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The Poetry of Pain:
An examination of the mechanisms used by
Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg to express
physical pain

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1 Introduction

The outbreak of the Great War yielded an unprecedented and sudden increase of poetic verse. British newspapers became deluged with more than hundred patriotic poems a day, written in amateur verse (Bogacz 647). The patriotic sentiments with its archaic vocabulary and the highly romanticized vision of dying soldiers on the battlefield gave the ordinary citizen a poignant and sentimental feeling (Bogacz 648). Nevertheless, it is the poetry of two young Englishmen - Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) and Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918) - that seems to have left a painful impact on its reader precisely one century later. These two poets opposed the 'high diction'¹, employed at the beginning of the conflict by Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell, and considered it a disingenuous vocabulary to rely on when describing the intolerable conditions of World War One. In particular, they objected to the poetry of Rupert Brooke not because it was unrealistic, but because his poetry was modelled on poems "designed not to represent trench warfare" (Clausson 107). Brooke and Grenfell did not write unrealistic poems, but their poetry was consistently based on the Romantic lyric and patriotic sonnets. However, these were not able to realistically convey the truth and hence encountered disapproval among anti-war poets. In particular, Wilfred Owen was one of the many war poets who abandoned this high diction and regarded it as false and unscrupulous after witnessing the war on the Western Front for himself. His name has almost become a synonym of 'war poetry' itself and he is mostly known among critics as the poet who romanticized the compassion he felt for his companions (Caesar 115). However, when one finds oneself suddenly in the midst of a war, it is not only difficult to assess the justice of what is happening, but also to accomplish "the much more elementary task of identifying,

¹ Wilfred Owen wrote in the unpublished preface of his poems "Above all I am not concerned with poetry" (Owen qtd. In Bogacz 644). Owen's words refer to what Paul Fussell named 'high diction'. This poetic form "elevated rhetoric in which so much that was written about the war was couched" (Bogacz 644). In particular, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg revolted against this model and sought to employ a more realistic language that fit the truth.

descriptively, what it is that is taking place” (Scarry 278). Nevertheless, while most anti-war poets abandoned this Georgian style employed by Brooke and Grenfell, many of them still relied on the Romantic lyric that served as an important source for inspiration but consequently transformed it into a new form that we nowadays know as the trench lyric. Historians overlooked the transmission of those horrendous experiences and physical pain for many years because it belongs to an invisible history that, seemingly comprehensible, lacks a reality “because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth” (Scarry 3).

This dissertation investigates the mechanisms Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg employed to communicate physical pain in their trench poetry. Using Elaine Scarry’s theory about the impossibility of communicating the experience of pain because of its resistance to language, this study will analyse how two of the most recognised anti-war poets tried to overcome that difficulty by adopting suggestive symbols, visual mechanisms, and rhyme and sound patterns. Because the soldiers who suffered were bereft of the possibility to communicate, the language of pain was used “by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak *on behalf of* those who are” (Scarry 6). Once physical pain has found a voice, the person abandons the pre-language of cries and creates a language that, as accurately as possible, tries to transmit the reality of pain. Virginia Woolf’s assertion of the absence or ‘near-absence’ of literary representations of pain will be proved wrong in this analysis (Woolf qtd. in Scarry 10). According to Scarry, people who suffer find it frequently reassuring to know that even the artist “falls silent before pain” (10), in spite of the fact that it is his task to refine ordinary speech. Nevertheless, this dissertation attempts to find within a limited sample of war poetry -one of the few literary instances in which the artist tries to translate pain- the mechanisms they employed to convey the acuity of suffering. The modern technologies in warfare are said to stand for “de-personalisation and perversion of this intimate sense as bodies are ripped apart by industrial warfare” (Das 23). The poetic language that hence tried to capture that sense of suffering on the battlefield consists of visual mechanisms, symbolic mechanisms and stylistic mechanisms. These mechanisms will be discussed through an analysis of a sample of trench poems written by Owen and Rosenberg after witnessing dying companions and experiencing the unbearable circumstances themselves.

I will also draw attention to the patterns in their poetry in which they articulate the struggle with language. The presupposition that poetics articulates experience, which means that it is able to shape knowledge, is fundamental in the case of trench poetry (Lecerle 264). Poems are indissolubly realistic accounts of war experience, as is the case with Rosenberg and Owen. These soldiers had felt the cold, had experienced gas attacks and witnessed the ‘Batter

of guns and shatter of flying muscles' (Wilfred Owen, "Mental Cases", line 16). The nineteen-year-old Owen experienced the war "not as a heroic deliverance but as a terrible international disaster" (Pinto 146). He soon realised that 'high diction' was insufficient to convey physical pain that he or his companions felt, and hence described realistic images of weapons, wounds or mutilated body parts. These images evoke an intense awareness in the reader that both the soldiers and oneself can easily be the subject to the same circumstances of mortality. Their poems offer the reader an authentic account of war experience and constitute "the only form of discourse that can make the experience actually alive" (Lecerle 266), enough for the reader to re-experience their suffering one century later. However, providing such knowledge was obstructed by language insufficiency or limited word choice. In fact, one of the first challenges that confronted Owen when he tried to capture the war within his verse was what discourse could accurately convey the intolerable experience. From his letters to his mother Susan Owen, critics acknowledge that Owen's initial struggle when he approached the war was a linguistic one (Hipp 63). Rosenberg also expressed his concern with language insufficiency by stating that when his ideas fail to be rendered clearly, this is caused by wrong word choice and hence it does not precisely fit his original idea (Harding 100). As such, translating genuine experience into a language that tries to shape this experience is performed by means of imagery, symbolism, sound or rhyme and is accompanied by articulations that express their concern with language insufficiency.

This dissertation will solely discuss the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg in an attempt to examine how they dealt with physical pain. As such, their genuineness of experience articulated through language characterises their verse and provides a useful range of realistic war accounts. Both poets convey the acuity of an agonizing war experience by means of symbol and imagery. As an example, Owen is particularly known for his use of half-rhyme, which is capable of transmitting instances of intense and short-lived pain. As their poetry incorporates a perspective that is based on offering "the aesthetics of direct experience" (Winter qtd. in Al-Joulani 110) and functions as the voice of pain and distress, it seems valuable to elaborate on their human experience that challenges poetic verse.

Both Owen and Rosenberg served in the latter half of the war when "terrible sacrificial proportions" (Johnston 210) reached their heights, enough so for the poet to take on his shoulders the duty of transmitting the realities of life in the trenches. Leone Samson made an interesting point in her study on Rosenberg's poetry by stating that the full experience of the trenches can be revealed by shifting the perspective of First World War poetry and including the voices of the lower ranks (Leone Samson qtd. in Moorcroft Wilson 13). For it is the poetic

voice of the infantryman that is hard to find, although it is an important source for understanding the ordinary ‘Tommy’ of the Great War instead of his superior officers (Moorcroft Wilson 13). Samson’s argument that it is hard to find a voice of the ordinary infantryman and that his experience might be a rarely recorded reality of life in the trenches is the reason why I decided to include Rosenberg’s poems in this dissertation.

Independent from their rank and experience, both poets show some similarities and differences that are worth elaborating on. On the one hand, Rosenberg’s work reveals an interesting insight to the war poets’ difficulty with putting ideas and hellish scenes into words. All of his war poems convey a direct suffering or discomfort, which focuses less on the political aspect of the war. At first sight, the corpus shows “no secondary distress arising from the sense that these things *ought not to be*” (Harding 97), while Owen’s predilection for pity and a lost youth is the leading motif in his poetry, hence stressing the senselessness of this slaughter. While Owen’s oeuvre centres on hatred, pity and the futility of war, Rosenberg’s poems focus on struggle and change (Silkin 274). Focusing too much on the pity and the aspect of mourning, critics often ignored the relation between his poetic composition and the conveyance of bodily damage. The heavy emphasis on his “visionary compassion” (Caesar 115) overlooks the influence of the Romantics as regards suffering. In fact, this dissertation will show that Owen’s verse transmits a selection of physical intensities that form one of the most complex, yet influential testimonies. Owen’s preoccupation with pain was not surprisingly influenced by Keats’ poetry, which portrays the will to suffer or “suffering even to death” (Caesar 121) that characterised the Romantic nature lyric. Nevertheless, in comparison with Rosenberg, Owen is less influenced by this Romantic nature lyric, which will be discussed in due course.

All in all, Owen’s crucial reflection on the war along with Rosenberg’s directness and painterly discourse form a riveting sample of poetry which reveals how war poets struggled to render pain into words as well as communicating their discontentment with the limitations of language.

The poems that will be discussed date from 1915 to 1918² and are solely based on the poets’ experience in the trenches. From Owen’s poems, I will discuss these poems, listed in

² Rosenberg was killed on the first of April 1918 during the Somme retreat (Johnston 214). Owen was killed on the fourth of November 1918 during the armed conflict to cross the Sambre-Oise. He was killed while building a make-shift bridge.

chronological order of composition (see chapter 9.1 for the full versions of the poems): “Exposure” (Feb. 1917), “Anthem for doomed Youth” (Sept. 1917), “Dulce et Decorum Est” (Oct. 1917), “Disabled” (Oct. 1917), “Apologia pro Poemate Meo” (Nov. 1917), “Insensibility” (March 1918), “Mental Cases” (May 1918), “Futility” (June 1918), “Spring Offensive” (Sept. 1918) and “The Sentry” (Sept. 1918). The analysis of Rosenberg’s poetry (see chapter 9.2) will include “Chagrin” (1915-1916), “Marching- as seen from the left file” (1915-1916), “Break of Day in the Trenches” (June 1916), “Louse Hunting” (1917), “Dead Man’s Dump” (1917), and “Daughters of War” (1917).

The mood and tone of these poems indicate a departure from the well-known 1914 sonnets that evoke a world of beauty, far removed from the terrible reality of the Great War. The new perception of war’s reality is one in which death is no longer regarded as heroic and appealing, but as a terrible deterioration for humankind. The tone we find in the trench lyric is caused by the atrocious circumstances they lived in: discomfort and filth to which they could impossibly escape, living with the consistent fear of finding themselves under continuous shell fire, being exposed to gas attacks, a possibility of drowning in mud, and many other features of mechanized warfare. As we remember the centenary of Germany’s invasion of Belgium on 4th of August 2014, we can most suitably recall the poems of British soldiers who witnessed the senseless slaughter and who skilfully evoke a shiver in the reader precisely one century later.

2 Methodology

Through an analysis of a representative sample of poems written by Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, this dissertation examines the mechanisms both poets used to communicate physical pain and abhorrent circumstances in the trenches. Moreover, I will draw attention to the occasions in their poems where they express the struggle with language. Both Owen and Rosenberg expressed within their poems the difficulty and anxiety they had with finding the required words and their preoccupation with word choice to accurately convey the experience of war. As such, not only the mechanisms to express physical pain will be discussed, but also their preoccupation with language insufficiency.

Based on Al-Joulani's article *Incurable Sores on Innocent Tongues: The language of Pain in World War I Poetry* (2011), the recurrent visual and suggestive symbols will be discussed. More specifically, I will elaborate on searching these mechanisms in the poetry of Owen and Rosenberg along with other possible mechanisms they used to facilitate that communication such as rhyme or sound patterns. This article is an important source for inspiration on the impossibility of communicating suffering and it is my attempt for further elaborate on this theme. Poems that make the reader feel the physical pain and distress of the soldiers' life will therefore be examined for symbolism, imagery and stylistic aspects in order to find the most recurrent mechanisms both poets employed to reach that effect in the reader. For war poets took on their shoulders the responsibility of translating physical pain while soldiers were unable of doing so because of injury, death or instances in which they were denied to tell the truth.

Two theories will be applied on the concept of rendering physical pain into words. Whereas Elaine Scarry's study will be used throughout the dissertation, revealing significant details on how words function as a voice of pain, Roland Barthes' theory on images will be used in the analysis of transmitting live experience. These theories do not speak about war

poetry in particular but they nevertheless reveal important insights in which mechanisms can be applied for communicating experiences.

Firstly, this paper will adopt Elaine Scarry's idea about the impossibility to communicate pain "through its resistance to language" (4). Her idea that pain becomes almost invisible because it can hardly be expressed is central in this dissertation; despite the fact that I aim at finding the recurrent mechanisms Owen and Rosenberg employed to overcome that challenge. *The Body in Pain: The Making and the Unmaking of the World* (1985) does not focus on war poetry specifically, but it nevertheless offers a clear insight in how human experience challenges poetic construction. Her work is to a certain extent a philosophical work that offers an analysis of physical suffering and its relation to literature, testimonies, vocabularies and other textual sources related to religion, politics and medicine. In particular, her hypothesis of how inexpressible pain is and how texts avoid these limitations of language results in a helpful analysis of war poetry. This research will elaborate on Scarry's idea that one resorts to a visualising discourse since pain can most accurately be described "when the human voice only become visible" (Scarry qtd. in Al-Joulani 109). In other words, based on Scarry's theory, the visual images will be brought to the surface in an attempt to illustrate in which ways both war poets tried to communicate the soldiers' suffering. Moreover, the analysis of the poems of Owen and Rosenberg will challenge Scarry's belief that even the artist, who takes on his shoulders the duty of refining ordinary language, "falls silent before pain" (10) and hence challenge Virginia Woolf's complaint about the almost total absence of representations of pain in literary works (Woolf qtd. in Scarry 10). As such, Scarry's philosophical work will be used within the analysis of both symbolic and visual mechanisms, but could not be applied to stylistic mechanisms, for which I based my results on D.S.R. Welland's article *Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen: Its Derivation and Use* (1950).

