

✦ Listing

Noonuccal uses listing in 'Entombed Warriors' to capture the enormity of the artwork that the artists are expected to create. The loyalty and dedication of the artist is admired by the poet: 'Clay warriors and horses, / A legion of foot soldiers, Cavalry, / Archers and Generals, / Swords, lances and spears, / And battle axes in bronze'.

✦ Colloquial language

The final stanza of 'Visit to Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall' contains two examples of colloquial language, communicating Noonuccal's honest dreams for her future. To convey how full the hall is with people, she says 'The hall is packed'. To express her sense of delight at being able to perform in the theatre she says 'I am in my element'.

SELECTED POEMS

OF WILFRED OWEN

Introduction to the text

About the poet

Wilfred Owen was born in March 1893 in Oswestry, England. He was the eldest of four and brought up in a middle-class family with a hard-working father and a much adored mother. After failing to pass the university entrance test he accepted a position as a teacher in France. During the same year World War I began and Owen enlisted. Owen was killed in battle one week before the armistice of 11 November 1918.

Owen's poems reveal the influence of his mother's evangelical religious beliefs which he rejected. These beliefs are revealed in his recurring theme of sacrifice and the recurrence of biblical language. The most significant influence on Owen's writings was his experience in World War I where he witnessed first-hand the horrors of the war machine. In hospital recovering from shell shock Owen met the poet Siegfried Sassoon who not only influenced Owen's style and poetic direction, but introduced him to the literary circle of England. Owen's poetic style was also influenced by the Romantic poets John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

According to Owen himself in his draft table of contents for his unpublished volume of war poems, there are a number of significant themes in his body of work, all relating to war. These include madness, heroic lies, inhumanity in war, indifference at home, the willingness of the old to sacrifice the young, the mentality of troops, the vastness of losses, and the overall horrible beastliness of war and grief.

Type of text

War Poems and Others is a collection of poetry.

Context

Owen wrote these poems in an intense creative period from mid-1917 up until his death in late 1918. During this time the world was embroiled in what has now become known as the Great War.

All of Owen's poems set for study are set in the actual context of World War I. In the preface to his first collection of unpublished poems Owen wrote that he was 'not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity'. Owen used his brief experiences in the trenches of France and in the hospitals for the wounded as the sole subject for his poetry. Owen's poems focus primarily on the experience

of the allied soldiers and the impact that the war has on the individual soldiers, their families at home in England, society and humanity as a whole. As such these poems are set in locations including the battlefield, a hospital and small towns in England.

Audience

Owen not only wrote poems for an educated audience who appreciated the art of poetry, but also for the everyday person who was affected by the enormity and horror of World War I. This included those in positions of power, the loved ones of the soldiers, the soldiers themselves and, most importantly, young men who were thinking about enlisting in the war.

Purpose

Many soldiers wrote about their unimaginable experiences during World War I simply to document them for their own future records or to articulate their last thoughts for their loved ones. Owen's purpose differed from the majority of these soldiers in that he anticipated, even desired, the publication of his poems and therefore consciously strove to make a significant impression on the imaginations, emotions and intellect of his readers. Ultimately he sought to reveal to those not directly involved in the frontline the horror, cruelty and futility of the war, with the aim that this may bring about an end to support for this war and further enlisting.

Reading the poems

Owen was influenced heavily by the Romantic poets. The intensity of his quest to make a significant impact on others' perception of the war through his poetry—which saw him die young in pursuit of his art and truth—should be considered in relation to each poem set for study.

Students must pay attention to the extremely well-crafted nature of these poems. Owen had been writing poetry for a number of years before his experience in the front line of World War I. An appreciation of his skilful use of sound devices, structure, rhyme and imagery is paramount to a genuine understanding of Owen's distinct poetic treatment of the impact that the Great War had on humanity.

The early war poets that came before Owen dealt with war and dying for one's country as though it were a

wonderful game in which all truly noble and great men should participate. Owen joined the ranks of young soldiers in October 1915, by which time the nature and likely duration of the war had change for the worse. The focus for those who chose to record their experiences of the war at this time turned to the pointlessness of the war due to the ineptitude of those in command, the massive loss of human life and, ultimately, the impact of life in the trenches.

Key concepts and definitions

Burnt offering—the slaughtered animal that is burnt on an altar as part of a religious sacrifice.

Five-nines—slang for the artillery shells used by the Germans to drop the poisonous gases. These were 5.9 inches in diameter.

