

WILFRED OWEN SCHOLARSHIP: 1919-1975

by

NANCY ROSE MACKENZIE

B.A., University of Northern Colorado, 1973

---

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

1976

Approved by:

  
Major Professor

LD  
2668  
R4  
1976  
M32  
C.2  
Document

317

Wilfred Owen's body of work is quite small and the best of his poems were written within a brief period of approximately two years. Yet his work has attracted attention from the beginning, and the extent of his influence has remained a subject of critical debate. Although Owen is usually considered to have status only as a war poet, critical and scholarly interest in his work, while never overwhelming, has increased steadily over the years.

It is my purpose in these pages to trace the progress of that interest from its beginnings to the present--from the earliest reviews of his poems in 1919 to the very recent biography by Jon Stallworthy. Since my aim is, in part, to illustrate the development of trends in Owen criticism, I have arranged the material chronologically, summarizing the main critical concerns--as well as the new critical and biographical contributions--of each decade.

At the outset, however, it will be well to name the principal resources of a student of Owen, most of them only rather recently available. There is now, besides a reliable edition of the poems, a full bibliography of secondary materials, a reliable critical introduction, and an admirable biography that sums up what is known of the man.

The biography is Jon Stallworthy's Wilfred Owen (1974[#43]).<sup>1</sup> Before Stallworthy's there were two biographical sources available: Edmund Blunden's "Memoir" [#3] and Harold Owen's three-volume work, Journey from Obscurity [#35]. But the first was incomplete and the second lacked the needed objectivity. Stallworthy draws extensively on Harold Owen's chronicle

<sup>1</sup>See Bibliography, Item 43. All subsequent works on Owen are listed in the Bibliography by number, and cited by those numbers in the text: e.g. [#43].

for his characterization of Wilfred as a child and a young soldier, but goes beyond it in many ways, notably in his description of Owen's stay at Craiglockhart War Hospital (where the poet first met Sassoon). Here, he is able to draw on Sassoon's memoirs and on Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters [#5] to provide a more thorough account than is available elsewhere.

Although there was no thorough biography until 1974, the first full-length critical study of Owen's work appeared quite a bit earlier: D.S.R. Welland in 1960 published Wilfred Owen: A Critical Study [#48]. Welland discusses Owen's early ideas on poetry, and examines the impact war had on his development. Neither biographer nor critic encroaches on the other's territory: Stallworthy seldom analyzes the individual poems, and Welland does not attempt biography. Stallworthy's and Welland's books are the most notable of all the secondary material on Owen.

The fullest bibliography of works on Owen is William White's Wilfred Owen (1893-1918): A Bibliography (1967[#1]). In 1970 (The Serif [#2]) White updated his bibliography of poems, translations, editions, biography, criticism, and reviews. The entry for Owen in The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (Vol. 4, 1972) is more selective.

The poems themselves are available in three editions: Sassoon's, Edmund Blunden's, and (currently the standard) C. Day Lewis's. The various editors have faced numerous difficulties because many of the poems are fragmentary or unrevised, and because only four of them were published before Owen was killed in battle on 4 November 1918. An additional seven were anthologized by Dame Edith Sitwell in Wheels, 1919: Fourth Cycle. It was Sitwell who largely prepared the first edition of Poems (1920[#6]). Siegfried Sassoon wrote an introduction to the volume, and he has usually

been credited with the editorship. Sitwell's greater role in preparing the edition was pointed out by Joseph Cohen ("Wilfred Owen: Fresher Fields than Flanders," [#14]) in 1964. Cohen details the deficiencies of this text, as well as those of Blunden's 1931 edition, The Poems of Wilfred Owen [#3], which included his well-known "Memoir," nine pages of notes on revisions and variants, and some poems not previously published.

C. Day Lewis's edition, The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen (1963 [#4]), is more thorough in both notes and variants. Besides including many new poems, this now standard edition indicates the locations of the available manuscripts (most in the British Museum), and incorporates relevant material from Owen's correspondence to approximate the composition dates of some of the poems. Another helpful feature of this edition is its arrangement: part one brings together the war poems; part two groups the fragments and poems on other subjects; part three consists of selected juvenilia.

## I

Owen's poems did not have to wait long for critical recognition. Sitwell's Wheels volume was reviewed by J. Middleton Murry in the Athenaeum in 1919. He describes "Strange Meeting" as the "most magnificent expression of the emotional significance of the war that has yet been achieved by English poetry" [#34,p.147]. Murry focuses on two aspects of Owen's poetry: his imitation of Keats, and his "monosyllabic assonances." Owen's rhyme technique, which Murry calls "the discovery of genius" [#34,p.147], became a primary topic for other early Owen critics.

With the publication of the first edition of Owen's poems, additional reviews appeared. Reviewers for the Times Literary Supplement, although

impressed by "Strange Meeting," were somewhat hesitant to praise Owen's technique. A review of 16 December 1920 includes this comment: "A curious vagary of technique may be noted in the writer's habit . . . [of using] imperfect rhymes" [#7]. Another TLS reviewer (6 January 1921) calls attention to the "peculiar type of rhyme" [#8] which, he believes, Owen uses deftly to suit his purpose.

Besides the interest in Owen's rhyming, there appeared a natural tendency in early criticism (one which continues even today) to compare Owen with the other war poets of his generation, especially Brooke and Sassoon. H. P. Collins, writing in 1925, devotes at least the first half of his chapter "The War and Wilfred Owen" [#17] to discussion of Brooke. Then, primarily as a mode of transition--or so it seems, since he does not attempt a point by point comparison or contrast--he notices the striking differences in the two poets' techniques. Collins finishes off his chapter with insightful remarks on Owen's diction.

In addition to Collins's work there are two short essays in which Owen and Brooke are compared. In "The Poetry of Wilfred Owen" [#20] Ifan Kyrle Fletcher says the two poets differ in that Brooke is continually striving for the well-turned phrase, whereas Owen consciously avoids it. Fletcher goes on to assert that Owen's greater strength lies primarily in his emotional depth and skill in presenting recollected emotional experiences. In "A War Debt That Can Never Be Honoured" C. Henry Warren says, "Owen in fact is Rupert Brooke grown up" [#46,p.110]. He believes Owen is indebted to Brooke and is surprised that the debt has not been recognized; but he neglects to illustrate the nature or extent of the alleged influence.

