

THE DEPICTION OF WAR SUFFERING IN WILFRED OWEN'S "DISABLED"

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan gambaran penderitaan perang. Wilferd Owen, penulis puisi Inggris, menceritakan penderitaan perang yang dialami seorang anak muda dalam puisinya "Disabled". Owen hidup pada masa Perang Dunia Pertama dan bergabung dalam Angkatan Bersenjata Inggris. Wilfred Owen dikenal sebagai penulis puisi yang bertemakan Perang. "Disabaled" menceritakan penderitaan tentara muda yang bergabung dalam Perang Dunia Pertama. Owen menggunakan ironi dalam mengungkapkan perbedaan antara mimpi dan kenyataan. Impian sebelum bergabung dalam perang berbeda dengan kenyataan setelah kembali dari perang dengan keadaannya yang tidak sempurna. Pada puisi "Disabled", Wilfred Owen mengungkapkan secara tersirat bahwa perang telah menghancurkan kehidupan para korbannya.

Kata kunci : *war suffering, the individual suffering of the war victims and irony*

A. Introduction

Wilfred Owen was a famous British war poet in World War I. He served as an infantry officer, was awarded a decoration for bravery, and was killed a week before the armistice. "Before the war he was already writing mildly sensuous poetry influenced by John Keats; for some time during the war he continued to write this late-Romantic tradition" (William, 1992: 249). However, he has adapted his technique to express the intensity of the suffering of the Western Front, which deliberately introduces the elements of discordance and harshness into his style.

One of his famous poems dealing with the suffering of the war is "Disabled". This poem dramatizes on the individual suffering of the war victims.

"Disabled" is a poem which demonstrates how the war has ruined the individual victims of war.

B. Discussion

"Disabled" is a poem of half rhyme which gives Owen's poetry a dissonant, disturbing quality amplifying his theme (Ronald and McRae, 1998: 360). His usage of language gives the poem an urgency and directness, and all the senses are utilized. The poem expresses the horrors of war and the mental and physical torment the young soldiers sacrificed because of it. Wilfred Owen wants to depict the real condition of World War I through his character in the poem. World War I is an experience that educates all people on the home front as to the gruesome conditions that the soldiers have to go through during times of conflict. The media of the time presents the war as a romantic endeavour, an adventure that all men should not want to miss. This could not have been farther from the truth. Life in the trenches, on the front lines of the war is intolerable. The soldier in the poem is one of those unlucky men picked to defend a captured enemy trench.

"Disabled" was written during Owen's four-month stay at Craiglockhart Hospital in 1917" ([Http://www.englishverse.com/poems/disabled](http://www.englishverse.com/poems/disabled) was accessed on Wednesday, December 17, 2008). It was very likely that he saw numerous soldiers like the one he describes in this poem while he was at the hospital. He writes his poem to reveal the realities of war and to show what torture the soldiers are going through in the trenches. In the poem, Owen adopts the persona of the

young soldiers as he reflects upon what he was before the war, and what the war has left with, or rather taken from him.

The following is the first stanza of the poem:

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

The image of a 'wheeled chair' implies that he is disabled and probably dependent on others. 'Legless, sewn short at elbow' further implies disability of the persona. The phrase 'waiting for dark', 'shivered' and 'ghastly suit of grey' imply his loneliness. 'Voices of boys rang saddening' reminds him of the old times when he used to be like them, playing and enjoying himself. 'Shivered' in line two indicates that he is outside and this conjecture is backed up by line three, where the narrator mentions that he was going 'through the park'. 'Voices of boys' makes him remember his childhood. It was not long ago that he was like those boys running around with any cares, but it seems like a distant memory. Owen seems to claim that the war robs 'you' and 'your' innocence and naivety. He is also probably a little jealous of them, they can still believe in fairy tales and happy endings, whereas he knows that not every life has a happy ending. Soldiers lose their youth to the war.