Sojourned—the word literally means to stay in one place for a short time, usually a foreign place away from that which is familiar.

Poems on the syllabus

Details of the text

'The Next War'

This sonnet opens with a quote from Siegfried Sassoon that mocks the war effort. The first stanza, the octave, tells of the soldiers spending time with 'Death'. He is presented as being on friendly terms with the soldiers, despite his bad behaviour, including his messy eating habits and his bad breath. The second stanza has the speaker admit that the soldiers are not enemies with death and tell of how they laugh knowing that there will be more significant wars in the future, wars fought for national pride.

This poem explores the impact that war has on the mentality of soldiers. Owen used his sonnet to communicate his sense of despair at the acceptance of death amongst the soldiers and their growing awareness that there will be even larger, more devastating wars in the future.

'Insensibility'

This long poem details the impact on soldiers who choose to remain 'insensible' to the horrors of the war around them. Stanza One outlines how soldiers who choose not to be sensitive to the sights of war and not to care about the lives of their fellow troops are happy. Owen says that the front line is no place for poets. Stanza Two suggests that some soldiers stop caring all together and leave their lives to chance and pay no attention to the numbers of men dying around them. Stanza Three states that soldiers have enough to carry and don't need the extra burden of their imaginations. These men have seen so much horror and death that

Thicket—a small, tough bush.

You need to know the following terms for this unit. The meanings are given in the glossary on pages iv–ix.

- Alliteration
- Allusion
- Apostrophe
- Figurative language
- Iambic pentameter
- Imagery
- Metaphor
- Onomatopoeia
- Personification
- Tone
- Trochaic pentameter

they can now laugh among the dead, not bothered by the awful sights. Stanza Four tells of returned soldiers who forget about the continuation of the war. Owen suggests that men who are uneducated or who have never learnt how to write poetry cope better in war, they can sing as they march at the end of the day. Stanza Five refers to the task of poets, with Owen questioning how they will carry on in war. He claims that they should adopt the attitude of those who ignore the horror. The final stanza gives voice to Owen's frustration with those who choose to be insensible to the realities of war—whether they are soldiers of people back in England—as he feels that being sensible to the horror ensures one can feel pity and the capacity to mourn the loss of others.

The main idea explored in this poem is the need to value and respect being sensitive and sensible to the world, despite its horrors. Owen's poem asserts his belief that being sensible to the horror ensures one can feel pity and the capacity to mourn the loss of others. It is human to feel and it is inhuman to numb one's self to the world.

'Strange Meeting'

This poem presents an image of the meeting of two enemies in battle. The first speaker describes the nature of their chance meeting. He is running through underground tunnels and comes across a group of people lying on the ground, asleep or dead he cannot tell. He prods one body and the man awakes in fear. The speaker describes the place as Hell. The man holds his hands up and the first speaker tells the man he does not need to be upset. The man speaks to him and tells

him that he should not mourn for the moment or that they appear to be in Hell, but rather he should mourn for what the war has taken from them. He describes how he came to fight in the war because he was looking for 'the wildest beauty in the world'. He explains how nations' desire for progress is the sole cause of war and will continue to be. He tells of his own commitment to the war, despite knowing the futility of the causes and the cost. The poem ends with the speaker revealing that he was killed by the listener, and in an act of forgiveness, tells him it is time for them both to sleep.

This poem illustrates the futility of war and the consequences of a desire for progress. Owen uses the 'strange meeting' between the two enemies to suggest that all young men are the innocent victims of a useless war whose purpose solely is for the continued progress of nations.

'Futility'

The tone of this poem is personal and sombre. It narrates a familiar scene experienced by the soldiers serving in the trenches during World War I: the loss of a comrade. A soldier is being moved by his comrades from his former resting place, presumably a trench, out into the open ground where the sun is stronger. The soldier has not woken that morning, having died from exposure to the cold wintery conditions of France. The speaker reflects how the sun once had the power to revive the victim at home in England and appeals to it to revive him now. Despite the warmth in the soldier's limbs, he is beyond help. The realisation of the sun's failure prompts the speaker to question why it is that the sun shines at all, in fact why life ever developed on earth, if it is simply to be lost in this pitiable way.

This poem has also been interpreted as Owen questioning the role that God played in the death of this young man, and why He created life only to destroy it.

