

AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAR POETRY OF WILFRID OWEN

by 45

LYNN KAY PARSONS

B. A., Kansas State University, 1966

---

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1969

Approved by:

*W. R. Moore*

---

Major Professor

LD  
2668  
R4  
1969  
P37

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	p.1
II. Matters of Technique	p. 1
III. Subject Matter	p. 12
IV. Analysis of One Poem as a Whole	p. 20
V. Conclusion	p. 21

**THIS BOOK  
CONTAINS  
NUMEROUS PAGES  
WITH THE ORIGINAL  
PRINTING ON THE  
PAGE BEING  
CROOKED**

**THIS IS THE BEST  
IMAGE AVAILABLE**

## AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAR POETRY OF WILFRED OWEN

### I. Introduction

Is a minor poet to be held at fault because he is not major? Or should he be appreciated for what he gave, rather than depreciated for what he didn't give? Minor poets are often unfairly criticized for not doing as much as Shakespeare, for instance, rather than given proper credit for whatever meaningful experiences they give to their readers. For many people, being a minor anything is almost the same as having a stigma attached to one's name. Wilfred Owen may have been treated more unfairly than most. (Owen? Didn't he write a couple of fairly good war poems? Didn't write anything else, though, and his view of the average fighting man was highly romanticized....) Bearing all this in mind, I would like to discuss what I like about Owen's poetry, and what makes it a meaningful experience. The most significant things to discuss from this viewpoint are Owen's use of half-rhyme, his manipulation of sound, his imagery, and his conclusions about war and about the nature of man.

### II. Matters of Technique

A discussion of half-rhyme properly belongs in the same category with manipulation of sound. I have made of it a separate category because it is "a special case." It is considered by most critics to be Owen's contribution to English prosody. D. S. R. Welland, in his critical study of Owen's poetry, leaves little to be said about Owen's half-rhyme. He prefaces his discussion by

saying that "there is no magic in half-rhyme which makes it invariably superior to pure rhyme nor does it necessarily offer a release from the constriction of pure rhyme."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say, however, that "the uniqueness and importance of Owen's peculiar use of half-rhyme remains inescapable; he gains far more than he loses by it."<sup>2</sup> Welland then gives his analysis of the contribution Owen's use of half-rhyme makes to his poetry.

Half-rhyme is right for this poetry because its note of haunting uneasiness, of frustration and melancholy, accords perfectly with the theme and the mood.<sup>3</sup>

...Owen deliberately chooses his vowels so that there is almost invariably a fall from a high-pitched to a low-pitched one....

There can be little dispute that this arrangement is deliberate, or that it does contribute to the dominant note of hopelessness that swells in these poems.<sup>4</sup>

One thing Welland doesn't mention is Owen's delight in the manipulation of sound. From A. S. Paton we learn that, from childhood, Owen was interested in words just as words.<sup>5</sup> This interest extends to vowels and consonants, as well as half-rhyme, and the reader can have almost as much pleasure watching these things at work as Owen did arranging them. In "From My Diary, July 1914" we can see him consciously playing with words.

<sup>1</sup> D. S. R. Welland, Wilfred Owen A Critical Study, (London, 1960), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> A. S. Paton, "Wilfred Owen -- His Childhood in Birkenhead," A Tribute to Wilfred Owen, compiled by T. J. Walsh, p. 7.