Structure



- ❧ Sonnet
- ❧ Elegy – lament for the dead
- ❧ Contrast between a funeral on the battlefield and funeral at home
- ❧ Why use this structure?



# Themes



- ❧ Dehumanisation of individuals
- ❧ Loss of dignity
- ❧ Horrors of war
- ❧ The neglect of authority
- ❧ The impact of technological warfare

# Futility



Move him into the sun –  
Gently its touch awoke him once,  
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.  
Always it woke him, even in France,  
Until this morning and this snow.  
If anything might rouse him now  
The kind old sun will know.

# Futility



Think how it wakes the seeds —  
Woke once the clays of a cold star.  
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides  
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?  
Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
— O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
To break earth's sleep at all?



# Structure



- ☞ Poem about grief
- ☞ The length of sonnet though not structured as one
- ☞ Short elegiac lyric
- ☞ Sun is the extended metaphor
- ☞ Owen is questioning the purpose of life
- ☞ Miracle of creation vs the indifference in the way the men are killed – shift in tone shows this mood

# GALLIPOLI - FUTILITY



# Themes



- ❧ Disillusionment with religion?
- ❧ Powerlessness
- ❧ Futile/senseless waste of life
- ❧ Psychological and physical consequences of life
- ❧ Loss of dignity
- ❧ Questioning the sanctity of life



# The Next War



*War's a joke for me and you,  
Wile we know such dreams are true.  
- Siegfried Sassoon*

Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death,-  
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,-  
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.  
We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,-  
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe.  
He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed  
Shrapnel. We chorused when he sang aloft,  
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.

# The Next War



Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!  
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.  
No soldier's paid to kick against His powers.  
We laughed, -knowing that better men would come,  
And greater wars: when each proud fighter brags  
He wars on Death, for lives; not men, for flags.

# Structure



- Form is conventional sonnet but its content is not – why might Owen do this?
- Light-hearted tone – there is a point in war where one can become indifferent. There is a buoyant mood contrasted with the pervasion of evil.



# Themes



- ❧ The psychological consequences of war
- ❧ The pervasive nature of death for men so young - incongruity evokes a sense of pity
- ❧ The futility of this war
- ❧ The helplessness of men - we are but mortals

# Why do we write poems?



- ❧ To express emotion and provoke thought about a topic
- ❧ To succinctly capture the attention of the masses
- ❧ To challenge the status quo
- ❧ To contextualise the anxieties of society or groups in society
- ❧ To criticise and condemn
- ❧ To change perspectives; persuade

# Who do we write them for?



- ❧ Governments
- ❧ Society/Community
- ❧ Loved ones
- ❧ Those with influence
- ❧ Children – education
- ❧ Ourselves – release/express /clarify

# Putting ideas together



Both Dulce and Futility express the despair the individual/group feels as they are forced into the position of witness and the consequent trauma associated with that position. In Dulce, Owen employs the use of the emotive word 'helpless' in the phrase 'helpless sight' to highlight the disempowerment of those viewing the death of their comrade. Additionally, the graphic imagery of the tricolonic line 'guttering, choking, drowning' elevates the horror of the event. Similarly, Owen expresses the same despair and trauma in Futility where he bitterly utters 'Was it for this the clay grew tall?' on finding his frozen comrade. The persona experiences an existential crisis which highlights his disillusionment with nature as indicated by the adjective 'fatuous' in reference to the sun. Clearly, both poems project Owen's anti-war sentiment and contempt for the arena of war.



# Past Papers - 2014



Explore how **Owen's use of dramatic imagery highlights the carnage and destruction of war.**

In your response, make detailed reference to the extract from 'Mental Cases' and ONE other poem set for study.

*Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight? Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows, Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish, (and the rest of the poem)*

# Past Papers - 2013



Owen's poems present the reader with a powerful exploration of the **impact of human cruelty on individuals**.

How does Owen achieve this in his poetry? In your response, make detailed reference to your prescribed text.