'Anthem for Doomed Youth'

This powerful sonnet captures the monstrosity of war and the grief experienced by those at home as a result of the vastness of the losses. The first stanza questions how the deaths of the soldiers will be formally acknowledged during battle and suggests that they will only be marked by further violence and horror. The second half of the sonnet shifts away from the experiences of the soldiers to the experiences of those at home who wait for news about their loved ones serving at the front line.

Owen suggests that even though these men do not receive the formal, religious ceremonies normally designated to the loss of a loved one, they are still mourned for by families and lovers. The focus, as the title of the poem suggests, is on the commemoration of the very young destined to die in battle during World War I.

'Dulce Et Decorum Est'

The realities of war are revealed through Owen's description of a battalion returning from the frontline exhausted and wounded to the point of death. As the men make the slow march towards their 'distant rest' they are caught amid shells of chlorine gas, and in the rush to get on their protective masks one man is too slow. The sight of this man fighting for air causes the speaker ceaseless nightmares. In the final stanza Owen suggests that if those at home witnessed the atrocious and agonizing death of this man, they would not be so quick to glorify the war.

The very title of this poem, a partial line of Latin from the Roman poet Horace that translates as 'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country', enunciates Owen's message that those at home are indifferent to the sufferings of the men in battle.

How relationships shape meaning

The statistics for the numbers of men who died during World War I are astounding. Nearly five million men served in the British army and over fifty-one per cent of these died. Owen effectively uses the sonnet form in 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' to reveal the impact of this loss of life on those at home. There is to be no eulogy given by loved ones with their 'voices of mourning'; however, hope is suggested by the introduction of 'save for the choirs'. Here Owen plays with the emotions of the reader as he hints that some small spark of recognition and respect may be given to these men. This feeling of expectation is furthered by the dash at the end of the line which makes the reader pause before discovering who it is that will sing over the bodies of the fallen soldiers.

Conditions in the trenches on the Western Front were appalling. Owen uses the sombre poem 'Futility' to express the realities of life in the trenches for these men. In the second half of 'Futility' the reader's attention is brought back to the present and to the body of the soldier whose limbs are still warm. Owen refers to limbs as being 'dear-achieved', alluding to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, suggesting that the evolution of man has taken millions of years, only to come to such a senseless end. The fractured structure of these two lines, created by the use of dashes and commas, conveys the confused thought patterns of the speaker. The speaker directly questions the reader, a confronting technique designed to make the reader feel as helpless and frustrated at the futility of war as the speaker is.

Students should comment on the war machine that fed on the life and youth of the men on both sides of the battle. This was a war where those in power, and their concern for economic and technological superiority, saw significant advances in weapons technology. These advances resulted in mass deaths in short spaces of

time. Human beings are viewed as expendable commodities, just another cog in the war machine which rolled over the land in hope of securing a bigger foreign market.

Language forms, features and structures

◆ Structure

'The Next War' is written in the sonnet form. A sonnet consists of fourteen lines, typically divided into two stanzas. The first has eight lines and is called an octave. The second is six lines and is called a sestet. Traditionally sonnets are love poems, however Owen subverts this as his poem is about the horror and reality of war.

'Insensibility' is divided into six unequal stanzas. It has been classified by many as an ode. This is because the poem is a dedication to something, in this instance to a state of being; insensibility. The choice of the ode form reflects Owen's love of the Romantic poets, especially John Keats who wrote many beautiful odes. However, Owen subverts the ode form as his poem lacks the strict rhyme scheme and structure typical of traditional ode. The first stanza features Owen's unique style of pararhyme; however, even this is lost in the remainder of the poem. This lack of rhyme and structure gives the poem its characteristic distorted and disturbed mood.

'Strange Meeting' is not divided into stanzas. However, it does have two main parts: the description of the location and the nature of the 'strange meeting' by the first speaker, and then the monologue of the second speaker who describes the nature and consequences of war.

'Futility' is divided into two evenly-weighted stanzas, both consisting of seven lines. The first stanza sets the scene for the reader, informing them of the event that will cause the confusion and questioning of the second stanza. Owen uses the first stanza to contemplate the specific: the soldier's death from exposure and the powerlessness of his friends and nature to revive him. The second stanza moves from the specific to the general, as the speaker (presumably Owen himself) questions the purpose of life in a world where life and death have become meaningless.