As regards the visual mechanisms, there should be no question that the painterly discourse of Rosenberg and Owen is at stake. Roland Barthes's notion of the static quality of images will demonstrate that both poets did not only want to visualise physical pain, but also transmit live-experience of instances such as soldiers in pain crying for help or experiences with gas-attacks. Whereas visual descriptions create nostalgia for death soldiers or a mournful moment, it does not create "a consciousness of the *being-there* of the thing [...] but an awareness of its *having-been-there*" (Barthes 44). Owen and Rosenberg rejected the shortcomings of static art and tried to render the experience in a way that the reader could experience the intolerable situation every time he rereads the poem. In other words, translating pain into expressive images that lack a static quality is what both poets aimed at.

The investigation will be structured according to the different poetic mechanisms and will not discuss each poet separately. In order to achieve an analysis of the mechanisms to express physical pain, I approached their poetry thematically. I systematically read their poems written between 1915 and 1918 and selected the themes that could be associated with suffering and their frustration with language insufficiency. Consequently, a division is made between symbolic mechanisms (religious imagery; vocal and facial imagery and landscape rendering), visual mechanisms (body, touch and shape; weapon imagery; mud and animal imagery;) and stylistic mechanisms (half-rhyme and the use sound patterns), in which the poems of both authors will be discussed where applicable.

The analysis of symbolic mechanisms will focus on metaphors that function as a referential content for physical pain, while the examination of visual mechanisms evolves around images of male body parts, weapons, mud and animals. The latter referential objects do not function as symbols, but could be identified with the degrading circumstances in which the soldiers in the trenches lived. The employed mechanisms to express pain will alternate with the mechanisms they used to show their frustration with language insufficiency as we can find them both within the analysis of symbolic and visual mechanisms. I will draw attention to the similar experiences that produced similar expressions in both poets' sample, as well as highlighting the most remarkable differences in their use of language. The stylistic mechanisms, on the other hand, will solely focus on Wilfred Owen's poems since the device of half-rhyme and poignant sound patterns are considered to be inherent to his writing and occur less frequently in Rosenberg's sample. Nevertheless, the effect of sound patterns and half-rhyme is vital when investigating the expression of pain and can therefore not be left irreproachable.

3 Background research

3.1 Introduction to Wilfred Owen

As this dissertation is focused on finding the mechanisms both Owen and Rosenberg employed to communicate pain, it may be beneficial to concentrate on the most important biographical facts that relate to Owen's shaping of physical pain in language. Therefore, reading Owen's life has, in my view, a significant influence on comprehending his poetry.

In general, two illustrations of suffering before the war indicate Owen's fascination with pain. The first instance is when Owen was diagnosed with a bronchial attack in April 1913, although Owen and his mother were convinced it was tuberculosis. It was around that period that Owen very often referred to disease and pain in his pre-war letters to his mother, Susan Owen, informing her of his latest physical discomfort such as a sore neck or swollen gum (Das 142). Letter after letter informs Susan Owen of his latest suffering which already alludes to a "deep link between bodily discomfort and writing" (Das 142). Owen wanted to communicate his illness and physical complaints to his mother, but was challenged by the fact that pain resists "objectification in language" (Scarry 5). Following the influence of Keats, Owen used melodrama to respond to that physical pain as well as his linguistic expressions, such as "all barbukles and whelks, and knobs and flames of fire" (Letter from Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, qtd. in Das 143). However, he also used art to help him overcome the difficulty of communicating pain. Sketches of coiled spirals represented his headaches while a spinning room illustrated his dizziness. These mechanisms show that Owen was at that time exploring how to express physical pain in language. In addition, his early poem "Lines written on My Nineteenth Birthday" (March 1912) show a relation between poetic composition and the sense of touch, which will later mark his war poetry with the combination of pain and

pleasure (Das 138): ‘No form it had; but quietly it drew / Its tightening hand of Pain through every thew / Of my frail body... Pain? – Why Pain today?’ (lines 21-23).

The second instance that shows Owen’s preoccupation with pain is a letter he wrote to his brother Harold Owen after visiting a war hospital in France. According to Das, this letter offers us a useful insight as regards “the connections between a masochistic imagination and war testimony” (151): “Only there were no anaesthetics-no time- no money- no staff for that. So after that scene I need not fear to see the creepiest operations” (Letter from Wilfred Owen to Harold Owen, September 1915, qtd. in Das 151).

Sound and visual details in Owen’s poems, amongst other mechanisms, cause a shivering in the reader. Emotional feelings as well as “an acute physical empathy constitute the body in pain in Owen’s poetry, hovering around moments when we no longer know where the *is* ends and the *was* begins” (Das 141). Claiming that Owen’s poetry lacks trench realism, a term that will be used to refer to descriptions in poetry of the excruciating experiences in the trenches, would be wrong. After a closer analysis, Owen’s poetry is not only associated with the criticism on warfare and the pity for lost youth, but it also supplies the reader with trench realism, which is illustrated in ‘Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips’ (line 23) in “Apologia pro Poemate Meo”. Johnston also asserts that Owen’s poetry predominantly offers the reader an analysis of the effects of warfare on the human body: “war cripples, maims, distorts, and corrupts; these are the penalties exacted of flesh and bone” (189).

3.2 Introduction to Isaac Rosenberg

Isaac Rosenberg was born in England in 1890 to Russian-Jewish refugees. He grew up in extreme poverty in east London and at the age of fourteen, he left school and became the apprentice to an engraver (Kendall 135). Later he joined the Slade School of Art and became part of a “network of radical Jewish artists and writers” (Kendall 135). However, it is important to know that Rosenberg consistently vacillated between poetry and painting. In 1915, however, Rosenberg claimed he believed in himself more as a poet than a painter. Nevertheless, an examination of his war poems reveals a considerable influence from this education as a painter, which will be elaborated on in the investigation of visual mechanisms. Rosenberg’s ambition as a painter unquestionably left an influence on his word choice and his

painterly discourse of the male body. In particular, critics recognise Rosenberg mostly as a visual poet when analysing the representation of physical pain (Das 88). In poems such as “Break of Day in the Trenches” as well as “Dead Man’s Dump”, the experience soldiers had in the trenches is brought alive by means of contact and touch. Whether a rat touches the hand or a cart drives over dead bodies, the visual mechanisms in which we recognise contact and touch seem to dominate his verse. However, this kind of contact does not have the sensuality and “homoerotic dalliance” (Das 94) that appears in Rupert Brooke’s or Wilfred Owen’s poetry. This sensuality and erotic sadness are often “the two modes of bodily representation we usually associate with war poetry” (Das 91). Instead, Rosenberg puts forward the uneasiness of the body in relation to life in the trenches. In the foreword to Rosenberg’s *Collected Works* (1937) edited by Ian Parsons, Siegfried Sassoon wrote: “Scriptural and sculptural are the epithets I would apply to him” (qtd. in Parsons, ix). The words ‘scriptural and sculptural’ allude to the accurate description of trench life in his war poetry, which will be elaborated on in this dissertation. In short, his strength as a war poet arises from “the acuteness of such corporeal imagination” (Das 100) and his original approach to language in order to evoke that image.

Not only do we recognise Rosenberg as a poet that accurately attempted to convey physical pain, but also as a poet who struggled to find the appropriate language to do so. Rosenberg complained in his letter to Edward March in 1917 that he had difficulty in expressing himself in language (Al-Joulani 114): “Now when my things fail to be clear I am sure it is because of the luckless choice of a word that would flash my idea plain as it is to my mind”. However, the analysis in this dissertation will show Rosenberg’s capacity for dealing skilfully with pain and language, so that he transforms suffering and painful experience into a “descriptively verbal force” (Silkin 285).

4 Literature review

The literature review will shortly draw attention to the studies that focus on the representations of trauma in war literature, as well as provide an assessment on which critics are used for this dissertation as regards the conveyance of physical pain. The most important critics that are related to the representations of physical pain in the poetry of Owen and Rosenberg will be introduced along with an evaluation of their approach. In addition, this chapter includes a short introduction to the limitations of language to describe pain.

4.1 Trauma in war poetry

A study of the poems that departed from the ‘high diction’ in war poetry and the language the poets adopted in those instances has long been a difficulty ignored by historians. However, within the work of poets who abandoned this “poetized reality” (Bogacz 649), many scholars sought to find the traces of shell shock and psychological pain. As well as communicating to the reader that the war is full of horrific scenes that leave a mental scar on the participants, the poet equally tries to render his psychological suffering. Trauma has hence been a powerful field of enquiry in recent times. Much attention has been paid to the war neuroses of the soldiers and the relation between psychological pain and narrative. Such is the case in the following works: Paul Lerner’s *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry and the Politics of Trauma in Germany 1890-1930* (2003) or Daniel Hipp’s *The Poetry of Shell Shock: Wartime Trauma and Healing in Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney and Siegfried Sassoon* (2005). Although psychological suffering seems difficult to express for the person in pain, it has, unlike physical pain, a referential content and could be expressed in language (Scarry 11). In

addition, Thomas Mann asserts that there is almost no literary text that is not about psychological suffering and “no piece of literature that does not stand by ready to assist us” (Thomas Mann qtd. in Scarry 11). In particular, the genuine experience that is expressed in Owen’s poetry serves as a realistic account of what psychologists considered as shell shock. “The Sentry”, for example, is characterised by fear of threatening bombardments, forcing the soldiers into a “state of passivity” (Hipp 48). The verses of Owen’s poems, for example, are haunted by the unavoidable existence of memory. Consequently, many studies focus on the representation and form of memory in war literature hence overlooking the inexpressibility of physical pain they felt. Over the years, historians have focused either on the Victorian and Edwardian male body, but as regards the connection between “male virility and war, very few British historians have tackled this theme directly” (Bourke 12). However, images of crippled soldiers have created the memory of the First World War at present day. Photographs of amputees and wounded soldiers are powerful and “they are immediately identifiable signifiers and substitutes for the war itself” (Koven 1193). Whereas many studies have already focused on the poetry of shell shock, I suggest the poetry of physical pain is equally able, just like photographs of mutilated soldiers, to function as a substitute for the representation of this war one has nowadays.

4.2 Wilfred Owen

Many critics examining the poetry of Wilfred Owen during the 1960s and 1970s put an emphasis on ‘poetry is in the pity’¹ and the recurrent themes of honour, glory and the loss of youth. Critics often treat Owen’s poetry, which is generally considered elegiac, as a therapeutic implement as it had the capacity to help the reader struggling through grief or offer an aesthetic replacement for expressions of loss. However, Jahan Ramazani claims that this therapeutic device is unsuitable for many of Owen’s elegies as their goal is to offer us a “certain amount of suffering, and not to effect a cure” (86). Marie Isabel Gardett also

¹ In May 1918, Wilfred Owen wrote in the preface of his collection of war poems that his subject is war and that he was not concerned with poetry, hence the expression ‘The Poetry is in the pity’ (Wilfred Owen qtd. In Stallworthy 266).

recognises that Owen is able to overcome that “limiting role of eulogist” (224) and suggests that he skilfully renders suffering as well as an identical suffering in the reader. In other words, many of Owen’s poems maintain a melancholic mood, but additionally yield an “aggravation of pain” (Ramazani 86), which scholars have frequently overlooked because of their focus on memory and pity. However, critics have often focused on different aspects of Owen’s broad sample. Whereas Dominic Hibberd in *Writers and their Work: Wilfred Owen* (1975) concentrates on intertextuality and the evolution of Owen’s oeuvre, Adrian Caesar offers us an interesting perspective on Owen’s sado-masochistic behaviour. Both authors explore Owen’s fascination with the Romantics, but the latter and more recent examination by Caesar was more useful when searching for Owen’s motives such as the will to suffer and his source for inspiration among the Romantics. Moreover, Hibberd’s analysis of the relationship between Owen’s early poems and his mature war poems was fundamental for initiating this research. Caesar’s focus on suffering, on the other hand, encourages a meticulous survey on the relation between language and poetry.

According to Hibberd, John Johnston in *English Poetry of the First World War* (1964) denies that Owen can predominantly be considered a writer of epics and criticises this one-sided and inadequate analysis of his poems (28). Hibberd, on the other hand, offers us an analysis of Owen’s evolution in poetry, his intertextuality and style. By doing this, Hibberd puts less emphasis on the social and political connotations of his work, which is the case in Jon Silkin’s *Out of Battle* (1972), but objectively explores the development of Owen’s ‘poethood’. Hibberd’s heavy emphasis on the importance of intertextuality is especially useful when examining the influence of Romantic poets such as Shelley and Keats. In particular, it cannot be ignored that the neo-Romantic aspect in Owen’s war poetry is partly responsible for his effective communication of sensibility and pain as he captures their idea of the will to suffer.

