

Futility by Wilfred Owen

Wilfred Owen is a war poet who describes the horror and pity of war through his poetry. He is an innovative poet who used conventional tone and rhythm in his most of the poems. The present poem *Futility* is an elegy which elegizes an unnamed soldier lying dead in the snow in France. The speaker begins with a hopeful tone, waiting the sun to rouse the dead body, but shifts to one of confusion and disillusionment upon recognising that death will always conquer life. Through this shift of tone, the poem uses the dead soldier as a catalyst for a larger, deeper mourning: that of the Futility of the act of creation in the face of death's inevitability.

The poem's confident descriptions of the sun's power to nourish life in the first stanza contrast with the way it doubts life purpose in the second stanza. The speaker's first response to seeing the dead soldier is to move him into the sun, because the sun always woke him throughout his life. Even though the soldier is dead, the speaker seems confident that the kind old sun will know a way to revive him. Yet

while the sun may be powerful enough to wake seeds and warm even the surface of a distant star, it cannot resurrect the fallen soldier.

The speaker is perplexed at how something as life can always lose out to death, and puts forth a rhetorical question as a way of underlining his or her shock: Are, limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides, full- nerved, still warm too hard to stir? The dead body is surrounded by warm sunlight, will never come back to life. The speaker then asks, was it for this clay grew tall? (here clay is a reference to the earth that human beings originally came from an idea common in creation myths throughout the world, including the Bible), expressing incredulity that life would bother existing given that it would always lose to death.

The speaker woefully wonders in the poem's final two lines why the Fatuous or pointless sunbeams would help create life on earth in first place, when that life would eventually die. The speaker's perspective thus widens beyond the dead soldier to include all of life. Rather than only being an elegy to a specific person whom the poem does not even bother to name, the poem is also dedicated to mourning death's power over life- an idea magnified by the context of war.

Although it contains tinges of hope, the poem's tone ultimately comes across as mournful, doubtful and discouraging. When situated in historical context, these tone qualities make sense. Wilfred Owen was

a British soldier during World War 1, and was therefore surrounded by death. Regardless of however many sunny days occurred during the war, death likely dominated in his mind, a perspective that manifests in *Futility*.

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