Owen constructed 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' using the conventions of a traditional English sonnet. This sonnet features a strict rhyme scheme of 'abab', 'cdcd', 'efef', 'gg' and the regular rhythm of iambic pentameter. The first stanza is an octave as it consists of eight lines and, following the characteristics of a Petrarchan sonnet, it introduces and describes a problem. In this case the problem is how the deaths of these young men will be marked if they fall during battle. The second stanza is a sestet as it consists of six lines and it presents a resolution to the problem. For Owen the problem is resolved through the informal grieving of the young girls at home in 'sad shires'. This sonnet also features a

volta, which is the turning point in the sonnet from question to answer, and traditionally occurs at line nine. The volta for this poem takes the form of the rhetorical question 'What candles may be held to speed them all?'. Once again Owen uses a distinct traditional structure, a sonnet, to explore a very modern subject, the loss of life, youth and innocence as a result of World War I.

'*Dulce Et Decorum Est*' is divided into four stanzas of unequal lengths and features the rhythm of loose iambic pentameter, a distinctive metre frequently employed by Owen in his war poems. Once again the traditional and controlled metre is contrasted to the chaotic subject matter, with Owen's structure effectively containing his overwhelming emotion. A framing device is used by Owen in the form of the quote from Horace, which acts as both the title and the final line of the poem. This creates a cyclic structure for the poem, which reflects the theme of the continued wilful sacrifice of the young and eager by those in positions of power. The division of the poem into distinct stanzas enables the reader to pause between each element of the event. The first stanza describes the men as a group, the second stanza describes the gas attack, the brief third stanza describes the nightmares of the speaker and in the last stanza Owen appeals to those at home to cease their support of such senseless and undignified deaths. Finally Owen's use of rhyme in this poem captures his bitterness towards the poets who glorify war and in doing so encourage the young to sacrifice themselves for their country. Full rhyme is used with the regular rhyme scheme 'abab', 'cdcd', 'efef', and so on. This basic rhyming pattern creates a sing-song effect which contrasts directly with the graphic nature of his subject matter and reinforces his argument that war should not be venerated by poets, nor anyone else.

Owen's adroit manipulation of poetic structure facilitates his protest against the dehumanising war machine. The emotional and psychological effects of being forced to watch your friends die during war is stressed in the isolated couplet of '*Dulce et Decorum est*'. The focus moves from the experience of the dying man himself towards the impact it has on the speaker, who suffers nightmares as a result of witnessing such horror. In his dreams he is 'helpless' against the confronting images of death, and sees the man 'guttering, choking, drowning'. The use of present tense verbs accents the continuance of this suffering and waste.

◆ Figurative language

In 'Insensibility' Owen uses a range of figures of speech to capture his images of men who has made themselves insensible to the horrors of war. He uses a metaphor to convey how men have lost their ability to feel: 'Happy are men who yet before they are killed / Can let their

veins run cold'. The image of veins full of cold blood is a confronting opening to a poem. This horror is continued through the use of a metaphor to create a picture of the numerous dead who the men must walk over as they continue to move forward: 'Or makes their feet / Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers'. The reader is shocked by the mental image of a road made from the bodies of fallen soldiers. Owen uses metaphor again when he tries to describe the impact that the horrific sights of battle have had on the minds of the soldiers: 'Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle / Now long since ironed, / Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned'.

The sun is personified in 'Futility' as a mother figure and given healing qualities. The personification of the sun as a benevolent protector continues in the poem as it whispers to the soldier of 'fields unsown'. Before the war the role of the sun was to wake the young man in the morning so he could begin his day's work ploughing his fields. Of course the 'fields unsown' act as a metaphor for the future that is lost because of this man's death.

In 'Futility' the speaker reflects on the origins of earth and human existence, with the earth described metaphorically as a 'cold star'. The stunning imagery of 'clays' being given life by the sun reassures the reader that it has the power to save the soldier. Owen interestingly uses a scientific explanation of the beginning of existence, rather than a religious one, signifying the climate of disbelief which emerged from the vastness of the losses in World War I. Owen argues that the sun brought life to the planet since without the light and heat of the sun no life could be sustained on it. The line 'Woke, once, the clays of a cold star' can also be interpreted as a biblical allusion to God's words in Genesis to Adam: 'for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return' (Genesis 3: 17-19). In this interpretation Owen is suggesting that the death of this soldier, and life itself, is futile since God has already determined the return to earth as punishment for the original sin.

◆ Personification

'The Next War' is characterised by its strong use of personification. Owen personifies death, making it human and less threatening for the men, conveying a grim attitude of acceptance of death as part of their daily experience. Owen creates a series of images that present death as a friend, despite being somewhat annoying. This understatement is both humorous and distressing. The opening line personifies death immediately: 'Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death, - / Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland'.