Be that as it may, Hibberd’s view remains highly Romantic and his survey on Owen was inadequate when searching for signs of the horrible life in the trenches and how they dealt with sharing their physical pain through language. This is due to the fact that he considers Owen’s poetry as “laments for the dead rather than exposures of the horrors of war” (27). Moreover, the critic emphasises the perception of Owen’s achievements predominantly as an elegiac task by stating that “he was above all an elegist” (27) and hence, overlooked the relation between physical suffering and its representation in language. Santanu Das, on the other hand, claims that the link between physical pain and writing poetry is crucial in the understanding of Owen’s verse (145). Yet, as Das quoted “the world of the trenches is felt

most acutely through the skin” (29). Therefore, Hibberd’s analysis of intertextuality and his interesting insight into Owen’s evolution as a poet could be used as fundamental knowledge before analysing the poet’s sample, but produces inadequate results when searching for recurrent mechanisms that he employed to convey suffering.

A focus on the physical effects of war is present in John Johnston’s study of Wilfred Owen. *English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form* (1964) contains extended background information on Owen’s life, his close connection with Siegfried Sassoon and explores the deeper levels of meaning we find in his trench poetry. As stated above, the 1960s were especially concerned with the interrelation between poetry and pity and traced the themes of honour and the loss of youth. Despite this theme, Johnston recognises the instances in which physical realities are transmitted. Therefore, his work served as a beneficial study of the mechanisms that Owen employed to render pain. Hibberd suspects Johnston of denying Owen’s ambition as an elegist, stating that he “vainly expects him to be a writer of epics” (Hibberd 28). Johnston seems to depart from this purely elegiac analysis and hence offers a study of Owen’s trench poetry that does not only transmit the idea that his poetry is one of mourning alone. As is the case in his analysis of Rosenberg’s oeuvre, much attention is drawn to Owen’s imagery that deals with the parts of the human body (189). Moreover, Johnston offers us an accurate context in which his trench poems were realised, which is lacking in other studies of Owen. His work embodies the combination of different perspectives on Owen’s writings and acknowledges that his poetry has the “physical background of war, the sense of hazard and duress, the pathos of suffering, and even a perception of tragic extremity” (207). Unlike Hibberd, Johnston’s view is less Romantic as he states that their experiences- “so alien to anything dealt with by the Romantic tradition” (207) required a highly imaginative discourse that could only be provided by the inspiration that goes far beyond that of pity alone.

Furthermore, Jon Silkin’s study of Owen’s poetry resulted less useful than his accurate perspective on Rosenberg’s sample, which will be discussed in due course. *Out of Battle* (1972) focuses on Owen’s motivations to enlist in the war as well as his development as a poet, but nevertheless offers a precise analysis of some of his most important trench poems. In particular, Silkin recorded remarkable instances in which nature and landscape rendering appear in Owen’s oeuvre, which yield useful perspectives on the interrelation between the landscape of the trenches and the soldiers’ suffering. Unlike Hibberd, Silkin disagrees with the idea that Owen merely wrote “to *culogize* the dead” (Silkin qtd. in Gardett 224). Referring to “Strange Meeting”, he claims that Owen skilfully achieves to “indicate that those who

suffer also cause an identical suffering in others” (Silkin qtd. in Gardett 224). Therefore, Silkin shifts the focus from Owen’s pure elegies to his complex protest poems by analysing the close connection between the soldiers’ suffering and that of the reader.

Adrian Caesar, on the other hand, offers us a complete different perspective on Owen’s poetry in *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality, and the War Poets: Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves* (1993) in which he explores Owen’s attitude to violence; his sado-masochistic behaviour, the identification with Christ and even the “elitist pride in the poet’s special ability to suffer” (Longley 68). Caesar provides convenient background information on Owen’s life as regards suffering and especially where his fascination with physical pain originates. Although Caesar does not enter into detail, nor explores his oeuvre in a meticulous way, his perspective and emphasis on Owen’s sado-masochistic attitude is helpful in understanding Owen’s mechanisms for communicating pain. For it is his persuasion that “suffering and literature are rarely separated in his mind” (125) that is absent in previous studies such as Hibberd’s. One can also recognise a similarity between the study of Santanu Das and Caesar’s since both critics focus on Owen’s health and sickness as well as its connection to his poems. Both critics emphasise the drawings of wounded soldiers in his correspondence to his brother and his accounts of sickness, which were an important influence on his later writing.

In *Touch and intimacy in First World War literature* (2005), Santanu Das hence offers an approach that might be linked to Caesar’s analysis of Owen, although Caesar draws more attention to the “sado-masochistic element in Owen’s poetry” (Das 152). Owen’s connection to the sense of touch is, according to the critic, “fundamental to understanding his art” (137) and is explored by revealing Owen’s bodily complaints and his observation of soldiers in pain. Das reveals Owen’s personal sense of pain and illness, which comes to us by means of letters to his mother Susan Owen or by means of sketches when he witnessed wounded soldiers in a war hospital in France. Visual mechanisms, focusing on the image of the hand and the lips, as well as drawing attention to sound and its relation to the processes of touch are fundamental for this research of physical pain in poetry. Furthermore, Das focuses on the influence of mud in poetry, which is useful in the discussion as regards the relation between the landscape of the trenches and the soldiers, as it is used as a recurrent metaphor. The analysis of verbs associated with movement in mud, synonyms of the texture and its strong impact on the survival of soldiers formed an elementary insight into the reality of the Great War. Moreover, Das calls attention to the fact that language is filled with references to touch and physical pain. He acknowledges, just like Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), that all our utterances and attempts to communicate pain

are in some way attempts “to reach out to people” (Das 21) and that touch, although it is fundamental and inherent to the self, is impossible to render.

4.3 Isaac Rosenberg

In the first edition of Isaac Rosenberg’s poems in 1922, Laurence Binyon depicts the poet as “not the least gifted” (Binyon qtd. in Moorcroft Wilson 2) and even apologizes for his difficulty in writing. A lack of appreciation was found in this first edition as Binyon claims that Rosenberg did not respect the limitations of language. According to Binyon, “he instinctively thought in images” (Binyon qtd. in Moorcroft Wilson 2). However, this painterly discourse nowadays attracts many critics such as John Johnston in *English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative form* (1964) as well as Santanu Das in *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005). Binyon’s view on Rosenberg’s difficult and non-conventional writing is absent in the second edition of Rosenberg’s work by Denys Harding and Gordon Bottomley in 1937. Harding states that Rosenberg’s complexity originates from the fact that “he brought language to bear on the incipient thought at an earlier stage of development” (Harding qtd. in Moorcroft Wilson 10). This means that instead of rendering experience or ideas into a well-known resemblance of itself, Rosenberg let the experience manipulate the words without relying too much on reasoning or intelligibility (Moorcroft Wilson 10). Rendering experience or ideas was a controlling impulse that in some way drove his poetic composition (Silkin 259). This idea is also shared by Jon Silkin who states that “Rosenberg’s capacity as a painter, as a thinker in images” (260) forced him into “regarding the ‘idea’ as a crucial component in the ‘made thing’” (260). As such, the response to Rosenberg’s war poems were at first underestimated because of his painterly discourse, whereas critics at a later stage praised his verses because it is “almost as though language were pain” (Moorcroft Wilson 10).

Jean Moorcroft Wilson hence recognises in *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life* (2005) the increasing interest in Rosenberg and states that a considerable growth of inter-disciplinary studies in the mid-Seventies caused this re-evaluation (14). As critics are now more willing to evaluate the effects of Rosenberg’s ambition as a painter on his poetic technique, many analysts focus on his perception as a

visual poet. The reassessment of Rosenberg is also due to his themes and techniques, which are, according to Moorcroft Wilson, nearer to our own time (13). Furthermore, her emphasis on Rosenberg's originality of language as well as his thought and technique are an interesting source for finding references to physical pain and Rosenberg's experience in the trenches.

John Johnston equally emphasises Rosenberg's "visual and verbal luxuriance" (215), which differentiates him from other war poets. He is the only critic that draws attention to the most important difference encountered in this dissertation, being Rosenberg's spontaneous imagery compared to Owen's "harmony of words, rhythms, rhymes and stanzas" (246). Throughout *English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form* (1964), Johnston draws, more than other critics, attention to his "imaginative intensity" (215), which was useful for searching visual mechanisms. Johnston acknowledges the poet's use of scriptural imagery but states that it "reflects an integral mode of visualization" (222) rather than the use of motifs such as Christian suffering, which is the case in the trench poems of Owen and Sassoon. According to Johnston, Rosenberg's insights seemed intent on serving "symbolic projections rather than limited lyric revelations" (246). Therefore, Johnston's study of Rosenberg's sample served the analysis of visual mechanisms more than other critics. In addition, Johnston draws attention to the limitations of the lyric mode for expressing experience. He states that the lyric response to warfare is intense, though it is "limited to subjective and therefore partial and scattered impressions" (237) and cannot convey the physical aspect of bloodshed. Instead, Rosenberg's attempts at conveying genuine experience results in subjective impressions and scattered fragments of sensations. Johnston recognises that every war poet encountered "some dissatisfaction with the limitations of the lyric mode" (237) and that their solution was the contemporary neo-Romantic poetry, in which they found a way of expressing their personal experience. Regardless of his focus on neo-Romantic influence, Johnston concentrates on the "descriptive, reflective, and narrative elements" (238) that we encounter in "Dead Man's Dump", since Rosenberg obviously tried to convey an intense personal experience that was "too profound for a simple lyrical presentation" (238). His emphasis on visual and imaginative elements is a useful source for inspiration on the visual mechanisms both Owen and Rosenberg employed to communicate pain and distress.

Jon Silkin, on the other hand, states in *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (1975) that Rosenberg's strength as a poet "arises partly from the ability to particularize the powerful physical horror" (Silkin 275). It is his original approach to language that strikes both Silkin and Moorcroft Wilson. Silkin's assertion that Rosenberg in his early work attempts to

find the appropriate language for his ideas rather than the search for a theme is crucial for exploring how war poets tried to render physical pain into words.

4.4 Limitations of language to express pain

Whereas this dissertation will mainly focus on the mechanisms Owen and Rosenberg employed to render pain into words, it is noteworthy to mention the challenge it includes. When one tries to capture a moment in memory, photographs are the most common devices to do that. Photographs take moments from the past but they are somewhat impersonal, as they cannot express what is accurately felt. Language, although less direct than a photograph, is said to be a more personal medium for recording experiences of warfare (Das 27). In particular, the lyric mode is able to remember the dead soldiers in a more intimate way and is able to create in the mind of the reader a first-hand experience of life in the trenches. However, the lyric voice that responded to that experience of warfare “is limited to subjective and therefore partial and scattered impressions” (Johnston 237). Descriptions cannot fully embrace the physical totality of war and any attempt to render meaningful actions resulted for the most part in a “disorganized record of sensations and subjective impression” (Johnston 237).

Elaine Scarry discussed the difficulty of expressing physical or mental pain in language because pain “ensures this unshareability through its resistance to language”² (4). This is motivated by the idea that the immorality of war is so absolute and that the physical pain it brings along is real that it is almost impossible to render it into words. In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and the Unmaking of the World* (1985), she argues that one tries to “invent linguistic structures that will reach to accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language” (6).

² Nurses diaries show us that nurses themselves had already come to the same conclusion in 1918 as Elaine Scarry. Enid Bagnold wrote, after nursing the wounded soldiers in the Royal Herbert Hospital that “The pain of one creature cannot continue to have a meaning for another. It is almost impossible to nurse a man well whose pain you do not imagine” (Enid Bagnold qtd. in Das 189).

As regards the impossible rendering of pain into words, John Johnston argues that every poet who was aware of the above-mentioned limitations showed some dissatisfaction with those impediments as well as their disapproval of “the responses encouraged by that mode” (237). Moreover, Johnston states that their efforts to transcend the limitations of language were hindered by the principles of the contemporary neo-Romantic poetry, the genre most accessible to convey personal sensibility and experience (237). The problem war poets encountered was identifying their experience with a literary form and vocabulary that enabled them to realistically respond to those agonizing facts. However, the Romantic nature lyric proved to be a disingenuous model that was not designed to represent pain nor trauma (Clausson 107). Bogacz shares Johnston’s idea of a hindrance in expressing pain by the neo-Romantic tradition. He states that in order to write about this new experience, many poets became modernists and “drew near to the concrete imagery of Pound and Eliot; they forsook the pre-war romanticized notion of the poet as ‘bard’” (645). This revolt against ‘high diction’ was established by the search for a language that enables one to express the truth about war. As the results of this analysis will show, war poets mainly tried to overcome that difficulty by constructing scenes with overwhelming visual and imaginative acuteness.