During the next decade, comparison of Owen and his mentor Siegfried Sassoon--whose name has been frequently linked with Owen's since his edition

of Owen's Poems--continues to be a topic of critical discussion. In The Criterion (1931) I. M. Parsons asserts that Owen's "sensibility is finer and his imagination richer than Sassoon's" [#36,p.659]. Parsons' brief comparison of the two poets distinguishes between Sassoon's satire and Owen's "sublime indignation." The superiority of Owen's verse over that of Sassoon is stressed also by David Daiches, who argues--quoting passages from both poets--that Owen's emotion is more genuine and controlled [#18]. Whereas Sassoon's vision is sometimes distorted by anger or despair, Owen's, Daiches says, is clear and penetrating. Almost the only critic for whom the comparison of these two poets is not decisively to Owen's advantage is Edmund Blunden, who allows Sassoon at least a sort of equality: "He [Owen] was, apart from Mr. Sassoon, the greatest of the English war poets" [#3,p.39].

Comparison of Owen and Sassoon is only one of the points dealt with by Blunden, and other critics, during the thirties. Blunden's "Memoir" contributes biographical information chiefly, but also touches on Owen's technique and influence. Having access to Owen's letters, from which he quotes extensively, Blunden provides information about Owen's life generally unavailable up to that time. The memoir also contains personal remembrances by two people--one a fellow officer--who knew Owen. In language which recalls Murry's earlier praise, Blunden describes the effect of Owen's pararhyme: "again and again by means of it he creates remoteness, darkness, emptiness, shock, echo, the last word" [#3,p.29]. With regard to Owen's influence on the technique of later poets, Blunden says that "imitators have been few" [#3,p.29]. He explains why this is so: "Only an innate, unconventional command over language, and a rich and loving vocabulary--in short, only a genius for poetry could for long work in that uncommon medium" [#3,p.29].

Besides Blunden, C. Day Lewis and David Daiches during the thirties expressed views on the extent of Owen's influence; their opinions differ. For example, in A Hope for Poetry [#30,p.2] C. Day Lewis ranks Owen with G. M. Hopkins and T. S. Eliot as the "immediate ancestors" of post-war poetry. Day Lewis describes the affinity post-war poets felt with Owen:

Owen commends himself to post-war poets largely because they feel themselves to be in the same predicament; they feel the same lack of a stable background against which the dance of words may stand out plainly, the same distrust and horror of the unnatural forms into which life for the majority of people is being forced. [#30,p.15]

On the other hand, in New Literary Values [#18,p.65] David Daiches asserts that whereas modern poets have been influenced somewhat by Owen's form (his experiments with half-rhyme, for example), they have remained uninfluenced by the "content" of Owen's poetry. According to Daiches, the modern poet's experience and view of reality have been too different for him to learn much that affected his writing of poetry. Daiches' and Day Lewis's views on Owen's influence, then, seem to be in direct opposition.

One of the most comprehensive early critical studies of Owen is the article by I. M. Parsons already mentioned, "The Poems of Wilfred Owen." His focus on the pity in Owen's verse marks the beginning of a dominant trend in Owen criticism, a trend stemming from the well-known statement in Owen's Preface:

My subject is War, and the pity of War.  
The Poetry is in the pity. [#4,p.31]

Identifying the dominant emotion in the poetry and studying the methods by which it is expressed is Parsons' chief aim. Although he devotes most of his discussion to the methods, he says that Owen's "significance is primarily one of purpose rather than of form" [#36,p.667]. He explains how Owen's

realist method--the poet's use of his own experience to convey his reaction to war--rises out of his indignation. This indignation, "or perhaps indignation chastened and restrained by pity," Parsons says, "emerges as the dominant emotion of his verse" [#36,p.660]. The conflict between indignation and pity, according to Parsons, "is responsible for the crude, hard, astringent quality" of many of Owen's poems [#36,p.660].

After describing the emotional content, Parsons moves on to investigate Owen's technique. His discussion focuses on Owen's use of alliteration, as well as assonance and dissonance, and his rhythmical structure. He points to Owen's alliterative method as new--or at least significantly different--in that it becomes an "integral part of the emotional content" of the poems [#36,p.663]. He likens the effect of Owen's use of assonance and dissonance to that of a metaphysical conceit: "it combines an element of surprise with a subsequent sense of satisfaction or assent" [#36,p.664]. And with regard to rhythmical structure, Parsons finds the poems demonstrate two particular effects. The first he describes as the "resolution of a conflict between extreme verbal emphasis on the one hand and extreme rhythmical restraint on the other" [#36,p.664]; the second effect is exhibited when the "rhythm is caught up and held, as it were momentarily above a precipice, before it topples precipitatedly [sic] in a swift cascade of sound" [#36,p.665]. In view of the technical sophistication of Parsons' article, it is perhaps surprising that no one seems to have taken this up in subsequent criticism.

Owen's methods, asserts Parsons, account for his success in communicating his experience. Only he and Sassoon adopt the realist method; but whereas Sassoon uses it more as a mode of satire, Owen lets it express a

straightforward moral anger. Owen's methods "do not lend themselves easily to imitation" says Parsons [#36,p.666]; this comment echoes closely the view expressed by Blunden. Parsons believes "Owen neither followed nor founded any school" [#36,p.666].

The pity in Owen's poetry, which is described by Parsons as "neither maudlin sentiment nor petty self-commiseration" [#36,p.669], is described in a similar fashion four years later by Stephen Spender. In a brief chapter in The Destructive Element [#41], Spender emphasizes that pity, in the best of Owen's work, is no mere subjective emotion, but a means of transcending the subjective, the limited and merely personal. Spender links Owen's pity with the tragic pity of works like King Lear.

This stress on the importance of Owen's pity continued throughout the decade, as illustrated by J. Loiseau's article in 1939, "A Reading of Wilfred Owen's Poems" [#31]. Quoting from letters and poems, Loiseau describes how Owen was tortured by the war, and how he resolved to emphasize for his readers the horror of war. He believes that Owen's greatness rises out of his pity:

Because he so intensely felt the misery of his fellow-sufferers, he rose above mere realism, satire, propaganda, or rhetoric. [#31,p.103]

Like Spender and Parsons, Loiseau stresses that Owen's pity was an expression of his humanity; his goal was realistic, truthful presentation of the suffering all around him, not satire or bitter accusation.