In this poem Owen also uses apostrophe to exaggerate the relaxed relationship between the men and death: 'Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!'.
◆ Imagery

In 'The Next War' Owen presents a series of images that convey the impact of death on the daily lives of the men. He uses a metaphor to present the daily experience of gas attacks: 'We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath'. The deadly poisonous gas is presented as the breath of death, a confronting image for the reader. The use of onomatopoeia and metaphor create an image of the men being hit by bullets: 'He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed / Shrapnel'. The reader is given a powerful image of the sound and movement of the bullets as we imagine them being spat at the men with force.

'Strange Meeting' has many powerful and effective images that present the reader with the reality of war. One such image is that of the face of a soldier aware that he will soon die: 'With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained'. This is a very human image and creates sympathy for the soldier. Owen also uses imagery to present the motives of men for going to war: 'I went hunting wild / After the wildest beauty in the world'. This positive imagery suggests that men have idealised images of war and the pleasure it will bring them. Towards the end of the poem, a gruesome image is created through metaphor which presents the commitment of soldiers despite knowing the flaws of war: 'Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels / I would go up and wash them from sweet wells'. The allusions to 'chariot-wheels' reminds the reader that war has long been part of human history, as has the desire for progress.

In 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' the images of youth, at home and on the battlefield, reinforce the theme of wasted youth and loss of hope. This is illustrated by the elegiac tone of the second stanza. This tone is heightened by the image of girls drained of colour: 'The pallor of girls' brows' after hearing of the death of their loved ones.

The aural imagery of 'shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells' is used in '*Dulce Et Decorum Est*' to shatter the reader's hopes for the men. The weapons are personified as a choir, but not as a choir experienced by those at home. This is illustrated through the adjective 'demented' and the onomatopoeia 'shrill' and 'wailing'. These men have been betrayed by those who are meant to care, their families and their governments, and are left to the cruelty and false security of the weapons.

Evocative imagery of the sea is created in '*Dulce et Decorum est*' through the repetition of 'green' and 'drowning' as well as the simile 'as under a green sea'.

This imagery captures the overwhelming feeling of helplessness experienced by the men.

Owen uses graphic imagery in *'Dulce et Decorum est'* to confront his readers with the realities of war. The image of the man's face is vivid and grotesque, being drawn out by the alliteration of the long sounding 'w' in 'watch the white eyes writhing'. The man's face is compared to that of a devil that is overwhelmed by its sins with the simile 'like a devil's sick of sin'. Owen combines both visual and aural imagery in his description of the effects of the gas on the man's lungs: 'If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs'.

Owen aims to reveal to the reader the ugliness and degradation associated with war, and this is achieved remarkably in the opening stanza of this poem. The immediate image in the opening lines is one of decrepitude, with the once young and fit soldiers described as 'old beggars under sacks'. The enjambment of this sentence on to the next line continues the image of aging and disability in the simile 'Knock-kneed, coughing like hags'.

The transformation of these once fit, proud and youthful soldiers is captured through vivid imagery. The men without boots are described as being 'blood-shod'; in other words, their blood and the blood of other soldiers is what is covering their feet instead of shoes. The imagery of horses 'shod' and 'lame' links to the imagery of cattle in *'Anthem for Doomed Youth'*, where once again the men are dehumanised as they are treated like animals. The authenticity of this description is reinforced by the jargon 'Five-Nines', asserting Owen's personal familiarity with war.

◆ Tone

The tone of *'The Next War'* is initially light-hearted, which is ironic as the message of the poem is very serious. Owen's voice is playful and mocking as he forces the reader to understand the daily presence of death for the men. The determined and accepting attitude of the soldiers is presented through the image 'Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe'. The tone in the sestet is much more critical, as Owen acknowledges: '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'.

The tone of *'Insensibility'* is critical and ironic. The final stanza evidences Owen's critical voice the most clearly as he asserts powerfully: 'But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns, / That they should be as stones'. This is in contrast to his stoic tone earlier in the poem where he shares his awareness that the poet struggles on with their emotions: 'We wise, who with a thought besmirch / Blood over all our soul, / How

should we see our task / But through his blunt and lashless eyes?'