On the other hand, Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s idea about the articulation of genuine experience *in, of* and *through* language offers us a different view on the communication of war experience. He states that the experience war poets want to communicate is dependent on language but that language is not a mere tool for communication (265). However, unlike Al-Joulani or Scarry, he does not mention the difficulties war poets had with creating an authentic account of that real experience. Instead of emphasising the impossibility to render pain into words, he uses war poetry as an example to illustrate that the communication of experience in its most agonizing form cannot be seen separately from the linguistic form in which it is expressed (265). Rosenberg’s “Dead Man’s Dump” is used as an example to illustrate that the articulation of war experience “occurs through a language which is in no way a mere instrument for the conveyance of ‘the substance’”(265). The technical vocabularies as well as metaphors are used to convey, with a certain distance, the appalling reality. Nevertheless, although Lecercle notices the same mechanisms to convey that experience, he focuses on the need of an authentic experience that is needed to describe the facts (Rosenberg carried wire up the lines and knew the sound of crushed bones under the wheels of the cart, which is what “Dead Man’s Dump” conveys). Moreover, according to Lecercle, poetics is the only “form of discourse that can make the experience actually alive, enough so for us vicariously to re-experience it almost a century later” (266).

5 The investigation

The investigation is divided into three main chapters. The symbolic mechanisms focus on the adopted symbols in Owen and Rosenberg's sample whereas the visual mechanisms focus on the translation of visual images that create in the mind of the reader an association with physical pain. Finally, the stylistic mechanisms will solely focus on Owen's war poems and consist of an analysis of half-rhyme and sound patterns that could have helped the poet in expressing suffering. I searched within a limited sample of war poetry how both Owen and Rosenberg tried to render the intolerable acuity of a war experience and accomplished that with the help of some theoretical frameworks³ on how to convey genuine experience and pain. The poems are hence thematically approached and will not discuss each poet separately. The full versions of the analysed poems can be found in the appendix (chapter 9.1 and 9.2), listed in chronological order.

5.1 Symbolic mechanisms

5.1.1 In general

Before analysing the symbolic mechanisms both poets used in order to overcome the unshareability of pain, it should be noted that when one tries to express feelings of the human

³ The theoretical framework of this dissertation consist of Elaine Scarry's book *The Body in Pain: The Making and the Unmaking of the World* (1985) and Roland Barthes' study of *Image-music text* (1977).

interior and more specifically physical pain, we lack any referential content (Scarry 5). The difficulty of expressing pain may be comprehended when we compare this sense to other interior states such as our conscious. Contemporary philosophers have recognised that “our interior states of consciousness are regularly accompanied by objects in the external world” (Scarry 5). Fear is caused by something external, ambivalence is provoked about something else and the same counts for loathing that is felt for someone or something external to the body itself. However, once we reach physical pain, “it is not *of* or *for* anything” (Scarry 5). Scarry states that it is precisely because pain takes no external content or object that it “resists objectification in language” (5). Symbols, which we recurrently find in poetry of the Great War, are one of the mechanisms used to cope with that resistance. In order to defy that deficiency, war poets created linguistic structures or symbols associated with suffering. Al-Joulán claims that, after a close analysis of the poems of Siegfried Sassoon, Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg, these war poets can be seen to reflect anxieties about that struggle of communicating genuine experience (109). Symbols, he claims, are one of the adopted mechanisms to overcome that difficulty, as well as visual mechanisms and broken grammar and lines.

Much research has already been done on the symbolic images that appear in war poetry. Longley affirms that onto the Christian and Romantic symbolic range, the war “grafts its own blood-dimmed iconography: the trenches, no-man’s-land, bugle-calls, bullets, gas, flares, wire, poppies, dead man’s dumps” (78). In other words, war poetry “aspires to the condition of symbol” (Longley 78), which this analysis will additionally show.

This chapter will discuss the religious imagery employed by Owen and Rosenberg as well as facial and vocal imagery and landscape rendering. Whereas Christ’s suffering and the war landscape stand for the soldiers’ suffering in battle, facial and vocal imagery reveals how both poets struggled to render pain into words.

5.1.2 Religious imagery

5.1.2.1 Christ’s suffering and resurrection

One of the possible explanations for the use of Christian imagery in war poetry in general is the fact that the war was enthusiastically welcomed and seen as a ‘liberator’ (Al-Joulán 110). The image of the war as a religious crusade gave way over time to the soldier in

Christ's position, an image of suffering and sacrifice as is the case in Rosenberg's "Dead Man's Dump". The sufferance of the common soldiers had more of a Christ-like quality in clear contrast to that devilish portrayal of the Church that drove these young men to kill their enemies (Hibberd 20). Many writers already employed the idea that Christ shared the soldiers' suffering before Owen and Rosenberg did so (Hibberd 20). Not only poetry used the image of soldiers in Christ's position, but also nineteenth century English hymns such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers". The hymn already puts soldiers in Christ's position: 'Onward, Christian soldiers! / Marching as to war, / With the cross of Jesus / Going on before' (Text by Sabine Baring-Gould).

The image of Christ's suffering in Rosenberg's "Dead Man's dump" appears when he refers to the wire as 'stuck out like many crowns of thorns' (line 3). The coils of the wire unmistakably resemble the thorns of the crown placed on Christ's head before his crucifixion, thereby referring to the suffering of the common soldier in war. The image of Christ's suffering offers the reader a complex response to war as well as the "realization of how war entails one damaging, continuous impact on the body and the mind" (Silkin 281). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that although many critics refer to this symbol of Christ's suffering, it is not a recurrent metaphor one finds in the poetry of Owen and Rosenberg. Hence, images whereby writers identify the Western Front as Golgotha is clearly absent.

Owen, on the other hand, skilfully used funeral imagery in one of his last poems "Anthem for Doomed Youth". Although not directly referring to the horrors and physical pain in war, Owen is able to bring those images to mind when he alludes in the first stanza to 'the monstrous anger of the gun' (line 2) as well as the image of men being treated as nothing more than cattle. However, Simcox considers this poem "a judgement on Owen's experience of war rather than an account of the experience itself" (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association). Nevertheless, I suggest that the imagery in this stanza is one of weapons combined with loud noises and a contrasting funeral rite with the intention of criticising the dishonourable treatment dead soldiers received. By replacing the direct horrific experience by imagery of funeral rites, the reader is challenged with emotional awareness. The first octet describes how church bells, choirs and prayers are over drowned with 'stuttering rifles' rapid rattle' (line 3) as well as 'the shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells' (line 7). Religious images such as bells, orisons, voices of mourning, candles and choirs symbolise, according to Simcox, "the sanctity of life and death" (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association) while they also suggest the futility and meaninglessness of religious rites in strong contrast with

warfare. The juxtaposition of ‘demented choirs’ and ‘wailing shells’ (line 7) can be considered a metaphor for God’s world and the Devil’s that are intermingled, thereby emphasising the futility of religion (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association).

Owen’s “Futility” is a poem that ponders on the function of nature to create life and puts in contrast the futility of senseless elimination. Some critics suggest that words like ‘still’ in ‘still warm’ (line 11) in “Futility” combine the senses of ‘yet’ and ‘motionless’ (Das 162): ‘Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?’ (line 11). This suggests the contiguity of life and death in warfare and the image of resurrection. The words ‘move’ and ‘touch’ in the opening lines arouses the image of Christ restoring someone’s eyesight through touch: ‘Move him into the sun- / Gently its touch awoke him once’. An additional reference to creation and resurrection is the notion of Pygmalion moving his statue of clay (Das 162). ‘Was it for this the clay grew tall’ (line 12) strengthens this last conception. Moreover, despite Owen’s religious background and his sceptical attitude as regards the presence of God on the battlefield, one may assume that he additionally questions the narrative of creation in an absurd way. This is due to the fact that for Owen “the entire world is contained in that single body” (Das 161). Words like ‘move’ and ‘touch’ combined with ‘sun’ and ‘fields’ show how different worlds of perception are related in Owen’s mind, focusing more on the bodily damage caused by war than on the landscape, which is placed on the background (Das 161). God’s creation is represented to the reader as pointless, compared to the sacrifice of the common soldiers.

The encountered differences between Owen’s and Rosenberg’s use of Christian symbolism seems to suggest that both poets looked at suffering from a different perspective and adopted a contrasting attitude. For Rosenberg, I suggest Christian imagery is a mere tool to parallel the soldiers’ suffering to that of Christ, whereas Owen recurrently emphasises the futility of religion. Harding claims that in all of Rosenberg’s poems, his suffering, whether personal or impersonal, and his discomforts are frequently rendered directly (97). Rosenberg’s biblical imagery already confirms Scarry’s assertion as she states that compared to hearing, touching, desiring or fearing, pain differs “by not having an object in the external world” (161). This lack of a referential content seems to prevent the poet from conveying pain in language. However, it is precisely this “objectlessness” (Scarry 162) that enables the poet to imagining and inventing possible references that readers may associate with pain, such as Christ’s crucifixion. The lack of a secondary distress that arouses from the idea that the war “*ought not to be*” (Harding 97) is presumably one of the reasons why Rosenberg, unlike

Owen, employs religion to a lesser extent in his poems. Contrary to Rosenberg, Owen's sceptic attitude as regards religion is central in both poems discussed above, while Rosenberg's lack of 'pity' only results in images of soldiers suffering in a Christ-like manner.

5.1.2.2 Biblical stories

In "Chagrin", Rosenberg employs the Biblical story of Absalom's death to portray the soldiers' difficulty in expressing their disillusionment in war: 'Caught still as Absalom,/.../Like hair of Absalom/ Caught and hanging still' (lines 1-4). Absalom tried to escape the enemy on his mule when his hair got stuck in the branches of an oak-tree as his mule ran on. According to Al-Joulani (114), "Chagrin's" opening lines show Rosenberg's conception of impeded communication: 'Of mute chagrin, my thoughts / Hang like branch-clung hair / To trunks of silence swing' (lines 8-10). Using David's son as a metaphor, Rosenberg's thoughts are just like Absalom hindered from moving on. This biblical story is hence thought to be used "to reveal the poet's struggle to express in words and ideas the reality of the conflict" (Al-Joulani 114). This shows Rosenberg's awareness of the impossibility of rendering pain and the knowledge that words are servants of an idea. In a letter to Edward March in 1917, Rosenberg expressed his vexation with this inconvenience and states that when his descriptions fail to be clear, "it is because of the luckless choice of a word or the failure to introduce a word that would flash my idea plain" (Letter from Rosenberg to Marsh⁴, July 1917, qtd. in Parsons 260). As such, Rosenberg used a biblical story as a metaphor for the inexpressibility of pain and agonizing circumstances.

Owen, on the other hand, also employed a biblical story but unlike Rosenberg, he used this story as a metaphor for expressing physical pain. Owen's "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" treats the story of the Hebrew bible in which God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son. The poem closely follows the original version of the Genesis up to the sixth line. Further reading leads us to the realisation of mixed elements from the bible with aspects of warfare: 'Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps, / And builded parapets and trenches there' (lines 7-8). By doing so, Abraham's killing tools such as iron and fire are intermingled with features of the First World War such as trenches. However, the reader's prior knowledge of the biblical story is completely changed when Abram rejects Gods

⁴ Edward Marsh was the editor of the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies (Clausson 109).

command and kills his son, along with many more young men in the final rhymed couplet: ‘But the old man would not so, but slew his son, / And half the seed of Europe, one by one’ (lines 15-16). The biblical Abraham, seen as the sacrificer, and Isaac, the sacrificed respectively, are personified as the supporter of war on the one hand and the victim of that first on the other hand (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association).

As such, an analysis of two poems by Owen and Rosenberg reveals that biblical stories could be used to complain about the inexpressibility of pain as well as creating a metaphor for physical pain itself. Whereas Rosenberg used a biblical story to express his concern about language insufficiency, Owen adopted a biblical representation in order to convey a senseless slaughter and sacrifice.

5.1.3 Facial and vocal imagery

As stated above, the mechanisms for rendering pain into words does not only encompass the techniques for describing this hellish scene, but it equally demands for patterns in their poetry in which the poet expresses his struggle with language. Word choice, language insufficiency to convey experience and the possible detour they had to make in order to reach that idea of suffering is central in both poets’ sample. Facial and vocal imagery is one mechanism to express their concern with that deficiency.

As such, the face and sound stand for the impossibility to render pain in words, which is central in Scarry’s study on pain and its relation to language. One of the central characteristics of physical pain is its unshareability compared to interior states of consciousness whereby a reference to the external world exists such as “fear is fear of y” (5) or “ambivalence is ambivalence about z” (5). However, pain “ensures this unshareability through its resistance to language” (4) which means that in any given instance of pain, the sufferer is unable to conform his pain, but is equally hindered to deny it. Or as Virginia Woolf stated: “The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry” (Virginia Woolf qtd. in Scarry, 4). Consequently, war poets such as Rosenberg put an emphasis on the face and voice, which functions as a symbol for the inexpressibility of pain and an attempt to translate intense and short-lived pain into a human discourse (Al-Joulani 113).