The similarity of Loiseau's interpretation to that of Parsons' is evident, but there is a significant difference of opinion to be noted. Parsons focuses on the conflict in Owen between pity and indignation, whereas Loiseau emphasizes primarily the pity. An assertion like Loiseau's

"his [Owen's] greatness may truly be said to rise out of his pity" [#31,p.103] is not to be found in Parsons' article. Whereas Loiseau implies that Owen's profound pity made him a poet, Parsons believes that Owen's emotion--by itself--was not enough to create poetry. Parsons writes: "It is only because his sense of values was keen enough to temper and control his indignation, that the latter could be directed successfully into a creative channel" [#36,p.668].

Loiseau, on the other hand, makes a distinction between Owen as a poet and Owen as a realistic interpreter of the brutalities of war. Referring to Owen's Preface, he illustrates how Owen felt he had to sacrifice pure poetry to carry out his mission. Owen was, above all, asserts Loiseau, a lover of beauty and tradition: "To the end, the direct, unconventional violence--what we call the modern element--in his war-verse remained alien to him, outraged his deepest instincts and beliefs" [#31,p.108]. Thus, for Loiseau, there is an irony in Owen's fame as a war poet.

## II

The value of Owen's work was recognized during the thirties with critical response ranging from attention to his pity and the methods by which he expresses it, to discussion of his own poetic growth and influence on later poets. But with the coming of the Second World War, the critics' interests shifted to seeing Owen in his wartime context, and to finding his relevance to a world again at war. Criticism of the forties--and, to a lesser extent, of the fifties as well--was dominated by these interests.

Two critics of the forties who stress the relevance of Owen's war poetry to that particular time are Patricia Ledward and Patric Dickinson.

Of the two, Ledward is more insistent regarding the benefit to be derived from reading Owen's message. She says: "This great poet and messenger can perfectly express and shape our sufferings and perhaps alleviate the dark sense of doom" [#29,p.99]. Dickinson too believes that current conditions render Owen's poems especially understandable as they detail suffering another war has made familiar [#19,p.331].

Ledward's treatment is more general than Dickinson's; essentially, her article is an introduction to Owen. She outlines his brief life and cites particular poems which illustrate characteristic attitudes and techniques. Ledward explains that Owen wanted to counteract the influence of war-glorifying platitudes. But his genius, she points out, was his skill in handling rhythm and language. Her biographical summary and brief description of Owen's work, though it contributes very little that is new, is justified, Ledward feels, because of previous neglect of Owen. And she is certain that "if at all it is during this war that Owen will take his rightful place among the great English poets" [#29,p.99].

Dickinson, like Ledward, turned to Owen because conditions called especially for a war poet; but Dickinson focuses more closely on Owen's technique. He discusses Owen's concept of pity as expressed in the fragmentary Preface to his planned volume of poetry and as illustrated in his poems. Dickinson finds something lacking: "The statement of horror in terms of its actual ingredients does not necessarily make poetry or evoke the emotion which it desires" [#19,p.328]. He is not inclined to praise Owen in the generalized glowing terms common in previous criticism. Nor does he respect Owen's slant rhyme as much as earlier critics did: "often you feel that the assonances were thought of first and the lines written to fit them,

even in his best poems" [#19,p.329]. Nevertheless, in some poems Owen was entirely successful, concludes Dickinson, and left his mark on later poets' work.

These two articles are representative of Owen criticism during the forties. Critical treatment was broad in scope with little attention to particular poems. And this was quantitatively the least productive decade.

As the next decade began, D.S.R. Welland refocused attention on Owen's half-rhyme. In his article of 1950, "Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen: Its Derivation and Use" [#47] (most of which was absorbed into the chapter on half-rhyme in A Critical Study), Welland describes what half-rhyme is and explains that Owen uses it in its strictest form. He points out that half-rhyme was not invented by Owen; earlier English and American poets who used it include Henry Vaughan, G. M. Hopkins, and Emily Dickinson. Welland rejects these three, however, as probable sources for Owen's use of half-rhyme. More likely as an antecedent for Owen, asserts Welland, is the work of the French poet and novelist Jules Romains. Welland believes Owen was probably introduced to Romains' work by Laurent Tailhade, who guided and influenced Owen during his two year stay in France. Welland concludes, however, that no positive source from which Owen derived his technique can be traced.

Five years after the appearance of Welland's article David Masson published "Wilfred Owen's Free Phonetic Patterns: Their Style and Function" [#32] which, while drawing on Welland's work, emphasizes patterns in Owen's phonetic devices. Following a full description of Owen's "elaborate and ritualistic" patterning [#32,p.366], Masson concludes that "these internal alliterative/assonant patterns, with their kinesthetic and musical

shapefulness, function . . . as a compensation . . . for Owen's discordant half-rhymes . . ." [#32,pp.368-69]. These internal patternings probably did not stem from an acquaintance with Romains' work, argues Masson, but resemble more closely patterns in the verse of Shelley, Rimbaud, and Hopkins.

The focus on Owen's sociological relevance which characterized criticism of the forties continued somewhat into the fifties. For example, in "The Importance of Wilfred Owen" (1954) Howard Sergeant writes: "The increasing tendency today towards centralization and uniformity . . . emphasizes the validity of Owen's poetry for our own troubled age" [#39,p.11]. Another--at least partially--sociological interpretation of Owen's work is that of Dylan Thomas who (also in 1954) writes: "we can see, rereading Owen, that he is a poet of all times, all places, and all wars" [#44,pp.118-19].

Thomas's chapter on Owen in Quite Early One Morning [#44] presents the reader a sympathetic, colorful description of Owen the soldier-poet. He quotes extensively from the poems themselves and argues for Owen's influence--ranking him in that particular with W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot. Thomas's chapter is worth reading for its energetic, vivid discussion of Owen and his work, though it is too sketchy to serve as an introduction to Owen, and lacks detailed analyses of poems.

Joseph Cohen, the student of Owen responsible for the largest number of separate pieces of Owen scholarship and criticism, published several reports on the state of Oweniana during the fifties. For example, in 1955 his "Wilfred Owen War Poetry Collection" was published in Library Chronicle of the University of Texas [#13], and two years later his article

"Wilfred Owen in America" appeared in Prairie Schooner [#16]. The 1955 article is a report on the Owen War Poetry Collection in the Rare Books Library at the University of Texas. This collection demonstrates that Owen had certainly achieved recognition and aroused scholarly interest, at one university at least, in the United States by the mid-fifties. The report is interesting for its detailed account of available letters, micro-film reproductions of manuscripts, photostats of war documents, and how it all came to be collected.