In *'Dulce et Decorum est'* the tone shifts from the dull, lifeless and depressing tone of the first stanza, to the urgent and dramatic tone of the second stanza. This sense of urgency and action is indicated through the capitalisation of the word 'GAS!', and the repeated exclamation marks punctuate the drama as the gas attack takes the men by surprise. As the officer calls to his 'boys' the panic is captured in the image 'An ecstasy of fumbling'. The use of the present tense verbs in the line 'But someone still was yelling out and stumbling, / And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime ...' captures the desperation and intensity of the soldier who is overcome by the gas. The verb 'flound'ring' is used to make the reader visualise a fish out water, struggling for breath as this man is due to the gas in his lungs. The ellipsis '...' at the end of this line allows the reader a moment to pause and consider the image of this man's horrific death. The impact of witnessing such a gruesome death is evident in the sombre tone of the speaker in the last two lines of the stanza: 'Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light, / As under a green sea, I saw him drowning'. The 'misty panes' refer to the speaker's mask, and the 'green light' is the colour of the gas being released from the shells.

◆ Repetition

The awkwardly musical ode *'Insensibility'* uses repetition to reinforce Owen's message about the impact of war on an individual's ability to have compassion. In the final stanza the repetition of 'nor' captures the negative consequences of being insensible to the reality of war: 'Nor sad, nor proud, / Nor curious at all'. The first half of the poem sees Owen frequently using the same sentence structure, beginning with the word 'Happy', to describe those who can switch off their emotions: 'Happy the soldier home, with not a notion / How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack, / And many sighs are drained. / Happy the lad whose mind was never trained'. The repetition of the word 'happy' in this context is ironic, as the soldiers are not really happy; rather, they are coping by turning off their emotions. This is not an emotion the poet can experience.

◆ Sound devices

'Insensibility' is characterised by its strangely musical quality. This quality does not come from a regular rhythm or rhyme, but rather from Owen's use of alliteration and assonance. Perhaps this conscious playing with words and sound is a reflection of his commitment to poetry and to 'sensibility'. The repetition of the soft 'm' and the long 's' sounds in the following lines creates a sombre mood as Owen describes the consequences of making oneself insensible to the suffering of others: 'By choice they made themselves

immune / To pity and whatever moans in man / Before the last sea and the hapless stars; / Whatever mourns when many leave these shores'. Earlier in the poem, the use of alliteration is once again used to create a mood; in this instance it is a defiant and careless mood conveyed through the repeated 'f' sound: 'Whom no compassion fleers / The front line withers, / But they are troops who fade, not flowers / For poets' tearful fooling'. This sound device creates a tone of flippancy, capturing the attitude of the soldiers who choose not to care about what they see and experience.

In *'Anthem for Doomed Youth'* Owen reveals that it is only the sound of the guns in battle that mark the deaths of these men. The brutality and the unnaturalness of these weapons is emphasised by the use of the sound devices, specifically onomatopoeia 'stuttering' and 'rattle' and alliteration 'rifles' rapid rattle'. The personification of the weapons, 'monstrous anger' and 'the stuttering rifles', reinforces Owen's message that these men have no person to mourn their sudden deaths but the weapons. The repetition of 'only' reinforces the tone of futility established through the images being described. The aural imagery of the 'patter' of the guns contrasts strikingly with the traditionally sombre 'orisons', which are prayers spoken for the dead. The numbers of dead are so great, and death comes so swiftly, that there simply is no time to respectfully mark the deaths of these men. Owen is clearly highlighting the dehumanised and anonymous deaths witnessed in war. The cruel choir of the battlefield sounds is accompanied by the sounds of 'bugles calling from sad shires'. The bugle was used during the war to indicate to the men that fighting had ceased for the day. Owen uses the image of a bugler calling the soldiers home for one last time to evoke a sense of pity from the reader, not only for the fallen men, but for those in 'sad shires' who await news of their loved ones. The personification of the small rural towns as 'sad shires' captures the enormity of the losses and the extent to which they stretched across Europe.

◆ Voice

In the opening of *'Futility'* Owen creates the sense that the reader is interrupting a private moment. The use of present tense and imperative tone of the first line 'Move him into the sun' creates a sense of urgency.

A distinctive technique of Owen's is the direct address to the reader. The speaker in *'Futility'* urges the reader to 'Think how it wakes the seeds' with the use of the imperative tone. The speaker argues that the sun has the power to bring seeds to life, evident in the present tense 'wakes', and suggests it can do the same for his friend. The seeds here are a metaphor for all life.

