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Disabled

BY [WILFRED OWEN](#)

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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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.
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.

* * * * *

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.

Only a solemn man who brought him fruits

Thanked him; and then inquired 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?

Vocabulary

1) Word: ghastly

Link: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ghastly?s=t>

Explanation: causing great horror or fear

2) Word: hymn

Link: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hymn?s=t>

Explanation: a religious song or poem of praise to God or a god.

- 3) Word: **hilt**
Link: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hilt?s=t>
Explanation: the handle of a weapon or tool, especially a sword, dagger, or knife.
- 4) Word: **salute**
Link: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/salute?s=t>
Explanation: *Military.* to pay respect to or honor by some formal act, as by raising the right hand to the side of the headgear, presenting arms, firing cannon, dipping colors, etc.
- 5) Word: **arrear**
Link: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/arrear?s=t>
Explanation: Sometimes **arrear**. something overdue in payment; a debt that remains unpaid:
- 6) Word: **esprit de corps**
Link: https://www.google.com/search?q=esprit+de+corps&rlz=1C1GCEU_koCA880CA880&oq=esprit+de&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l7.4956j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8
Explanation: a feeling of pride, fellowship, and common loyalty shared by the members of a particular group.
- 7) Word: **dole**
Link: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dole?s=t>
Explanation: a portion or allotment of money, food, etc., especially as given at regular intervals by a charity or for maintenance.

Symbols

- 1) Football - a symbol of war and how many men saw war as a game to be won like a sport but the true aftermath is injuries, blood, etc.
- 2) Darkness - symbol for death. The author was waiting for death
- 3) Colour - Owen says that he's lost his colour, symbolizing his happier life before war, before death.

Setting

Physical: This poem takes place in a dark, isolated place in his wheelchair where he reflects back on war and his memories as well as his time before.

Emotional: Dark and reminiscent

Conflict

1. Person vs society; external; he's longing for the ability to live how he used to, the boys having fun in the park discouraging and dampening the spirits of the disabled man. Comparably, a similar feeling of yearning may have passed through the soldiers at war in WWII; missing their family and friends, wanting to go home and return to their lifestyles.
2. Person vs self; internal; he's hostile in accepting the development of his life and in welcoming the dissimilar conduct of his life. With no one there to help him, he seems to be incapable of doing most things many of us find to a normal aspect in our lives.

Poetic Devices

1. *"voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn"* (4): **Simile**. Unable to enjoy himself in the park, the boys' voices sadden him, reminding him of melancholic hymns.
2. *"play and pleasure"* (5): **Alliteration**. The repeated use of the 'p' and 'l' sound adds to the effect of the man being unable to do most of the things he wishes he could.
3. *"gathering sleep had mothered them from him"* (6): **Personification**. A mother gathering her children to her at the end of the day, however one cannot be mothered by sleep. This line illustrates how when the boys departed the park, returning home for a night's rest, the disabled man was left with nothing to listen to, unable to drown out his thoughts.
4. *"gathering sleep had mothered them from him"* (6): **Metaphor**. Conveys deep pity for a man, grounded as a consequence of his disability, cold and tired, and yet unable to leave his position until someone remembers that he needs to be put to bed.
5. *"he's lost his color... poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry"* (17-18): **Metaphor**. Slowly, he finds himself decaying in his own body, his lifetime expiring. The personification of his color pouring down shell-holes leaves the reader to indulge in the image of a man at war, fighting for his country and his life fading away in a shell-hole.

Irony

1. *"How cold and late it is! Why don't they come? / And put him into bed? Why don't they come?"*
Dramatic Irony - These two lines are an example of dramatic irony because the author himself doesn't understand what had happened to the people. However, readers are able to infer that those individuals passed away during their time at war and will never come home as they were expected to do.
2. *"Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal."*
Situational Irony - This phrase is an example of situational irony because one would expect a huge ovation and a lot of appreciation from their people after fighting for their country in war, but this was not the case. The response from the people was different than

what was expected because they didn't celebrate the same way they did at a football game, which was what the narrator and readers thought would happen.

3. "He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;"

Situational Irony - This line is an example of situational irony because the narrator expected it to be extremely difficult to try and enlist in the army, since it was something that a lot of men took pride in. However, it wasn't hard at all to join, since in reality there weren't enough men who were voluntarily signing up, which is the opposite of what was expected to happen.

Author Background (link to background page)

Link: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~lsmithg/biography.html>

Imagery

(5 examples identified and explained, annotated)

1. Example: He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark
Explanation: I can think of a one man who is depressed due to his disability.
2. Example: Through the park / Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Explanation: Group of boys were depressed that they sounded like they were crying.
3. Example: Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.
Explanation: Boys couldn't go to sleep because they were depressed.
4. Example: his back will never brace
Explanation: the old man hurted his back, and it can't be cured.
5. Example: before he threw away his knees
Explanation: I can think of a man who does not have a leg.

Thematic Statements (4 thematic statements that fit the poem, also must be explained in 2-3 sentences, end of document, annotated)

- 1)
A seemingly simple choice can change your life forever

While drunk one night, this man made a choice to join the military. He gives reasons such as looking good in a kilt, to impress a girl. He only saw the glamorous romanticized aspects of the

war so lied about his age and they happily accepted him nonetheless. He made this quick and easy choice and it ended up negatively changing his life forever.

2)

Joy for life and the things one enjoys can quickly be taken away.

A major theme in this poem is loss. The loss that this soldier has suffered after losing his limbs and freedom in the war now impacts all aspects of his life. He doesn't find the same joy in life he once did.

3) The world is often glamorized to the young and impressionable

The fourth stanza depicts heavily the disillusionment that this man faced in his youth, he saw the war as a way to impress those around him and live a more interesting life. He realizes now the truth after sacrificing almost everything.

4) One who is at one point celebrated and loved can just as easily be forgotten by those around them.

The author describes the feeling of loss he feels all around him. At one point feeling admired and enjoyed by others, specifically women, he now feels ignored and passed by for those who don't share his disabilities.

Connect the poem to WWII (Why is understanding WWI important?)

Wilfred Owen shows readers that war impacts a person's life significantly, no matter how long you served your country (as seen through the main character's perspective as a soldier). It is clear to the audience that Owen demonstrates that every conflict or problem has consequences that can be detrimental to one's life and the world around them. By reminiscing on all of the dark times the narrator endured throughout his life, it symbolizes the effects of worldwide conflict and how it is essential to understand the history behind the brutal wars of the past. When trying to understand WWII, looking backwards at WWI is crucial. While not as deadly, it introduced the world to the horrors and loss that comes along with a mass world war. Many of the themes the author brings up regarding world war one are equally if not more so amplified by world war two.

While the author illustrates WWI as a repressive solution to many long standing conflicts, the instability that followed was a strong backbone to the motivation to implement regimes, leading to World War II; the anterior objective being to get rid of old and decayed social and political structures.

Owen also tries to show that many men saw war as a type of game to be won. The loss, pain and trauma that was felt afterwards was a clear showing of what war truly entails and the long term effects on so many.