In his later article "Wilfred Owen in America" Cohen suggests reasons for "Owen's failure to achieve popular recognition in America" [#16,p.339]. In his discussion of the identification people sometimes make with a soldier hero, Cohen comments on the sociological implications of the comparative neglect of Owen in America. He compares Rupert Brooke's popular status with that of Alan Seeger and Joyce Kilmer, and points out Owen's lack of such popular acclaim. In 1957, according to Cohen, Owen was strictly a "'poet's poet'" [#16,p.345].

In addition to adopting the sociological approach, Cohen also focuses on the biographical--as well as the structural--elements in Owen's work. His 1955 article "Wilfred Owen's Greater Love" [#15], anticipating the work of another critic later in the fifties, Samuel J. Hazo, turns attention to Owen's predominant theme. Cohen's article is a well-organized, in-depth analysis of the theme of sacrifice (or as Cohen phrases it--the theme of "greater love") in Owen's verse. Cohen seeks to "establish the point of view that Owen was above all a spiritual poet, and that the distinguishing spiritual element in his poetry is a thoroughly developed religious concept which he called the greater love" [#15,p.106]. Owen's sacrifice theme had been mentioned by earlier critics, but Cohen was the

first to suggest Owen's motivation for employing this theme and to trace its development in his work.

In his article "The Passion of Wilfred Owen" [#24] Samuel J. Hazo, although not explicitly using Cohen's work as a basis, takes up where Cohen leaves off and argues that Owen's best poems are those which incorporate the theme of sacrifice. First, Hazo divides the poems into two groups. One group, Owen's poems of "indignation," includes the poems which deal with wounded soldiers; Hazo believes these are not as good. "In an attempt to dramatize the plight of these wounded men, he has verged on melodrama" [#24,p.203], asserts Hazo, specifically of "Conscious" and "Disabled." The other group is composed of poems which equate the "soldier's suffering with the scourging of Christ--one aspect of a parallel that is at the core of Owen's best poems" [#24,p.203]. The bulk of Hazo's discussion centers on the poems in this second group, "Greater Love" and "Anthem for Doomed Youth," for example. He argues that the equation of the soldier's suffering and death with the Passion of Christ lends to Owen's verse "transcendental significance" [#24,p.208].

These articles of the fifties, specifically those treating Owen's parahrhyme and sacrifice theme, illustrate the lessening need for critics to introduce Owen. A select few of his poems had been frequently reprinted in anthologies and a substantial enough quantity of criticism and scholarship had been published by that time so that critics no longer felt obliged to explain who Owen was before they could proceed to develop their theses.

### III

Criticism of the sixties began solidly with the publication of D.S.R. Welland's Critical Study. As Welland states in his preface, the work

is intended as a companion to Blunden's Poems of Wilfred Owen and, therefore, designed for the reader already acquainted with both Owen's poetry and Blunden's memoir. This small book, approximately 150 pages, contains analyses of many poems, comments on half-rhyme (as mentioned earlier), discussion of influences on Owen as well as summary of Owen's influence on later poets, and explanation of textual problems in the manuscripts.

The poems themselves which Welland calls elegies receive most of his attention. To facilitate clear description (and, to some extent, evaluation) Welland categorizes Owen's verse into three groupings: poems of "dramatic description" those of "personal response" and poems of "imaginative description" [#48,p.73]. The poems of this latter group, Welland argues, are Owen's best. Poems such as "Exposure," "Asleep," and "The Sentry" illustrate the "imaginative process of re-creation [wherein] the individual and the episode become universalised" [#48,p.75]. Welland believes these "imaginative description[s] are in many ways more far-reaching in their implications and more satisfactory as poetry" than Owen's other poems [#48,p.73].

In 1961 Philip Hobsbaum lamented the early death of Owen, and two contemporaries, because poetry was suffering from the loss. Hobsbaum begins his provocative article "The Road Not Taken" [#25] by asserting that "modernism in English poetry is beginning to seem something of an American imposition" [#25,p.860]. He maintains that the influence of American poets--specifically Pound and Eliot--has been harmful. Had three young English poets, Edward Thomas, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen, lived, their poetry "would surely have constituted a big challenge to the prevailing standards in poetry" [#25,p.860]. The chief accomplishment of

these three, which might have prevented the bad influence of an "essentially American revolution in verse technique" [#25,p.863], is a thorough reshaping of traditional forms, argues Hobsbaum.

Since other critics of the sixties linked Owen and Rosenberg (as will be pointed out later), the particular similarities Hobsbaum finds in the works of these two should be noted. He explains, for example, that both use the first person plural narrator in their poems; yet each conveys an attitude or emotion about something greater than himself. Most important, asserts Hobsbaum, Owen and Rosenberg, and Thomas as well, contributed an advancement in technique and sensibility.

Three years after the appearance of Welland's major critical assessment, Harold Owen complemented it with the first volume of a major biography, Journey from Obscurity: Wilfred Owen 1893-1918 [#35]. Volume One was subtitled "Childhood," and was followed in 1964 by the second volume, "Youth," and in 1965 by a final volume, "War." There are strengths as well as weaknesses in this biography by a member of the poet's family. There is certainly a wealth of first-hand information; hence the story of Wilfred Owen's life is told from a not altogether objective point of view. It becomes clear, for example, that because of the Owen family's restricting financial circumstances Wilfred's educational advantages were attained sometimes at the expense of Harold's. The brothers' relationship, until only a short time before Wilfred's death, was rather strained. Harold's chronicle is not, however, unduly colored by ill feelings.

Most informative and interesting are the first two volumes. Since many critics, in dealing with Owen and his verse, emphasize his rather shy, reserved manner and compassion for his fellow man, it is interesting to see

how domineering and, at times, harsh Wilfred was as a youngster toward his younger brothers and sister. The third volume is less informative because Harold saw his brother so seldom while he was in the army. More about Owen's growth as a poet is to be learned from the writings of those who knew him during the war--from which Stallworthy's biography (see below) draws extensively.