Owen challenges the ideals of honour and courage promoted by those at home, confronting his readers with the hideousness of life on the battlefield and

questioning the war machine which allows the butchery to continue. The final stanza of *'Dulce et Decorum est'* directly addresses the reader through the use of the second person, 'you', as Owen asks whether those at home could endure what he has and still support the war.

The final four lines of the stanza illustrate Owen's despair and frustration as he uses direct address, 'My friend', to explain how after seeing such horrors, they could not possibly encourage 'children ardent for some desperate glory' the myth that it is 'sweet and fitting to die for one's country'. The use of the word 'children' is powerful here, as it articulates to the reader the lack of morality associated with the war machine and the propaganda which encourages very young men to participate in the war under the pretence that it is honourable and noble.

◆ Word choice

In *'Futility'* the speaker's desperation for the sun to heal his friend is emphasised by the use of the word 'Always' in the line 'Always it woke him, even in France'. The word also reveals the futility of the speaker's attempts to rouse his friend who has died during the night. The sentence carries over to the following line, where the demonstrative pronoun 'this' directs the reader's attention to the cause of the man's death, it is the 'snow' that has fallen during the night.

Owen uses apostrophe in *'Futility'* to express the speaker's heartache at society's failure to value the lives, innocence and ultimately the humanity that has been lost. The apostrophe at the beginning of the line '-O what made fatuous sunbeams toil ...' is a direct address to a higher being or force for some guidance or understanding. The adjective 'fatuous' used in this line means pointless and is used to describe the sunbeams and their effort to bring life to this 'cold star'.

◆ Enjambment

In *'Futility'* the speaker appeals to the kindness of the sun to 'rouse' his friend from death. The use of enjambment captures the urgency and desperation of the speaker, who ends the stanza with his appeal to the powers of nature. The obvious contrast here is between the presence and benevolence of the personified 'kind old sun' and the absence and malevolence of the old men who control the unnatural war which has brought about this man's death.

The speaker's final question in the poem *'Futility'* is carried over from the previous line, once again through the use of enjambment. The word 'sleep' is used to metaphorically describe death. The imagery of the sun breaking the sleeping earth reminds the reader of the soldier's body which will not be woken by the sun again. Ending the poem with a rhetorical question in this way encourages the reader to contemplate Owen's

theme of futility, specifically in relation to the vast number of deaths caused by World War I.

♦ *Rhythm and rhyme*

Owen uses his distinctive rhyme scheme in 'Futility' as traditional full rhyme is too upbeat to suit his sombre subject matter. His experimentation with rhyme is evident in his rhyme scheme of 'ababcccc', 'dedeff'. His use of end of line rhyme consists of full rhymes, half rhymes and pararhymes. A pararhyme is a type of rhyme distinctive to Owen and it is he who brought its use popularity amongst other war poets. An example of pararhyme in 'Futility' is between lines eight and ten with his rhyming of 'seeds' with 'sides'. The vowel does not rhyme, but the beginning consonant and end consonant are the same and this creates pararhyme.

'Strange Meeting' is one of the best examples of pararhyme used by Owen. He perfected this technique in his war poems; it is a device that allows him to adequately create a discordant and distorted mood within these poems. This mood effectively communicates the sense of chaos and turmoil experienced by the soldiers during World War I. The pararhymes give an overall distorted feel to the end of each line; a discordant note that matches well to the disturbing mood of the poem. The image of progress created by Owen is effectively presented through his use of pararhyme as he makes a direct connection between 'progress' and 'tigrass' suggesting the brutality and speed of progress: 'They will be swift with swiftness of the tigrass, None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress'. The discordant sound of the off rhyme draws attention to the disorderly nature of progress through war. The poem also uses a regular rhythm, with most lines being written in iambic pentameter. For example, 'Now men will go content with what we spoiled'. However, as typical of Owen's style, some of these lines do not strictly adhere to this rhythm. The final, unfinished line of the poem is a perfect example, drawing the reader's attention to the finality of the soldiers' sleep.

The final line of the rhyming couplet of 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' closes the poem in Owen's distinctively simple style. The end of a day, 'dusk', becomes a metaphor not only for death, but for the traditional 'drawing down of blinds' that accompanies a funeral in small towns as a mark of respect to the dead. The alliteration of 'd' adds a subtle finality and weight to this poem in the phrase 'dusk a drawing-down'. The heaviness of the couplet moves the reader to feelings of contempt towards the system that allows for such loss of innocence and youth as well as questioning the usefulness of traditions, specifically religious, in light of such an overwhelming sorrow and loss of life.