In the second stanza, Owen expresses the gaiety and liveliness of the town as compared to the first stanza filled with empty thoughts and coldness. The following is the second stanza of the poem.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
 When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim, –
 In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
 Now he will never feel again how slim
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

The stanza describes how the boy is described before he has enlisted to the war. He is described as having energy and vitality in his pre-war days, the warmth of this memory contrasting with the isolation he finds himself in upon his return. The clause 'before he threw away his knees' (line four of the stanza) seems to mock at him sacrificing his legs. The fact that 'he will never feel again how slim the girls' waists are' shows as far away from him as possible, avoiding much contact. Around this time of day he used to go out on the town and party with his friends. Girls were always around and would flirt with him; they wanted to be with him, because he was a hero of war, as cliché as those sounds. He threw his knees away when he enlisted in the army. Girls do not want someone who is crippled; heroes do not get injured. It seems like he has given up on life as much as life has given up on him. He has succumbed to the idea that he is not a real man anymore; others can probably sense this about him, and they stay away because they do not want to be dragged down by him and his self-pity. - 'All of them touch him like some queer disease' - implies that women could touch him with disgust, but it is equally likely that it is him who is projecting his own feelings of disgust on them.

In the past, artists liked to draw his face as he did not look his age. Irony is used in the third stanza. Baldick states that "irony involves a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant" (1996: 114). It describes that the soldier is

very handsome and admirable. Because of his sorrow, he looks older than his age. He seems to lose his youth because he feels much suffering that burdens his future life. The third stanza of the poem is as follows:

There was an artist silly for his face,
 For it was younger than his youth, last year.
 Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
 He's lost his colour very far from here,
 Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
 And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
 And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

The fourth stanza presents a scene from before the war.

One time he liked a blood- smear down his leg,
 After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
 It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
 He thought he'd better join. – He wonders why.
 Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
 That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
 Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
 He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
 Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.

In the past before enlisting to the war, he has felt proud to sustain an injury while playing football on the field. He is worshiped and celebrated like a hero. Along with Owen's portrayal of the boy's former life, he refers to the events leading to the boy's recruitment. He mentions that the boy was once thought 'a god in kilts', not only does this demonstrate the soldier's total physical change, but also indicates that the boy joins the army partly because of his vanity. The clause 'he'd look a god in kilts' shows that he thinks he will look good and impressive in his army uniform. Owen's depiction for the boy's imagination of the girls' praise of him can be shown in the seventh and eighth lines of the stanza. They imply that he wants to display his manliness to impress the girls. 'To please his Meg' is also

cited as another reason for the boy enlisting. Another criticism lies in the following line: 'smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years', the sadness of the soldiers plight is heightened as it becomes clear that the boy is underage when he enlists the army. He has lied about his age to join the army. He probably knows that he is too young to be accepted and therefore he lies.

The fifth stanza shows mostly the portraits of the boy's dreams after deciding to enlist the army for joining the war.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
 And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
 Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

He knew nothing of German or Austrian. He did not know anything about the politics of the war. He only thought of how the uniform would make him look, and how people would treat him once he put on it. 'Jewelled hilts' are ornamental daggers; Scottish soldiers would put them in the top of one of their stockings. 'Esprit de corps' means they have regarded for the honor and interests of a military unit. When men left for war they were sent off with many drums and cheers, it would be like a big parade.