By the mid-sixties there was no longer a need to argue for Owen's importance. Substantial evidence of it is to be found not only in such a compilation as T. J. Walsh's A Tribute to Wilfred Owen [#45], with its personal statements from such figures as Sir Herbert Read and T. S. Eliot, but also in lengthy treatment of the poems in three critical surveys of the time: English Poetry of The First World War by John H. Johnston [#26], Heroes' Twilight by Bernard Bergonzi [#9], and Frederick Grubb's A Vision of Reality [#23].

John H. Johnston's chapter "Poetry and Pity: Wilfred Owen" is a first-rate study of the poems and the poet's development. He explicates Owen's major poems, analyzing the dominant themes, the use of paradox, and the abrupt contrasts and ironic reversals. Johnston's concern with tracing Owen's development is illustrated by the way he identifies certain poems. For example, he points to "Happiness" as Owen's first poem expressing a personal reaction to the war. He identifies a different poem, "Exposure," as Owen's first important war poem; also it contains the first use of pararhyme in a war poem.

Johnston separates the poetry into two basic divisions: that written before August 1917, which was influenced by Sassoon, and that written between August 1917 and September 1918--what Johnston calls the "creative

period"[#26,p.166]. He believes those poems which demonstrate Sassoon's influence ("Dulce et Decorum Est," for example) represent a cynical attitude not really natural to Owen's verse. Johnston finds the poems of the latter period more profound, truer to Owen's inspiration. Although he considers Owen's body of poetry eloquent, Johnston concludes: "Despite Owen's extraordinary sensitivity and his efforts to reconcile that sensitivity to the demands of formal poetic art, his achievement does not measure up to the vast tragic potentialities of his material" [#26,p.205].

Unlike Johnston's, neither of the other two surveys, Bergonzi's Heroes' Twilight and Grubb's A Vision of Reality, devotes a chapter to Owen alone. Whereas early critics were inclined to compare Owen with Rupert Brooke, these more recent studies juxtapose Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, no doubt following the lead of F. R. Leavis, who had made the comparison briefly in his New Bearings in English Poetry in 1932.

In his chapter "Rosenberg and Owen" Bergonzi confines his discussion to Owen's more famous poems. He believes the two poets differ chiefly in Owen's emphasis on realistic details of maiming and death. Bergonzi does not attempt a detailed comparison of the two poets.

Grubb's chapter (somewhat more complex than Bergonzi's) "The Embattled Truth: Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg" also links these two poets without really comparing them. Grubb devotes the first part of his chapter to discussion of Owen and the latter half to Rosenberg. As a transition between the two sections Grubb writes: "[Rosenberg's] art is not obviously striking nor is he altogether a 'war poet,' but his work is founded on rare gifts and will prove to be as permanent as Owen's . . . ." [#23,p.85]. Grubb's discussion of Owen touches on imagery, colloquial modes,

themes, fictional method, irony, and attitude toward nature. To date no one has carried the comparison of Owen and Rosenberg so far as to examine individual poems in minute detail.

The year 1965 was a productive and various one in Owen criticism. An approach completely different from Bergonzi's or Grubb's formalistic analyses is exhibited in yet another of Joseph Cohen's articles, "Owen Agonistes" [#12]. Cohen's interpretation depends on a chiefly biographical reading of Owen's work. A biographical reading is hindered, Cohen feels, by Harold Owen whom he accuses of being responsible for a conspiracy to keep certain human dimensions of Wilfred Owen guarded. Carefully making the distinction between latent and practicing homosexuality, Cohen asserts that latent homosexuality "is the final key to understanding Owen's achievement, and that the position he took toward the war was almost entirely motivated by homosexual elements" [#12,p.256].

The negative reaction such biographical criticism is likely to provoke is illustrated by Gertrude M. White's article "Critics' Key: Poem or Personality?" [#49]. In response to Cohen's article White argues: "The question of whether details of Wilfred Owen's life can be interpreted as furnishing evidence of latent homosexuality . . . supplies no such 'key' to Owen's poetry as Mr. Cohen claims" [#49,p.178].

White's article is absorbed into the final chapter of her full-length study Wilfred Owen (Twayne's English Author Series, 1969 [#50]). In her book White discusses the major aspects of Owen's life, his poetic growth, and characteristics of his poetry. The theme of soldier as sacrificial victim, along with other themes--such as war as violation of nature--are treated. Her book's helpfulness stems partially from its format; the

chapters are subdivided and labeled according to the topic of discussion. For example, among the several headings within the fourth chapter "My Craft or Art" are "Half-rhyme," "Convention and Tradition," and "Vocabulary and Diction." These subheadings facilitate reference for the student with particular questions or interests. Also helpful is the annotated bibliography.

In her informative fifth chapter, "Afterwards: The Growth of Owen's Reputation," White briefly discusses reasons for--as well as reactions to--W. B. Yeats' refusal to include Owen in his Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936). Mentioning Yeats' 1936 letter to Dorothy Wellesley in which Yeats says Owen is "all blood, dirt, & sucked sugar stick," White concludes that Yeats' exclusion of Owen from his anthology probably damaged his own reputation more than Owen's.

Partially because of his rejection of Owen's poetry, Yeats' anthology drew immediate attack from reviewers;<sup>2</sup> and his denunciation of Owen has continued to pique interest. Although it involves a minor disruption of the chronological order of this survey, it seems most efficient to summarize at this point three articles, each representing a different decade, which examine the relationship between the work of these two poets.

The earliest of these three, D. S. Savage's 1948 article, "Two Prophetic Poems" [#38], contrasts Yeats' "The Second Coming" and Owen's "Strange Meeting," but also seeks to point out similar prophetic qualities in these two poems. The characteristic endowing both poems with prophetic

<sup>2</sup>Some of these reviewers are quoted by Joseph Cohen in his article "In Memory of W. B. Yeats--and Wilfred Owen" [#11].

significance, explains Savage, is "great intensity of vision directed . . . to the fate of man in history" [#38,p.68]. Savage enumerates several points the two poems have in common, but goes on to point out their extreme dissimilarity in emotional attitude. In addition to his examination of the poems, Savage contrasts the poets' personal qualities, focusing on their opposing life-styles, aesthetic outlooks, and attitudes toward pity.