♦ *Form*

Owen's poetic style is distinct in that he uses a traditional textual form, poetry, to subvert traditional notions about war and heroism. The traditional ceremony associated with death is referred to by Owen in 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' as a 'mockery' as such formalities try to shroud the truth about these violent and wasteful deaths. Owen then proceeds to use the remainder of the poem to list specific elements of a traditional funeral that these young men will not receive: 'prayers', 'bells', 'mourning voices', 'candle', 'pall', 'flowers' and 'the drawing down of blinds'. The repetition of negative adjective 'no' accompanied by the negative conjunction 'nor' strengthens the undignified nature of these deaths and effectively shatters any idealised notions about dying for one's country.

♦ *Rhetorical questions*

'Anthem for Doomed Youth' opens with a rhetorical question asking what symbols of mourning will be displayed for the young men who are destined to die during the Great War. Owen conveys the masses of lost lives through the simile 'for those who die as cattle', a striking figurative image that effectively dehumanises the young men who have fallen for their country during battle.

♦ *Setting*

The setting of 'Strange Meeting' is ambiguous. The reader is unsure whether the first speaker's description of the tunnel as 'Hell' is literal or metaphorical. The opening description of the man escaping 'Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped / Through granites which Titanic wars had groined' captures a possible literal image, as a lot of World War I was fought in trenches and tunnels. When he encounters the man his description of the location becomes metaphorical: 'And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall; / By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell'. The reader is unsure whether Owen is simply using a metaphor to convey the pain and suffering of the war, or whether he is imaging the two men meeting in Hell, once they are both dead. This latter interpretation is supported by the final lines of the second speaker's monologue as he reveals: 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend. / I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned / Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed. / I parried; but my hands were loath and cold'.

STASILAND

BY ANNA FUNDER

Introduction to the text

About the author

Anna Funder was born in Melbourne in 1966. Her writing, both fiction and non-fiction, has received many accolades and awards. Her novel *All That I Am* won the Miles Franklin Award in 2012. Her work of non-fiction, *Stasiland*, was awarded the Samuel Johnson Prize in 2004. She continues to write and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Type of text

Stasiland is a non-fiction text.

Context

Stasiland focuses on the lives of individuals living in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1949–1989. The GDR was established after Germany's defeat during World War II. Germany was divided between the victors—England, America, France and Russia—with half becoming the democratic, capitalist West Germany and the other half, East Germany, 'established as a satellite state of the USSR' (p. 161), and thus communist. In 1989, after a 'peaceful revolution against the Communist dictatorship in East Germany' (p. 5) the communist rule ended with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.

Audience

This text is suitable for individuals who are interested in history as well as personal stories. The text includes has mature content and is therefore suitable for an older audience.

Purpose

The purpose of this text is two-fold. On one level it gives Funder the opportunity to recount her experience of living and travelling in Germany as a young woman. On a deeper level, it gives voice to those who lived under the Stasi and who suffered as a result. It gives the reader an insight into the often ignored lives of those living and working under a totalitarian regime.

Reading the text

While this text is non-fiction, it has elements of a memoir and a travelogue, and therefore it uses a number of narrative techniques similar to a novel. When reading a memoir, you should still consider the five elements of narrative: plot, setting, characterisation, theme and style. Taking notes on these elements during your initial reading is essential. It is also important to pay close attention to the narrative voice used in the memoir. Ask yourself these questions:

- Who is narrating the story?
- Why has this narrator been chosen by the author?
- Does the narrator know absolutely everything about the story and the characters?
- Is the story being told in the first person or the third person? Why?
- Is the story written in the past, present or future tense? Why?

Key concepts and definitions

Berlin Wall—a physical barrier between East and West Berlin that was constructed by the German Democratic Republic. It was built to keep the purported fascist elements of West Germany separate from East Germany.

GDR—the German Democratic Republic. Established in 1949 at the end of World War II, it was governed by Socialist Unity Party of Germany and as such was a communist country. It discouraged its people from travelling to or associating with people from Western countries, including West Berlin.

Stasi—the Ministry for State Security of the German Democratic Republic. Known for spying on the civilian population and its various methods of surveillance and individual repression.

You need to know the following terms for this unit. The meanings are given in the glossary on pages iv–ix.

- Figurative language
- Linear structure
- Metaphor
- Rhetorical questions
- Symbolism