The sixth stanza of the poem "Disabled" implies what the boy feels after he has returned from the war. What he has imagined is absolutely different from the reality. The fifth and the sixth stanzas show the contrast between his dreams shown in the former and his reality shown in the latter. He does not know why or what he has been fighting for because 'Germans he scarcely thought of; all their

guilt', / 'And Austria's, did not move him'. Line two of the first stanza emphasizes his reality, 'And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey', one can imagine that the soldier quivers at the thought of wearing that hideous and disgusting gray suit without legs and arms.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
 Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

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.
 Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
 Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
 How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
 And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

When the boy decides to enlist the army in order to fight in the war, he does not even experience any fear –'no fear of Fear'-. This shows that he is rather ignorant and has many illusions of good life in the army. However, his army career is soon over and he is 'drafted out'. 'Some cheered him home' shows that he earns some respect for sacrificing himself and joining the army. Otherwise, this cheering is not as much as he receives when he has been an athlete scoring the goal –'some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal'-. It shows that people probably treat joining the army as a necessity and not a sacrifice while being an athlete needs talent that not everyone has.

The second line of the fourth stanza, –'After the matches, carried shoulder-high'- emphasizes that everyone feels cheerful when he wins the matches and the boy used to have people carry him on their shoulders. It illustrates the contrast to the second line of the sixth stanza, –'Only a solemn man who brought

him fruits'- now all his reward for his sacrifice in the war is a lone man bringing him fruits, nothing more. Yet, what he has sacrificed is worth more than some fruits. He has sacrificed his legs and a major part of his life in the war. Throughout the poem, the boy is troubled by the town's indifference toward him and the ungratefulness that is shown towards him after he has returned home from the war.

'Do what things the rules consider wise' (line two of the seventh stanza) implies that the soldier's passivity is complete. The fine young athlete has been reduced to a state of dependency on others and helplessness. His helplessness is heightened by the pitiful closing repetition of –'Why don't they come?'. The last stanza seems to have the boy wait for others to do things for him, he 'spends a few sick years', and 'takes whatever pity', others choose to offer him; he is passed over by the women's attentions, as he bemoans the cold and hopes that someone will put him to bed. Women barely glance at him as he is considered as 'incomplete'. He is rather useless now that he has no legs.

'Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes/ Passed from him to the strong men that were whole' pictures his attractiveness to the opposite sex. 'Whole' implies that he is incomplete, less than a man. He is dependent on young women to even help him into bed which is contrary to his experience before, where he can even help them. Instead, ironically he depends on young women to put him to bed, in contrast with his prewar virile manhood when he can expect to take women to bed. The repetition of the clause 'Why don't they come' implies that he

is waiting for something to happen, perhaps for death to put an end to his suffering.

C. Conclusion

Few would challenge the claim that Wilfred Owen is the greatest writer of war poetry in the English language. He wrote out of his intense personal experience as a soldier and wrote with unrivalled power of the physical, moral and psychological trauma of the First World War. One of those poems is entitled "Disabled". Wilfred Owen obviously portrays the individual suffering of the war. It is the reflection of a boy's suffering after going home from the war. He has experienced the physical, moral and psychological suffering. What he dreams is different from the reality. Not only does he feel morally isolated, but also socially and psychologically rejected.

The boy dreams of glory and everyone's praise because he has sacrificed himself. However, what he has got is obviously unimaginable. Because of his loss of legs, he is ignored by the society that formerly admired him. Moreover, he is also completely passive and dependent on someone's help. He is shocked by what his surrounding has reacted toward his future life.

Wilfred Owen's depiction of the individual suffering of war seems real in the poem. He writes in opposition to the war and yet supports the men he serves with his poetry by bringing the discomfort and horror of war to the eyes of the public. Owen illustrates the intense suffering of the victims, and demonstrates how the war has ruined their lives.

"Disabled"

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
 Voices of play and pleasure after day, (5)
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
 When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim, –
 In the old times, before he threw away his knees. (10)
 Now he will never feel again how slim
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
 For it was younger than his youth, last year. (15)
 Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
 He's lost his colour very far from here,
 Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
 And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
 And leap of purple spurted from his thigh. (20)

One time he liked a blood- smear down his leg,
 After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
 It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
 He thought he'd better join. – He wonders why.
 Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts, (25)
 That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
 Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
 He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
 Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt, (30)
 And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
 Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits. (35)
 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
 Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes, (40)
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come (45)
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

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