Joseph Cohen's article, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats--And Wilfred Owen," published in 1959 [#11], examines the basis for Yeats' ill feelings toward Owen. Cohen suggests two explanations. Yeats attacked Owen's excessively lush diction, asserts Cohen, because "he [Yeats] saw reflected there some of his own youthful diction" [#11,p.642]. A stronger reason for Yeats' rejection of Owen, however, he suggests, is their opposing conception of the theme of war. Cohen says Yeats believed in the "joy of battle" [#11,p.643] as the proper theme for poetry; therefore his denunciation was "never an entirely personal offense mounted directly against Owen, but a defense of a long-cherished poetic principle no longer popular" [#11,p.649].

The most recent article on the kinship of Yeats and Owen is Jon Stallworthy's "W. B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen" [#42], published in 1969. Rather than contrast the two poets' personalities or speculate about Yeats' motives, Stallworthy concerns himself chiefly with tracing Yeats' influence on Owen. Stallworthy says, "internal evidence suggests that Yeats was a later and a stronger influence than all except Keats" [#42,p.200]. Quoting extensively from both poets, he points out how Owen echoed and sometimes parodied Yeats' work. Stallworthy believes that Owen often drew on Yeats' vocabulary to achieve an ironic emphasis. For example, Stallworthy speculates about Owen's intended implication in "The Show" with its epigraph

from Yeats' play The Shadowy Waters. And he concludes that Owen introduced the lines "as a springboard catapulting the reader, with a whiplash of irony, into 'The Show,' the language of murderous reality making a savage contrast with Yeats's dreamy Pre-Raphaelite diction" [#42,p.203].

These three articles illustrate not only the various aspects of the Owen-Yeats connection--similarities in their poems, differences in their attitudes, and extent of influences--which arouse speculation and examination, but also indicate the continuing inclination of critics to study Owen in his poetical-historical context. But an important development here is that critics no longer confine themselves to comparing Owen only with other war poets.

An additional work, a primary source, must be mentioned before concluding discussion of Owen study during the sixties. In 1967 Harold Owen and John Bell published their edition of Owen's correspondence, Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters. Related especially to Owen's poetic development are his letters from the battlefield and those to Sassoon. The majority of the 673 letters (including postcards and incomplete letters) published are addressed to the poet's mother. The letters date from 1898--Owen's first letter to his mother when he was five--to 31 October 1918. The editors provide helpful notes, and include numerous photographs and an appendix containing some letters Owen received from Robert Graves.

Owen study during this decade was more extensive than in any other and balanced among several areas of interest. Primary sources include, besides the Collected Letters, Day Lewis's edition of The Collected Poems. Available biographical information was greatly increased by Harold Owen's three-volume memoir. And criticism appeared in journal articles, survey

chapters, and--for the first time--in books devoted entirely to Owen's work.

#### IV

A valuable contribution of the early seventies is Arthur Lane's book on Sassoon and Owen, An Adequate Response, published in 1972 [#27]. Lane's stated purpose is to examine the validity of Sassoon's and Owen's poetic response to the experience of war. Specifically on Owen, Lane writes about his poetry of experience, his milieu, and characteristics of his imagery. He begins with a cogent discussion of Owen's Preface, explaining that Owen's foremost goal was meaningful expression of a message--the untold truth. Lane concerns himself with how Owen was true "both morally and aesthetically" in his poetry [#27,p.13].

Since war constituted Owen's personal context as well as his subject, Lane discusses the character of the war which generated Owen's poetry. Also an important component of the milieu were poets like Brooke and Jessie Pope who represented the home-front view of the war. These popular poets, Lane says, were unequal to Owen artistically, and unable to comprehend the moral implication of such far-reaching conflict. This especially applies to Jessie Pope, to whom Owen had originally dedicated "Dulce et Decorum Est." The dedication was ironic, an attempt to deride what he saw as her facile, patriotic verse.

Characterizing Owen's milieu is only one of Lane's goals; he also focuses on Owen's imagery. He points out the prominence of visual imagery, much of it suggesting an underwater setting. He comments on the antithesis and paradox of images in "Spring Offensive," and "Greater Love" is cited

as an example of Owen's use of ambivalent images to express a disparity between two attitudes. Lane is full of praise for the success of Owen's "imaginative transformation of experience into image" [#27,p.157].

An Adequate Response concludes with a brief discussion of current critical judgments. Especially interesting are Lane's opinion of Bergonzi's survey and his comments on Johnston's assessment of Owen.

Heightened critical interest in Owen's poetic technique has been demonstrated in several journal articles of the present decade. Horace Posey's "Muted Satire in 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'" [#37] stands out in Owen criticism because it focuses on a single poem. The distinction between Owen's Christian compassion for fellow sufferers and his rejection of orthodox religion is emphasized by Posey. "It is these two elements, tenderness in the face of human suffering and a mockery of the institutional forms presuming to memorialise death, that give the poem both its force and its form" [#27,p.378]. Owen's rejection of religious ceremony motivates the satirical element in "Anthem." Yet the satire is muted, explains Posey, because Owen retains conventional symbols.

At this point an earlier article (cited in Posey's notes) should be mentioned. Rosemary Freeman's 1963 article, "Parody as a Literary Form: George Herbert and Wilfred Owen" [#21], emphasizes the role of irony in Owen's verse. Freeman asserts: "Both [Herbert and Owen] adopt the formulae of love poetry but direct them to other occasions. The principle is a principle of parody, for the method without losing the emotional force of the original creates a standard which exposes the limitation of its context" [#21,p.308].

Freeman's argument, particularly her discussion of "Greater Love" stimulated a recent response from Jennifer Breen. In her article of 1974,

"Wilfred Owen: 'Greater Love' and Late Romanticism" [#10], Breen writes: "Dr. Freeman notices that 'Greater Love' parodies some general poetic conventions, but she does not recognize that Owen is parodying a specific poem" [#10,p.177]. Breen believes that Owen's "Greater Love" parodies Swinburne's poem "Before the Mirror." Through his parody, Owen rejects the values of late Romantic love poetry, says Breen, and he exposes the weakness of the culture Romantic poetry represents. Breen argues that in his war poetry Owen "ironically inverts many of the conventions and sentiments of both Romantic poetry and institutionalized Christianity" [#10,p.176].

The relatively recent critical trend, as illustrated by these articles,<sup>3</sup> to close analysis of the formal elements--especially irony--in Owen's poetry does not entirely dominate the critical scene. Owen students continue to demonstrate their interest in his personal attitudes as revealed in his work.