A closer analysis reveals that it is characteristic of Rosenberg’s poetry that he had a preoccupation with the facial and the vocal. Numerous references to mouths, tongues and

utterances of dying soldiers emphasise the inaccessibility of the poet to a language that can describe the fright and suffering (Al-Joulán 113). This hindrance to language is essential in war poetry and is frequently used in Rosenberg's poems to symbolise that the tormented poet himself is silenced and obstructed by what he sees and that he is unable to render these experiences in poetic language. As Scarry asserts, sound and touch are objects outside the body and therefore absent from any referential context that prevents the possibility of describing it (161-162). However, although it cannot be easily objectified in verbal form, it gives the poet the possibility to create symbols, as is the case in Rosenberg's "Dead Man's Dump". In his description of dead bodies, Rosenberg points out their impossible utterances as 'their shut mouths made no moan' (line 9). Another reference to the symbolic voice can be found in line 29 where the soldier has a 'doomed mouth'. In "Daughters of War", 'lips of ash/ seem to wail' (line 52) and in "Home-Thoughts from France", 'fragile faces' and 'pitiful mouths' (lines 1; 2) are the focus of the poem along with 'faces startled and shaken' (line 9). Once again, Rosenberg used the image of voice in "In War" when the poet, who bears witness to the horrors of warfare, is silenced and hindered by language: 'The voice that once could mirror/ stirred by responsive voices near/ suddenly stilled for ever' (lines 11; 14; 15). According to Al-Joulán, Rosenberg used the vocal and facial symbol as the "poet's creation of a language that uncovers the painful essences of experiences that leave their scars on the mouth and face of the poet" (113). This confirms Scarry's previously mentioned statement that hearing and touch, both situated outside the body, cause problems when the poet tries to render these senses in language. Symbols such as the mouth, voice and face give rise to imagining these horrors witnessed by the poet himself.

However, not only Rosenberg shows a preoccupation with doomed mouths, but also Owen's sample shows some references to this symbol. His strategy in "Anthem for Doomed Youth" consists of representing the war by contrasting the image of the home and the battlefield. In order to approximate the experience, Owen includes a range of answers and negations such as 'What passing-bells' (line 1) and emphasises the absence of prayers, bells or human voices. Owen attempts to express the impossibility of assimilating the war into verse and hence focuses on negation and inadequacy (Hipp 65). Moreover, the combination of weapon imagery and funeral rituals can also function as an image of sound whereby the combination of the poet's voice and the sound of machinery symbolises the reversal of voice and voicelessness (Ramazani, 72). The sound of gunfire seems to suggest that the poet's voice is over drowned so that he is unable to find the proper language and is unable to utter the mourning words the elegy should normally offer us. In other words, by combining these two

contrasting images, Owen describes the war by means of his own inability to create a language that sufficiently represents the conflict (Hipp 64). Consequently, the poem is a success because of what the poet is unable to express (Hipp 66).

5.1.4 Landscape rendering and natural forces

This chapter will elaborate on the image of nature and war landscapes that function as a symbol for the soldiers' suffering. Both poets used the symbol of nature to assimilate the sense of physical pain into a poetic tradition. As such, they relied on the conventions of the Romantic nature lyric, but transformed it in order to realistically convey the horrors they were exposed to. Silkin similarly states that both Owen and Rosenberg saw nature sometimes in destructive relationship to man (277). Therefore I suggest that landscape rendering is able to provide us with useful information on how war poets tried to convey pain. This chapter also includes an analysis of Rosenberg's emphasis on doomed soldiers. The symbolic image of a subterranean setting transmits his defeatist idea that soldiers have always been predestined to suffer and die on the battlefield.

Not only did Rosenberg employ biblical stories to express the destruction of civilization, but also landscapes of destruction characterise Rosenberg's poetry (Al-Joulan 114). Such is the case in "Home-Thoughts from France" where the soldiers live 'In the land of ruin and woe / The desolate land of France' (line 7-8) or in "Break of Day in the Trenches" where he introduces 'The torn fields of France' (line 18). Gruesome trench imagery whereby soldiers are symbolically torn apart shows that the poetic representation of war became more realistic than the patriotic fervour we found in "The Dead Heroes", written in 1914 (Matalon 36). Clausson draws attention to the model on which Rosenberg based his trench poems in which nature is realistically rendered. He states that it was the task of both Owen and Rosenberg to create a new lyric form that was capable of capturing the "madness of the battle itself" (Clausson 111). However, that model does not create itself out of nothing, but is constructed by transforming the Romantic nature lyric (Clausson 111). A sensitive speaker who is situated in a natural landscape characterises this Romantic form, which we predominantly find in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Within the opening lines of their verse, we encounter the described natural scene with its characteristics such as flowers and birds (Clausson 111). All these aspects capture the attention of the speaker who will later

analyse and reflect on this landscape with its attributes. Poets of the nineteenth century were so engrossed with this Romantic genre that most of them modelled their writings on it. However, this genre was unable to express the pain and distress they felt. Both Rosenberg and Edmund Blunden hence sought to resolve the problem of realistically conveying the war without relying too heavily on the conventions of the Romantic lyric. Their resolution consisted of transforming the Romantic nature lyric into the well-known trench lyric (Clausson 112).

Rosenberg's previously mentioned "Break of Day in the Trenches" is one of his most well known examples based on this Romantic nature lyric. The speaker of the poem is a sentry on duty at the time of dawn. Just like the Romantic lyric we find in Wordsworth's oeuvre, the poem opens with a brief description that informs the reader about the time and place (Clausson 122): 'The darkness crumbles away. / It is the same old Druid Time as ever (lines 1-2). However, unlike the charming birds that may serve as the object of the poet's attention in the poetry of the Romantics, the rat is here being introduced. This familiar habitant is, according to Clausson, "as un-Romantic an object of contemplation as one can imagine" (123). As such, Rosenberg creates a scene in which the narrator contemplates on his experience with an aspect of nature, in this case the sardonic rat, but unlike the Romantics, he does not convey this encounter as an affirmation of the poet's union with it (Clausson 124).

Another instance in this poem in which we can associate the landscape with physical pain is when the rat tries 'To cross the sleeping green between' (line 12). The 'green' we find in no-man's-land can, according to Simpson, be associated with gangrene and bloated corpses (133). If Rosenberg meant it this way, than we can indeed conclude that his landscape functions as a metaphor for physical pain. Nevertheless, whether or not the reader immediately sees the connection between the green of no-man's-land with gangrene, I think the reader will rather ironically associate the soiled colour of this land with the beautiful green lawn at home or the "peaceful slumbers" (Simpson 133).

The following reference to landscape rendering occurs in the seventeenth and eighteenth line: 'Sprawled in the bowels of the earth, / The torn fields of France'. 'Sprawled' suggests that the battlefield is filled with murdered soldiers and transmits a sense of "carelessness, ugliness, laziness, irresponsibility" (Simpson 134). These bodies were once the 'haughty athletes' but are now transformed into inactive corpses that seem to represent a heroic death on the battlefield (Simpson 134). However, more important than the focus on these murdered soldiers is the connection between the earth and the corpse in this verse. Whereas the word 'bowel' normally refers to the body, it is now applied to the war landscape. Rosenberg

conveys an image of the earth that is, just like the mutilated body with split organs, devastated and symbolically hurt. The organs of the earth are hence split, which evokes an image of the soldiers “sprawling in among them and constituting an unbearable obscenity” (Simpson 134).

As regards the image of the war landscape, Silkin made an interesting point as to state that “Rosenberg manages to envisage a landscape but synchronizes the image of it with the image of something smaller” (279). Whereas ‘torn’ in ‘The torn fields of France’ (line 18) would normally be applied to damaging paper, an object made by man and that consequently is more at scale with humans than a landscape, Rosenberg skilfully transmits this idea onto something larger. ‘Torn’ conveys the impression of a relationship between the torn object and the person who realises the action. However, whereas human hands cannot tear landscapes, Rosenberg emerges two different scales and thereby alludes to the easiness of tearing a landscape in two parts (Silkin 279). In other words, the combination of ‘torn’ and ‘fields’ indicates the power of war as well as the vulnerability of man and nature. The destructive tone of these lines conveys in a delicate manner the violence to which man was exposed in war.

The same poem becomes even more violent once the poet introduces the poppies, a recurrent symbol that represents the dead soldiers and “their violently shed blood” (Silkin 280) and serves as an emblem of sacrifice (Clausson 131). Whereas Rosenberg’s rat serves as a counterpart of the joyful bird in Wordsworth’s poetry, we may as well assume that the poppy possibly corresponds to his “golden daffodils⁵ dance and are ever dancing in his tranquil recollection” (Clausson 124). The poppy is generally understood to be nourished by blood of the soldiers that is left behind on the earth and gave the petals a red colour. However, Rosenberg takes this nature phenomenon even further as to suggest that in return for nourishment, the “poppy gives man the ambiguous gift of mortality” (Silkin 280): ‘Poppies whose roots are in man’s veins’ (line 23). The circular process of dying and growing suggests that those poppies “feed off his [man] mortality, and therefore emphasise it” (Silkin 280) since the poppies, just like the fallen soldiers ‘Drop, and are ever dropping’ (line 24). In other words, death is nourished by mortality whereby the poppy functions as the perfect symbol to illustrate the pointlessness of such slaughter. The joyous vision of the Romantic lyric is now

⁵ “Daffodils” is the commonly used term to refer to William Wordsworth’s lyric poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”. In this poem, the daffodils constitute the central object of reflection just like Rosenberg’s poppies in “Break of Day in the Trenches”.

transformed into an image of a desolate landscape filled with murdered soldiers, ‘Sprawled in the bowels of the earth’ (line 17) (Clausson 124).

Once Rosenberg established the connection between a flower and men’s fragility, one is likely to continuously connect the painterly image of the poppy with spilled blood. I agree with Simpson as he claims that the connection between the poppy and blood creates an “awareness that we are all subject to the same conditions of time and morality and the whims of murder: soldiers, rat, poppy, reader” (135). Comparing it to processes of change in nature is, I suggest, the most successful way to convey men’s vulnerability. In fact, the word ‘drop’ followed by ‘are ever dropping’ in line twenty-four implicitly suggests what the entire poem aims at: illustrating that the slaughter will continue itself the next day and hence the “cosmos works its processes of change relentlessly” (Simpson 135). Soldiers are likely to be murdered the following day and will presumably “go on sprawling in the bowels of the earth” (Simpson 135) and rats will not cease to feed themselves on the corpses.

The above-mentioned combination of two different scales can also be found in Owen’s “Mental Cases”. ‘Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh’ (line 22) once more incorporates the image of the landscape that is symbolically torn apart. This grotesque image shows the vulnerable position of soldiers in the trenches and conveys violence in its most painful form. As Rosenberg and Owen shared the same experience in the trenches, it is, I suggest, not mere coincidence that both poets employed a similar form of expression for these ideas. A landscape that functions as metaphor for the male and mutilated body shows that soldiers, just like the Western Front, are characterised by destruction and disfiguration. “Asleep” similarly renders a landscape that unites with the soldier’s body in ‘His hair being one with the grey grass/ of finished fields, and wire-scraggs rusty-old’ (lines 17-18) but unlike the examples previously discussed, this verse lacks a metaphor of the landscape that stands for the mutilated male body. Compared to Rosenberg’s sample, however, we find fewer references to landscape rendering. Nevertheless, it is important to note that although Owen admired the Romantics such as Keats and Shelley, he seldom wrote in their manner (Clausson 113). As such, the descriptions of natural scenes we read in Rosenberg’s poems is lacking in Owen’s sample.

One of the poems that is generally referred to when searching for descriptions of the battlefield is Owen’s “Exposure” (Feb. 1917), his first important war poem. The eight stanzas recall the winter landscape of the trenches whereby the poet reminisces about the harrowing conditions and transmits the “impression of agonized minds and bodies” (Johnston

169) situated in the intolerable and cold no-man's-land. In particular, the second stanza elaborates on the relationship between nature and war but also lacks the landscape metaphor that stands for an injured soldier. The wire, for example, seems to have brambles and this combination points out the fearful dissimilar entities between the landscape and war (Silkin 203). As a result, the harmless brambles are opposed to the wounded and dying men on the wire, which creates a dissimilar relation between innocuous nature and the seriously damaging war. The interrelation between landscape and the war is continued in the following stanza: 'The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow' (line 11). Despite Owen's use of nature landscape that generally acquires an invariable friendly presence when taking Wordsworth's verses into account, 'dawn' receives a hostile connotation in "Exposure" (Silkin 203). In the fourth stanza, this hostile image of the landscape is extended as the 'successive flights of bullets' (line 16) are considered to be 'Less deathly than the air that shudders black with snow' (line 17) (Silkin 203). The fifth stanza, then, prompts the question that strikes the reader sharply with 'Is it that we are dying?' (line 25), which unexpectedly replaces the anterior refrain 'But nothing happens' (line 5, 15 and 20). Nature in more intimate contact with the soldiers leads up to this question as 'Pale flakes [...] come feeling for our faces' (line 21). In other words, Owen portrays the war landscape as an implement that is able to cause heavy injury and death. The reader, I suggest, similarly associates the landscape with injury and death, not because it functions as a metaphor for the damaged body, but because Owen suggests that the hostile image of the battlefield is able to cause more pain than 'flights of bullets' (line 16).