Two distinguished surveys which, at least partially, approach Owen biographically are Jon Silkin's Out of Battle [#40] and The Great War and Modern Memory (1975) by Paul Fussell [#22].

In his lengthy chapter on Owen, Silkin traces Owen's use of nature, linking it with other themes, to arrive at an interpretation of his attitude toward nature itself and toward war and its effects. Pointing to "Exposure" as a representative poem, Silkin argues that Owen uses nature in a new way for him (at this point in his development) and that this way is different

<sup>3</sup>Also pertinent is an article by Timothy O'Keeffe, "Ironical Allusion in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen," Ariel, 3 (1972). O'Keeffe traces sources of particular allusions in Owen's verse and shows how they are ironic.

from the view of nature he inherited from the Romantics. Silkin concludes that Owen's view of nature is twofold: nature, usually a "benign sustaining entity," becomes a "force hostile to man for as long as he makes war" [#40,p.219]. Owen does not believe that man is nature's victim in war, says Silkin; man is responsible for his own suffering. Silkin's chapter deals with more than this single theme; his discussion of Owen's compassionate impulse and protest against war is certainly worth consulting.

In his brief section "The Homoerotic Sensuousness of Wilfred Owen," Fussell asserts that in Owen's poetry homoerotic impulses "are transfigured and sublimated with little diminution of their emotional warmth" [#22,p.286]. After identifying Owen's favorite sensuous images--particularly kissing--Fussell proceeds to briefly argue that Owen seeks to achieve an "intimate identification" with soldiers by dwelling on sensuous physical details [#22,p.291]. Fussell goes on to point out resemblances between Owen and Hopkins in their use of sensuous imagery.

A recent aid to study of Owen's poetry is James F. McIlroy's Wilfred Owen: A Study Guide (1974[#33]). This small paperback is designed primarily for the student not yet fully acquainted with Owen's work. Publication of such a study guide indicates that Owen is now considered a sufficiently established poet for general readers, besides those specializing in twentieth-century British poetry, to be interested in his work. Brief analysis of each of the war poems (arranged as they appear in Day Lewis's edition) makes up the bulk of this study guide. Without undermining Owen's poetic achievement, McIlroy frankly points out some faults in particular poems. For example, he describes "Greater Love" as a "flawed poem which begins interestingly but loses impact as the sharpness of Owen's focus is

lost" [#33,p.37]. More often, however, McIlroy explains the success of certain poems.

McIlroy's sixteen-page introduction provides a biographical summary and outlines the major influences on Owen's poetry. Most influential, he explains, were Owen's mother, the poetry of Keats, and Sassoon's criticism and encouragement. In a separate section, McIlroy briefly compares Owen with other war poets: Brooke, Robert Graves, Rosenberg, and Sassoon. Also worth consulting is the survey of criticism (1920-1960) which, though rather brief, identifies some of the standard book-length works and important periodical articles.

And finally, the most recent book devoted to Owen is Jon Stallworthy's authoritative biography Wilfred Owen, mentioned at the outset of this report. Stallworthy neatly assembles data collected from the earlier biographies, Owen's letters, and the memoirs of Owen's contemporaries, among whom are Osbert Sitwell, Robert Graves, and Sassoon. Stallworthy goes beyond previous biographical work, especially in his account of Owen's stay at Craiglockhart. He brings to light another side of Owen as he reports on his botanical interests; while at Craiglockhart Owen delivered several lectures to the Field Club. Stallworthy also provides a few details on the counseling sessions Owen had with his doctor (Owen was sent to the hospital for treatment of neurasthenia).

Throughout the biography poems are quoted as Stallworthy remarks on Owen's dominant themes. Seldom, however, does he devote more than a sentence or two at a time to critical commentary on the poetry. The range of the biography's focus includes Owen's special regard for his mother, his dedication to poetry, and his compassion and competence as an army officer.

The nature of this summary has required selectivity; therefore, a number of articles and discussions of Owen included in surveys have not been mentioned. Those which I have summarized, and in many cases quoted from, constitute the most valuable scholarly and critical contributions and are representative of the work published so far on Wilfred Owen. It is a rather wide and varied body of work, and as such it does not clearly follow any one pattern.

But while simple patterns are not easy to find, it is possible to note some of the enduring interests critics have shown in Owen's work since its first publication. These seem to fall under two general headings, technique and biography. From the first, critics have been concerned with Owen's use of half-rhyme, and more recently many have dealt with his distinctive use of irony. The extent to which his technique has influenced later poets remains an unsettled question. The biography of the poet similarly continues to attract attention, and this is perhaps inevitable because of the content of the poems: Owen was a poet of the Great War, and his historical context--his life story and the story of his time--has great significance for the understanding of his poetry.

Finally, perhaps the most notable development in Wilfred Owen scholarship and criticism is this: over the last fifteen years, interest in his work has grown considerably. This trend, if such it can be termed, indicates that Wilfred Owen has achieved a lasting place of his own in the literature of the twentieth century.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The listing here is less complete for the years 1920-1969 than the entry for Wilfred Owen in The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature. Certain titles in that listing, though they confirm the trends illustrated here, do not appear to offer much that is new, and therefore have not been cited in this report.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL WORKS

1. White, William. Wilfred Owen (1893-1918): A Bibliography. Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1967 [reprinted with revisions from The Serif, 2, 1965].
2. \_\_\_\_\_. "Wilfred Owen: Bibliographical Notes and Addenda." The Serif, 7 (1970), 25-27.

## EDITIONS

3. Blunden, Edmund, ed. The Poems of Wilfred Owen. 2nd ed. (1946). London: Chatto & Windus, 1955.
4. Lewis, C. Day, ed. The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen. (1963). London: Chatto & Windus, 1974.
5. Owen, Harold and Bell, John, eds. Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967.
6. Sassoon, Siegfried, ed. Poems by Wilfred Owen. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920.

## BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDIES

7. Anon. Review of Poems by Wilfred Owen. Siegfried Sassoon, ed. Times Literary Supplement, 16 Dec. 1920, p.862.

8. Anon. Review of Poems by Wilfred Owen. Siegfried Sassoon, ed. Times Literary Supplement, 6 Jan. 1921, p.6.
9. Bergonzi, Bernard. "Rosenberg and Owen." Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War. London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1965, pp.109-135.
10. Breen, Jennifer. "Wilfred Owen: 'Greater Love' and Late Romanticism." English Literature in Transition, 17 (1974), 173-83.
11. Cohen, Joseph. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats--and Wilfred Owen." Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 58 (1959), 637-49.
12. \_\_\_\_\_. "Owen Agonistes." English Literature in Transition, 8 (1965), 253-68.
13. \_\_\_\_\_. "The Wilfred Owen War Poetry Collection." Library Chronicle of the University of Texas, 5 (1955), 24-35.
14. \_\_\_\_\_. "Wilfred Owen: Fresher Fields than Flanders." English Literature in Transition, 7 (1964), 1-7.
15. \_\_\_\_\_. "Wilfred Owen's Greater Love." Tulane Studies in English, 6 (1956), 105-17.
16. \_\_\_\_\_. "Wilfred Owen in America." Prairie Schooner, 31 (1957-58), 339-45.
17. Collins, H. P. "The War and Wilfred Owen." Modern Poetry. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1925, pp.51-66.
18. Daiches, David. New Literary Values: Studies in Modern Literature. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1936.
19. Dickinson, Patric. "The Poetry of Wilfred Owen." The Fortnightly, 162 (1944), 327-31.
20. Fletcher, Ifan Kyrle. "The Poetry of Wilfred Owen." Welsh Outlook, 15 (1928), 332-33.

21. Freeman, Rosemary. "Parody as a Literary Form: George Herbert and Wilfred Owen." Essays in Criticism, 13 (1963), 307-21.
22. Fussell, Paul. "The Homoerotic Sensuousness of Wilfred Owen." The Great War and Modern Memory. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975, pp.286-99.
23. Grubb, Frederick. "The Embattled Truth: Wilfred Owen and Isaac . Rosenberg." A Vision of Reality: A Study of Liberalism in Twentieth-Century Verse. London: Chatto & Windus, 1965, pp.73-96.
24. Hazo, Samuel J. "The Passion of Wilfred Owen." Renascence, 11 (1959), 201-08.
25. Hobsbaum, Philip. "The Road Not Taken." The Listener, 23 Nov. 1961, pp.860, 863.
26. Johnston, John H. "Poetry and Pity: Wilfred Owen." English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964, pp.155-209.
27. Lane, Arthur E. An Adequate Response: The War Poetry of Wilfred Owen & Siegfried Sassoon. Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1972.
28. Leavis, F. R. New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation. (1932). 2nd ed., New York: George W. Stewart, 1950.
29. Ledward, Patricia. "The Poetry of Wilfred Owen." Poetry Review, 32 (1941), 99-108.
30. Lewis, C. Day. A Hope for Poetry. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1934.
31. Loiseau, J. "A Reading of Wilfred Owen's Poems." English Studies, 21 (1939), 97-108.

32. Masson, David I. "Wilfred Owen's Free Phonetic Patterns: Their Style and Function." Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism, 18 (1955), 360-69.
33. McIlroy, James F. Wilfred Owen's Poetry: A Study Guide. London: Heineman Educational Books, 1974.
34. Murry, John Middleton. "The Present Condition of English Poetry." Athenaeum, 5 Dec. 1919. Reprinted in Aspects of Literature. London: W. Collins Sons & Co., 1920.
35. Owen, Harold. Journey from Obscurity: Wilfred Owen 1893-1918: Memoirs of the Owen Family. 3 vols. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963, 1964, 1965.
36. Parsons, I. M. "The Poems of Wilfred Owen." The Criterion, 10 (1931), 658-69.
37. Posey, Horace G., Jr. "Muted Satire in 'Anthem for Doomed Youth.'" Essays in Criticism, 21 (1971), 377-81.
38. Savage, D. S. "Two Prophetic Poems." Western Review, 13 (1948), 67-78.
39. Sergeant, Howard. "The Importance of Wilfred Owen." English: Literature, Criticism, Teaching, 10 (1954), 9-12.
40. Silkin, Jon. "Wilfred Owen." Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972, pp.197-248.
41. Spender, Stephen. "Poetry and Pity." The Destructive Element: A Study of Modern Writers and Beliefs. London: Jonathan Cape, 1935, pp.217-21.
42. Stallworthy, Jon. "W. B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen." Critical Quarterly, 11 (1969), 199-214.
43. \_\_\_\_\_. Wilfred Owen. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974.

44. Thomas, Dylan. "Wilfred Owen." Quite Early One Morning. New York: New Directions Books, 1954, pp.117-33.
45. Walsh, T. J., ed. A Tribute to Wilfred Owen. Birkenhead: Birkenhead Institute, 1964.
46. Warren, C. Henry. "A War Debt That Can Never Be Honoured." The Bookman, May (1931), 110.
47. Welland, D. S. R. "Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen: Its Derivation and Use." Review of English Studies, 1 (1950), 226-41.
48. \_\_\_\_\_. Wilfred Owen: A Critical Study. London: Chatto & Windus, 1960.
49. White, Gertrude M. "Critics' Key: Poem or Personality?" English Literature in Transition, 11 (1968), 174-79.
50. \_\_\_\_\_. Wilfred Owen. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969.

WILFRED OWEN SCHOLARSHIP: 1919-1975

by

NANCY ROSE MACKENZIE

B.A., University of Northern Colorado, 1973

---

AN ABSTRACT OF 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

1976

Almost from the first appearance of his work in print, critics and scholars have increasingly demonstrated an interest in the life and work of Wilfred Owen. This interest has taken the form of full-length studies as well as various articles in both learned and popular journals, so that today we have a sizeable body of work on Owen. This paper seeks to survey that work decade by decade, and to draw attention to the chief areas of discussion.

Of these the two most notable are Owen's biography and his poetic technique. Materials for the biography have gradually become available through the efforts of Edmund Blunden, Harold Owen, and others, leading to the rich biography of Stallworthy; during this process, critics have naturally attempted more and more to see Owen's work in the context of his life and that of his era, since it is as a poet of the Great War that he is most readily understood. The other main body of writing on Owen has tended to concentrate on his individual style: at the beginning on his half-rhyme (which has been observed by all, and most thoroughly treated by D.S.R. Welland), and more recently on his distinctive irony. A subsidiary theme in criticism, not yet worked out, has been the influence of Owen on other poets. The volume and quality of recent studies of Owen suggest that the interest in him is growing rather than waning and that his place in the history of literature is secure.