5.1.4.1 Subterranean setting

Characteristic to Rosenberg's poems is his sense of subterraneous dwelling. This can already be indicated by the fact that the poet frequently used the word 'sprawled'. In "Dead Man's Dump", 'The wheels lurched over the sprawled dead' (line 7) and in "Break of Day in the Trenches", the soldiers lay 'Sprawled in the bowels of the earth' (line 17). Both poems seem to accurately reveal an image of war's destruction as well as the physical effects witnessed by the poet. According to Al-Joulani, Rosenberg suggests "massive inertia" (114) by visualising the landscape filled with inactive male bodies. Although the cause of this landscape filled with bodies is concrete, being the bullet or 'the swift iron burning bee' (line 30), the result of this action is consistently uncertain. Despite the fact that injury or death is a

logical consequence, Rosenberg prompts the narrator to contemplate on the existence of afterlife (Brow 102). The ‘sprawled dead’ in “Dead Man’s Dump” are buried in the earth and Rosenberg suggests that this kind of burial has always been predestined for the soldiers: ‘Earth had waited for them / All the time of their growth / Fretting for their decay: / Now she has them at last!’ (lines 14-17). Silkin made an interesting point when he compared these lines to Keat’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” in which the poet “fixes youth at its most graceful and passionate” (283). Whereas Keat’s poem fixes that lost youth and creates immortality by closely entangling life and its image, Rosenberg fixes death and “shows up even more the value of what is being destroyed” (Silkin 284). This confirms Rosenberg’s directness as regards the representation of death and suffering as critics such as Harding assert that there is a lack of secondary pain that arouses from the feeling that the agonising facts of war “ought not to be” (97). In addition, it shows that Rosenberg relies on the Romantic nature landscape, but he transforms it since there is no joyful tone and no hope, which these Romantic modes recall.

A closer analysis of Rosenberg’s poems reveals his possible preoccupation with images of predestination. Not only ‘sprawled’ soldiers are recurrently used in an allegorical image, but also the word ‘doomed’ appears in two of his poems (Al-Joulán 114). In “Dead Man’s Dump”, he mentions the ‘doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth’ (line 29) and in “Daughters of War” we encounter ‘the doomed earth’ and ‘the doomed glee’ (line 50). Moreover, in the latter poem, we find the same theme of predestination in the following lines where the daughters desire the courage of the soldiers: ‘I heard the mighty daughters’ giant sighs/ In sleepless passion for the sons of valour’ (lines 10-11).

This image of a subterranean setting and of predestination in Rosenberg’s poems does not directly convey physical pain, as is the case with weapon imagery or position of the body. Nevertheless, these images of doomed mouths that ‘made no moan’, a landscape that had been waiting for dead soldiers and daughters who desire the ‘sons of valour’ are “essential to his struggle to ‘essence’ the war to his language” (Al-Joulán 114). Rather than describing the agonizing scenes of war with words that are “rendered meaningless from overuse” (Brown 102), Rosenberg constructs in both poems a logical connection between the moment of injury and the speaker’s pondering on the destination of corpse. As is the case with the landscape-metaphor for the mutilated body, I suggest readers will associate words like ‘sprawled’ and ‘doomed’ with images of corpses, hell and an earlier process of intense and short-lived pain.

The same representation of a subterranean setting occurs in Edward Thomas’ “A dream”, where the “syntactical coils [...] place the speaker at a symbolic hiatus between

daylight and the underworld” (Longley 64). Thomas evokes the subterranean setting by describing the ‘dark waters’ (line 3) followed by its movement in ‘heaving and coiling’ (line 9) and ‘mighty motion’ (line 10). However, unlike the intention of Rosenberg to fix death and question the destination of these corpses, Thomas tries to visualise the imprisonment of the consciousness in time and portrays the impossibility to bring it under control (Longley 64). As such, the image of a subterranean setting functions not only as an encouragement to ponder upon the destination of dead soldiers, but also tries to capture the illusion of an imprisoned mind that is unable to break free and “subject to apocalyptic repetition” (Longley 64).

5.1.5 Conclusion

This chapter showed that although we lack any referential content to express the human interior and more specifically physical pain, war poets adopted symbols that function as a metaphor for the injured body. One of these metaphors is Christ’s suffering, which is, for example, employed by Rosenberg in “Dead Man’s Dump”. Owen, on the other hand, ironically uses Christian imagery in relation to death while Rosenberg renders the image of a suffering Christ that symbolises the soldiers’ sacrifice in this so called religious crusade. As such, Rosenberg’s war poems show a direct suffering and lack the underlying meaning that these things should not be happening (Harding 97). Owen, unlike Rosenberg, used Christian imagery to emphasise the pity and the senseless slaughter of young men.

As regards the inexpressibility of suffering, both poets adopted the facial and vocal symbol that stands for the poet’s obstruction in language. In particular, Rosenberg showed his preoccupation with language insufficiency as his verses contain several references to the mouth, voice and sound. An emphasis on the facial and vocal shows the war poet’s preoccupation with the translation of physical pain into a language accessible for the reader.

Furthermore, a landscape that functions as metaphor for the damaged body shows that soldiers, just like the Western Front, are characterised by disfiguration. One may find this metaphor in the poems of both Rosenberg and Owen, although the war landscape appears more frequently in Rosenberg’s sample. Clausson (124) points to the fact that the hopeful vision of the Romantic nature lyric is now transformed into an image of a desolate landscape filled with dead soldiers, ‘Sprawled in the bowels of the earth’ (“Break of Day in the Trenches”, line 17). As such, Rosenberg relied more on the Romantic tradition than Owen did but transformed it into a landscape that stands for the mutilated body.

5.2 Visual mechanisms

5.2.1 In general

This chapter will examine the attempts of both poets to create images of the war's reality in the mind of the reader. By doing so, the reader becomes a witness and seemingly shares the poet's experiences. After a close analysis of Owen and Rosenberg's poetry, the visual mechanisms appeared to be the most recurrent and will therefore be closely elaborated on. The lexicon reflects attention to details such as the body, weapons and landscape texture. The reader is symbolically taken on a journey and participates as witness when soldiers are shot or find themselves in a state of immense pain. More than symbolic mechanisms, the visual ones are direct and therefore more accessible for the reader to understand. Moreover, the results of this analysis support Scarry's study of the importance of visibility when translating pain into words: "The rarity with which physical pain is represented in literature is most striking when seen within the framing fact of how consistently art confers visibility on other form of distress" (11). To illustrate the idea of visibility, a person in pain almost certainly tries to describe his pain by means of comparison with weapons or animals, which will be discussed in this chapter.

As regards the association with physical pain, Scarry affirms that "in any given instance of pain, there may actually be present a weapon (the hammer may really be there) or wound (the bones may really be coming through the skin); and the weapon or wound may immediately convey to anyone present the sentient distress of the person hurt" (15). These suggestive images of the weapon and wound, which will be discussed in relation to war poetry, give rise to an almost accurate sensation of suffering. By doing so, the poet's seemingly inability to render pain in words disappears as the reader is challenged with an accurate description of warfare.

I will also draw attention to the difficulty war poets had with transmitting live-experience. It is often argued that war poets opposed the static quality of the painterly discourse in poetics. Roland Barthes's theory on the dead picture as an allegory of the tomb shows the necessity of transmitting live-experience whereby the reader re-experiences the events felt by the poet instead of solely producing acts of mourning, evoked by the dead image. The final utterances of a dying man are reproduced in such a way that the poet creates a live-transmission of the personal event every time the reader rereads the poem.

5.2.2 The body, position and shape

5.2.2.1 The male body in pain

Between 1914 and 1918, soldiers were unavoidably forced to live in fear of possible injury or death. The bodies of these healthy young men were more and more “at risk of frighteningly new ordeals of mutilation” (Bourke 31). The number of amputations of limbs is estimated at 41.000 during the war, whereas 272.000 soldiers suffered from heavy injuries that did not need an amputation (Bourke 33). These historical facts left many references in the poems of Rosenberg and Owen, who referred either directly or by means of a metaphor and synecdoche to the soldier’s body in pain. The high number of damaged bodies was certainly unprecedented as no event in British history had ever been prepared at such elevated number of severe wounded soldiers (Bourke 33).

Johnston already alludes to the importance of the body in Owens poetry. According to him, Owen writes of the physical effects of the conflict on human beings and “much of his imagery deals with parts of the body, especially the parts in which masculine beauty and strength are manifest” (Johnston 189). Rosenberg and Owen hence had a different way of representing the male body in pain. Whereas Owen opts for the erotic pathos and sensuality of the male body (‘For love is not the binding of fair lips’ (line 19), “Apologia pro Poemate Meo”), Rosenberg portrays the uneasiness of the body in pain and does not abominate accurate descriptions of life and death on the Western Front (‘And our wheels grazed his dead face’ (line 79), “Dead Man’s Dump”). This poem shows what images are left from the war: it increased deformity and caused a number of disabled men that drastically changed twentieth-century Britain (Bourke 31).

However, what characterises Owen’s representation of the male body in his poetry is theatricality. The body is highlighted through gestures and movement that contains a “Caravaggio-like quality” (Das 153). The opening lines of “Dulce et Decorum Est” illustrate that the shape and position of the body is put forward: ‘Bent double, like old beggars under sacks’ or ‘Knock-kneed’ (lines 1-2). In “Smile, Smile, Smile” the first line immediately exhibits a poetic canvas to which the reader is introduced: ‘Head to limp head, the sunk-eyed wounded scanned’. In addition, the well known image of the soldier who sat in a wheeled chair in his suit of grey and missing his limbs in “Disabled” is another example of the contorted body in Owen’s theatrical verse. In this poem, Owen reveals with tragic irony the loss of manliness and its decrease to impotency (Caesar 157).

Das observes that many of his poems begin with verbs, “propelling the body forward and establishing its relation to the phenomenal world” (153), as is the case in “Spring Offensive”: ‘Halted against the shade of a last hill’ (line 1). Verbs like ‘bent’, ‘sat’ and ‘halted’ imply movement, drama and contact and suggest Owen’s awareness as regards the “embodiedness of the subject in a material universe” (Das 153). The reader is continuously reminded of the poet’s emphasis on the presence of the soldier’s body, which enters the poetic frame.

Moreover, the position of the body is established by this choice of verbs. In “Spring Offensive”, for instance, the verb ‘Hung’ (line 11) alludes to the position of the body on the vertiginous hills they had to face before exposing themselves in the ‘fury of hell’s upsurge’ (line 35): ‘Sharp on their souls hung the imminent ridge of grass’ (line 11). According to Das, it “hints at the fates of the soldiers hanging in balance” (164) but it also reveals the pained position of the male body that stands in close relation with the battlefield. The reader is hence consistently faced with men’s vulnerability, whether or not the body is already exposed to the upcoming threat of gunfire, gas or disease.

As regards the choice of verbs in order to intensely render pain, Rosenberg often employed the “device of transposition” (Silkin 282) by which the verb seemingly has two agents or may be understood ambiguously. The latter is found in “Dead Man’s Dump” and involves the painful ‘lurched’: ‘The wheels lurched over the sprawled dead / But pained them not, though their bones crunched’ (line 7-8). At first sight, it seems as if the wheels stagger over the corpses. However, according to Silkin, ‘lurched’ additionally refers to the person who figuratively feels the limbers of the track running over the dead bodies (282). In a letter to Edward Marsh, Rosenberg reveals this personal experience as he states that the weight of the cart will damage the body in the same way as if the soldier were alive (Silkin 282). ‘Lurched’, then, suggests that the spectator of this scene empathically feels that the body is not dead if he stares at it, which means that the dead soldier is still nearly human in the eyes of the watcher. Whereas ‘lurched’ connects the spectator with the corpse, the word ‘crunched’ emphasises “how close to the dead the living were drawn by the shared experience of conflict in which chance decimates some and others not” (Silkin 282). I suggest that this shared experience is not only expressed by means of his letters to Edward Marsh, but that it is also accurately revealed by his word choice (‘lurched, sprawled, crunched,..’) in “Dead Man’s Dump”. Moreover, the redundant ‘But pained them not’ (line 8) shows this feeling of the dead still nearly being human. One gets a sense of strong identification with the murdered soldiers since the affirmation of known information is needed in order to believe that the corpses do

no longer suffer. Rosenberg's "device of transposition" (Silkin 282) is therefore a useful implement that connects the reader, like the spectator in the poem, with the crushed bodies.

In the same poem, Rosenberg also establishes a strong identification of the reader with the sufferers in the following line: 'And shells go crying over them' (line 12). The device of transposition admits 'crying' to have two agents, more specifically shells and the humans. Silkin asserts that in this verse "the shells cry out, as do the humans mutilated by fragments of exploding shells" (283). As such, I suggest word choice as well as this device of transposition allow the poet to render physical pain by placing the male body in a position that authentically shows its vulnerability.

Having looked at word choice to place the body in a position that allows the threat of injury, Owen and Rosenberg's sample also shows a preoccupation with specific body parts. The importance of the hand has more than once been discussed in relation to memoirs of the nurses (Das 26). Hands constantly came in contact with the injured body as they covered wounds, or even cause a new drive of pain. However, these hands do not have the same background of shared war experience as there was between men. Rosenberg's depiction of hands is found in "Daughters of War", where 'Frail hands gleam up through the human quagmire' (line 52) or dust 'That clings about those white hands' (line 57).

In Rosenberg's "Marching- as seen from the left file", the focus lies on necks and hands that will be destroyed by mustard gas: 'My eyes catch ruddy necks' (line 1), 'Like flaming pendulums, hands' (line 4) and 'In these bared necks and hands' (line 9). As Johnston argues, "Marching" shows that Rosenberg slightly moves away from his pre-war verse as the imagery in the above mentioned lines suggests that came into contact with a new war experience (220). Just like Sassoon and Owen, he became disillusioned with the idea of heroically dying for his country and moved from his pre-war verses to "expressing lapsed patriotism" (Matalon 35). As such, Rosenberg adopted visualising mechanisms that allowed him to express intense and short-lived pain. Rosenberg skilfully achieves this by portraying contorted body parts with a language that functions as paint. Consequently, the visual discourse of "Marching- as seen from the left file" demonstrates the enlarged insight of the poet into the reality of warfare. By analysing these visual descriptions, one cannot ignore that Rosenberg's strength as a poet arises from his capacity to "particularize the powerful physical horror" (Silkin qtd. in Moorcroft Wilson 12).

The male body in pain is rendered in a "grotesque conglomeration" (Johnston 218) of limbs and faces in "Louse Hunting". Faces, limbs, the throat, arms and fingers are conveyed

in such a painterly discourse and shows once more Rosenberg's capacity of imaginative intensity. In particular, this painterly discourse is obtained by combining the recurrent 'see' at the beginning of line fifteen, sixteen, eighteen and twenty one with the 'silhouettes' (line 15), 'shadow' (line 16) or body parts such as 'arms' (line 17), 'fingers' (line 18) and 'limbs' (line 21). This proliferation of words - "flech, fingers, hooked, pluck, smutch" (Das 100) - underlines the visual qualities of the poem. The unprecedented high number of amputations was caused by weapons that produced heavy injury and dismemberment such as hand grenades, artillery fire and small firearms (Bourke 34). The photographs of amputees and other wounded soldiers may have left an enormous influence on how we see the First World War today, but I suggest these poems have the same capacity of preserving the memory of war.

We find a similar descriptive power in Owen's "Mental Cases", which starts with an almost identical perspective like that of "Disabled". The questioning speaker of the poem observes the human remains of the soldiers in a hospital and creates alienation in the first line by asking who these soldiers are. As such, Owen once more takes on his shoulders the duty of speaking on behalf of those who are in pain. The following lines illustrate poignantly what the First World War was able to create: 'Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish, / Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?' (lines 3-4). These lines indicate that the soldiers in hospital are no longer "men whom the war has made less manly" (Hipp 70), but rather inhuman creatures that appear to the reader as a collection of monstrous corpses. While words like tongues, jaws, teeth, skulls, hair and hands classify the young men as human; the poet's description of these male body parts connects them with hell (Hipp 70). The 'purgatorial shadows' (line 2) combined with the horrendous description of skulls, moments of panic and 'stroke on stroke of pain' (line 5), create a hellish scene that establishes a highly visual imagination in the mind of the reader.

It must be noted that although poems like "Dulce et Decorum Est" or "The Send-off" encompass the sound of marching soldiers through rhyme and metre, the image of the feet is limited compared to the recurrent appearance of other body parts in Owen's verses (Das 150). References to feet or limbs are limited to marching images such as 'limped on, blood-shod' (line 6) in "Dulce Et Decorum Est" or 'walk hell' (line 9) in "Mental Cases". In "Disabled", Owen conveys the image of a legless soldier but the poem focuses on the leg-wound, hence connecting the war with football: 'One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg, / After the matches, carried shoulder-high' (line 21-22). This absence is, I suggest, unusual if we know how many soldiers had to amputate their legs. Of the 41.000 soldiers who had their limbs

amputated, “69 per cent lost one leg, 28 per cent lost one arm, and nearly 3 per cent lost both legs or arms” (Bourke 33). References to amputated arms, however, are represented in Owen’s “Apologia pro Poemate Meo” in ‘Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips’ (line23), but images of amputated legs or feet remain rather limited. Whether this is coincidence or whether it is also the case in for example Sassoon’s poetry, is an implication that needs further research.

Although previously stated that physical pain and the sense of touch are present in his poetry, the corpse itself is frequently reduced to a synecdoche such as ‘piteous mouths that/ coughed’ (lines 18-19) in “Greater Love” (Das 142). Rosenberg, on the other hand, portrays body parts in a direct and realistic manner as is the case in “Dead Man’s Dump”, where Rosenberg conveys ‘A man’s brains splattered on’ (line 48). More specifically, the images of eyes, necks, hands and limbs appear in his trench poetry as a “quotidian routine” (Das 91) that clearly differs from Owen’s sensuality, theatricality or indirect representation of the body by means of metonymy. This leads to the observation that both poets frequently used visual mechanisms for representing physical pain, but applied it divergently.

In addition, body parts were not only used to express pain, but it also serves to communicate their concern with language. Rosenberg used the image of fingers as a tool to represent his difficulty of translating pain. His allegorical use of finger is evident is “Marching- as seen from the left file” where ‘Blind fingers loose an iron cloud’. Al-Joulan (114) indicates the importance of finger in Rosenberg’s poetry, as it is also found in “Moses” (1916), a long verse-drama, which he finished before going to war: ‘It boils to my finger-tips, Till my hands ache to grip’ (lines 40-41). The difficulty of translating the unseen into a human discourse is hence embodied by the image of fingers. As is the case in “Moses”, this image is used to represent “the need for a powerful expression” (Al-Joulan 114) but the use of body parts to express the impossibility of conveying pain is rather limited compared to other symbols such as the voice or biblical stories.

5.2.2.2 Transmission of live-experience

The focus in this part of the analysis is to show how accurately both poets intermingled direct communication between the soldiers in the trenches with a narrative addressed towards the readers (Al-Joulan 112). In addition, the importance of visual

mechanisms cannot be ignored, as the reader needs precise descriptions of ideas and situations in order to share the firsthand experience with the soldiers.

In order to focus on a successful and effective communication of physical pain, it is important to mention Roland Barthes' "phenomenology of the (dead) painting or picture as an allegory of the tomb" (Barthes qtd. in Al-Joulan 113). Barthes' notion of the phenomenology of the dead painting or picture is related to the idea that actions of war are impossible to render because of the static quality of an image. Paintings and images freeze the captured moment and will later represent a dead moment. Consequently, our memory becomes inherent to the picture and will only evoke acts of mourning and strong emotions. Instead of rendering an existing event, the image evokes nostalgia for the past and emphasises its loss (Al-Joulan 113). According to Barthes, the photograph creates a paradoxical truth: "it establishes not a consciousness of the being-there of the thing (which any copy would provoke) but an awareness of its having-been-there" (Barthes 44). In other words, the unreality of an image is the *here-now* and its reality is the *having-been-there* since every image evokes the feeling of something that once has existed and shows the spectator how it was (Barthes 44). This means that paintings or photographs do not contain the temporal aspect or the contingency of an event (Al-Joulan 113). It is precisely the temporal aspect that sustains the distinction between the taking of the picture and the attached emotions when seeing the picture. Hence, taking pictures can be considered as a "mummification of corpses" (Bazin and Burgin qtd. in Al-Joulan 113). On the other hand, literary 'pictorialism' is characterised by mental images that evoke essences, in contrast with paintings and photography, which invoke appearances (Al-Joulan 113). This means that static art such as a photograph is unable to evoke live-experience, and that is precisely what Owen argued against. Although he claims that it is essential to paint the actions of warfare, it is a task that is doomed for failure because of the static quality that is connected to painterly discourse in poetry. As a consequence, Owen opposed this static art because it lacks the possibility of re-experiencing those horrendous events. "*Live-painting in the language of verse*" (Al-Joulan 113), where an experience is relived every time the poem is read, is undoubtedly a more successful way to convey the truth about warfare. Owen's struggle with the effective communication of action is, however, successfully overpowered by intermingling "direct communication with the soldiers and narrative address towards the reader" (Al-Joulan 112).

Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" is haunted by the discourse of danger, pain and death as he transmits a live experience of war towards the reader: 'Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! – An

ecstasy of fumbling, / Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time' (lines 9-10). For the reader, the events almost take place as we read them and one seems to be alerted for the dangers and horrors, just like the soldiers are warned for gas in the poem. Smelling the chemicals, placing the helmets, and the image of drowning soldier strike the reader like a firsthand experience (Al-Joulan 112). Once more, the painterly discourse is present in the juxtaposition of images of yelling soldiers and undetermined soldiers who are all 'floundering like a man in fire or lime' (line 12). The repetition of the verb 'drowning' emphasises the perseverance of trying to forget this visual image within the poet's mind (Hipp 77). Although the poet did not experience the physical pain of being gassed himself, he developed sympathy for his companions and it is precisely by transmitting this excruciating experience that Owen develops his own form of pain, as he is unable to forget. Therefore, all soldiers are able to "experience another's pain because it is one with their own" (Hipp 76).

A similar warning for an enemies' attack is found in Rosenberg's "In the trenches" where the live-transmission exists of alarming soldiers for shells: 'Down – a shell – O! Christ' (line 13) followed by 'I am choked...safe...dust blind' (line 14). The discourse of danger, pain and ultimately death is one that we found in both poets' oeuvre and presumably the discourse that most successfully evokes a shiver in the reader.

Another instance of live-experience occurs in Owen's poem "The Sentry": 'O sir – my eyes, - I'm blind, - I'm blind, - I'm blind' (line 18). The eighteen months gap⁶ between the personal event and the composition of the poem suggests that this experience must have been intense (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association). The immense mental impact on Owen is, I suggest, a reason for adopting a discourse that connects the victim with the reader so that one may experience it in the same way one century later. A similar cry for help occurs in Rosenberg's "The Dying Soldier": 'Water!... Water!... O! Water! / He moaned and swooned to death' (lines 11-12). Instead of a static image to which only acts of mourning are connected, the reader re-experiences the death of a soldier every time he or she rereads the poem. According to Harding, Rosenberg "thinks only in terms of death which comes quickly enough to be regarded as a single living experience" (97). A trace of static art hence lacks in the above mentioned lines, which suggests that live experience, seemingly inaccessible to

⁶ The poem is based on Owen's experience in the trenches in January 1917, two weeks after he arrived there, but the poem's composition dates from over a year and a half later in France, after he has suffered from shell shock, recovered in Craiglockhart and finally returned to the battlefield (Hipp 46).

express for the poet, is skilfully represented by means of a direct transmission that creates a clear image in the mind of the reader as if language were paint.

5.2.3 Weapon imagery and wounds

Although it is not possible to trace the origins of human imagining as well as the chronological order in which weapon imagery first appeared, there are, according to Scarry, indications that the sign of a weapon to express pain occupies an important position in the translation of this feeling (172). In this transformation of pain into visual descriptions, the weapon constitutes possibly one of the most central images. As stated before, pain does not only resist language but it also destroys speech because it deconstructs language “into the pre-language of cries and groans” (Scarry 172). However, the person in pain may rediscover his speech and put an end to the shattering of language, or a person who witnesses the sufferer could speak on behalf of the person in pain. The person in pain or the witness hence adopts a range of descriptive words, but since the existing vocabulary for expressing physical pain is very limited, writers will almost immediately use “the ‘as if’ structure: it feels as if... ; it is as though...” (Scarry 15). One of the metaphors used in these structures is undoubtedly the weapon, a recurrent object in war poetry: ‘He’s spat at us with bullets, and he’s coughed / Shrapnel’ (“The Next War”, lines 6-7). Weapons represent an external agent that causes the pain while the second element specifies the wound or bodily damage caused by that weapon (Scarry 16). Weapons can lift pain and the mental habit of recognising physical pain within the image of a weapon is one that we can find already in previous literary texts (Scarry 16). One does quickly acquire the mental perception of pained bodies and exposed wounds, despite the fact that an instrument itself cannot ‘have pain’. Consequently, the reader associates wounds almost immediately with the image of a weapon.

Scarry goes even further as to say that “pain can be apprehended in the image of the weapon (or wound) but that it almost cannot be apprehended without it” (16). Especially in the case of war poetry, the image of crippled soldiers or missing limbs evokes the associative image of bayonets, bullets or shells. Owen’s “Apologia pro Poemate Meo” illustrates Scarry’s theory on weapon imagery as the image of a wound and a weapon are combined in one verse: ‘But wound with war’s hard wire whose stakes are strong’ (line 23) followed by another image of a wounded arm in ‘Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips’ (line 24). This associative image of weapon and wound hence arouses in the reader a mental perception of pained bodies. Nevertheless, although Scarry claims that weapon imagery almost always goes

hand in hand with the image of the wound, both poets convey weapons frequently without any representation of the wound, except in Owen's "Apologia pro Poemate Meo". However, this does not mean that the reader ignores the image of a wound in his mind since Scarry recognises the automatic association of weapons with pained bodies.

It should be noted, however, that physical pain is not always identical with damage caused by weapons. Contaminated mud, bad weather conditions, hunger or diseases also caused death, although weapons are predominantly associated with physical pain. These metaphors are consequently a recurrent aid for poets to refer to bodily damage and appeared to be a helpful image for communicating physical pain. Both the wound and the weapon can be used associatively to communicate pain. Or as Scarry puts it: "We often call on them to convey the experience of the pain itself" (15). By doing so, the poet makes sharable to the reader what was originally considered inexpressible.

In "Mental Cases", Owen's aim is to describe the physical symptoms of mental illness and employs blood imagery to convey that experience (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association). Starting off with 'Treading blood from lungs' (line 14), Owen continues his detailed description with weapon imagery in 'Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles' (line 16) to recover the blood imagery in 'Carnage incomparable' (line 17). In the final stanza, blood imagery predominates, although weapon imagery lacks: 'Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black' (line 21), followed by 'a wound that bleeds afresh' (line 22).

5.2.3.1 Gas and shells

The German army first used gas as a weapon on October 27, 1914, when they released it near Ypres (Fussell 10). Whereas the British army would quickly imitate this killing device, it was very soon perceived as an atrocity because people saw this chemical as "the least inhumane of modern weapons" (Liddell Hart qtd. in Fussell 10). One of the references to gas is found in "The Next War", where Owen attempts to convey the feeling of inhaling mustard gas in 'We sniffed the green thick odour of his breath' (line 4). No wonder that this 'atrocity' has had an enormous impact on the soldiers' lives as it blistered the skin. Moreover, this greenish-yellow gas burns the nose, throat and lungs and caused immediate death (Al-Joulani 112). Those who were lucky of not being killed by gas could run the risk of severe lung damage. The impact of gas and shells in war poetry could have been predicable because the First World War was fought from the trenches and differs from other conflicts in that there

was less man-to-man confrontation. This trench warfare, in which troops protected themselves from the enemies' artillery by creating dugouts, caused an enormous fear for shells and mustard gas.

"Dulce et Decorum Est" is one of Owen's most noticeable poems when looking for weapon imagery. "Here is a gas poem, done yesterday" (Letter from Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, October 1917, qtd. in Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association) are some of the famous words he wrote to his mother, along with his explanation of the ironic title. However, to this ironic statement at the end of the poem precedes a horrendous scene in which the reader functions as a witness. The second stanza in particular conveys the pressure and frightful moment that precedes the gas attack. The soldiers' fright is expressed by the medical term 'ecstasy' (of fumbling) in line nine, that refers to "a morbid state of nerves in which the mind is occupied solely with one idea" (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association). One man is the victim of this attack as he is unable to get his helmet on in time: 'But someone still was yelling out and stumbling' (line 11). Owen, then, as Scarry asserts, puts on his shoulders the duty of expressing the soldier's suffering since he is "bereft of the resources of speech" (6) and speaks on behalf of the soldier who is in pain. In 'And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...' (line 12) the metaphor consists of a soldiers being succumbed to poison gas compared to the act of drowning. 'Floundering' is also used to illustrate the fate of many soldiers when they fell into a bomb crater filled with mud. By comparing the effect of gas to the landscape in which soldiers could drown, the action takes on a more gruesome insinuation as Owen witnesses his companion dying (Simcox 2000, The Wilfred Owen Association).

Although Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" is generally associated with the extremely painful effects of mustard gas, it appears from closer analysis of their trench poetry that the fear for shells⁷ in general seemed to be the mayor protagonist in their poems when compared to images of other weapons. Bullets or bayonets are less frequently represented in their poetry, although we cannot underestimate their impact in poems such as Owen's "Spring Offensive" where 'the surf of bullets' (line 34) receives a considerable amount of attention as

⁷ Mustard gas was first delivered by means of gas cylinders. The gas was released within the trenches and was, with the help of a favourable wind, blown towards the enemy's trenches. Instances of gas cylinders are not represented in the poetry of Owen and Rosenberg. However, at later stages, the gas was delivered via artillery shells that overcame the risks encountered with gas cylinders, as these gas shells were independent from the wind. The continuous threat of these shells constitutes an important influence on the representation of pain, as the soldiers consistently feared blindness, burned lungs and ultimately death.

well as his “Anthem for Doomed Youth” in which ‘the monstrous anger of guns’ (line 2) is placed in a poignant contrast with religious and peaceful symbolism. Owen’s “Apologia pro Poemate Meo” already contains two references to flying shells alone: ‘Found peace where shell-storms spouted reddest spate’ (line 28) as well as ‘heaven but as the highway for a shell’ (line 32). “The Sentry” equally opens with a reference to this weapon in ‘And gave us hell; for shell on frantic shell’ (line 2) followed by ‘the shrieking air’ (line 26). “Insensibility” mentions ‘The tease and doubt of shelling’ (line 15) and makes it ironically rhyme with ‘reckoning of their shilling’ (line 17).

Rosenberg’s “Dead Man’s Dump” renders a scene in which the ‘explosions ceaseless are’ (line 41) and “In the Trenches” offers a live-transmission of a soldier warning for a shell⁸: ‘Down – a shell – O! Christ’ (line 13). Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth” equally mentions the ‘wailing shells’ (line 7) and ironically compares it to the peaceful sound of a choir. In addition, Rosenberg’s “Marching- as Seen From the Left File” refers to this chemical weapon where the soldiers’ hands ‘swing across the khaki - / Mustard-coloured khaki’⁹ (lines 5-6). With the change in techniques of modern warfare, the poet clearly calls upon a less glorious and less heroic tone (Johnston 220). In other words, the Romantic notion of war changed along with the mustard-gas-filled battlefield.

5.2.4 Mud

Not only did artillery form a continuous threat, but also rain, cold and mud enclosed the soldiers so that they were even more aware of the intolerable conditions (Hipp 49). Unmistakably, mud was one of the greatest realities of the First World War. The landscape of the world to which one was exposed everyday was replaced by “the haptic geography of the trenches and mud was a prime agent in this change” (Das 23). It was impossible to ignore for soldiers died drowning in mud as they could have died from a bullet. Although weapon imagery occupies a predominant position when rendering pain, mud equally had the power over life and death as bullets and mustard gas.

⁸ The fear for bombardments forced the soldiers into a ‘state of passivity’ (Hipp 48) that psychologists considered as the onset of shell shock. It is important to note that the analysis does not talk about shell shock in particular although the impact of the fear for feeling pain may not be overlooked.

⁹ The word ‘mustard’ alludes to the colour of the gas in which many soldiers were absorbed or drowned (Al-Joulani 112).

Herbert Read's poem "Kneeshaw Goes to War" is considered to be one of the most realistic war poems and offers a sensible representation of what mud is capable of doing to soldiers. The poem conveys the poet witnessing the death of his companion as he slowly drowns in the mud: 'And slowly sank, weighted down by equipment and arms. / He cried for help' (lines 15-16)¹⁰. His modernist aesthetics undermines the Romantic nature lyric and introduces horrific battlefields. The correlation between this "avant-garde aesthetic" (Das 65) and the contrasting horror that it describes is also central in the poetry of Owen and Rosenberg. The image of mud haunts the poet, appearing more than once in his poems by means of metaphors, and asking extended descriptions of its texture and content. The words 'mud', 'slime' as well as 'clay' appear in trench narratives and the preoccupation with this threat is clear from Owen's "Apologia pro Poemate Meo", where 'mud' already occupies a position in the first two lines: 'I, too, saw God through mud, - / The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled'. Das draws the attention to the words 'splashed', 'muck', 'sludge', 'funk' and 'plastering slime' (71). These words were not only new¹¹ English words introduced for the first time in poetry, but they also establish "a new economy of bodily affect" (Das 71) and new ways of rendering the body in pain with a historical resonance. In Owen's "The Sentry", mud is used as a tool for rendering the threat and pain in the trenches: 'And splashing in the flood, deluging muck' (line 14).

Especially the choice of verbs in relation to mud is offering us an accurate piece of trench realism. This word choice is affirmed by Das who states that 'to creep', 'to crawl' and 'to worm' are the usual movements in the course of the night watch in no-man's-land or even while stretcher-bearers had to rescue the wounded soldiers in order not to be noticed (43). Active verbs such as 'blinds', 'closes' and 'buries' already hint at the threat of mud (Das 35). However, 'drown' is one of the verbs that both poets frequently used in association with mud, as is the case in "The Sentry" where Owen tries to repress those incidents: 'And one who would have drowned himself for good, - / I try not to remember these things now' (lines 28-29).

¹⁰ Herbert Read, *Collected poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966)

¹¹ 2014 will mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War. The OED (Oxford English Dictionary) is honouring this anniversary with a request to public help in finding the etymology of words that may have first appeared in the context of this war. Words like 'camouflage', 'shell shock' and 'tank' first appeared in newspapers, but the OED is searching for earlier examples that appeared in soldier's diaries or letters. The list of new words is found on < <http://public.oed.com/appeals-tags/wwi/>>.

Although the reader is offered the general perception of soldiers who are surrounded by mud or drowned by it, it is important to note that mud was also compounded of iron scraps, organic wastes or other sorts of debris (Das 39). As a consequence, soldiers did not only drown when slipping into a shell crater, but they could as easily die when an open wound came in contact with contaminated mud. The geography of the battlefield hence assists further complications. Doctors who witnessed these scenes contrasted the uncontaminated territory of South Africa of the Second Boer War with the contaminated and muddy trenches in Flanders that favoured infections (Bourke 34). Mud and lice caused trench-foot¹², which led to an unavoidable amputation of the foot, but mud was also capable of suffocating the soldiers. The latter horrendous death is accurately represented by Owen's choice of verbs.

From what one reads in Owen's verse, it is interesting that critics like Das mention the possible correspondence between mud and Owen's preoccupation with phlegm. Both of them were considered a threat to him. From what we read in his letters to Susan Owen, the throat was for Owen a place of recurrent pain. In his lyric verse, mud often "gets transformed into an all too familiar and remembered bodily fluid" (Das 146) and the contact with claustrophobic and muddy situations in the trenches corresponds to Owen's experience of his phlegmatic and tubercular body (Das 146). This image of muddy landscapes, characterised as a hideous disease can be illustrated by means of "The Show", where he attaches 'great pocks' and 'scabs of plagues' (line 5) to the trenches. Owen's description of no-man's-land seems hence "disease-ridden" (Das 146) which shows his preoccupation with the body. What Owen seems to accomplish here is to create in the mind of the reader an associative image that enables us to parallel mud with infection, disease and consequently physical pain. Note that this associative image is also created for weapon imagery or landscape rendering, as discussed above, in which the reader almost automatically links the weapon to a wound in his mind or where the landscape functions as a metaphor for the damaged body. Nevertheless, these images in which mud is associated with illness and infection is only found in Owen's sample. His preoccupation with corporeal imagination leads me to suggest that this is the main reason for the elevated number of references to mud. Rosenberg's poems, on the other hand, contain

¹² Trench foot is the term doctors gave to soldiers who suffered from pain and swelling of the foot, which was caused by cold, mud and damp (Atenstaedt 635). These wounds could ultimately lead to gangrene. In total it caused half a million of victims within the British and Allied forces (Atenstaedt 635).

little reference to muddy landscapes although his letters to Edward Marsh reveal how difficult life was in the trenches: “We spend most of our time pulling each other out of the mud” (Letter from Isaac Rosenberg to Edward Marsh, 26 January 1918, qtd. in Parsons 267).

5.2.5 Animal imagery

The representation of animals that lived close to the soldiers in the trenches is traceable in Rosenberg’s poetry, in particular the rat and louse. However, one could also argue that animal imagery functions rather as a symbol for the soldiers’ degradation and inhumane circumstances in which they found themselves. As stated before, not only mud was able to cause trench-foot, but lice were also partly responsible for heavy injury which necessitated amputation (Bourke 34). The object that is selected to represent suffering may vary from discussion to discussion, but as rats and louse were part of the physical reality of life in the trenches and are used to identify, descriptively, of what was taking place, I shall analyse animal imagery within the examination of visual mechanisms.

Das claims that the “rat, mole, earthworm and snail are recurrent similes that are used in trench narratives to describe the soldiers” (44). This may be due to the fact that the dropping of the body on the ground or bending oneself in the trenches challenged the vertical organisation of the soldiers’ position and gave way to the representation of the horizontality of animals (Das 44). However, instances in which movements of an animal are used to represent their position is found in but one poem by Rosenberg.

Inferior creatures appear recurrently in several of his poems, as is the case in “Louse Hunting”. Rosenberg’s use of scales (see chapter 5.1.4) is also found in the latter poem. The perspective moves from that of the louse to that of the soldier, seemingly merging the movements of animals with those of humans. The discrepancy in size between the soldier and the inferior creature reveals much of the degradation of humankind. In addition to this scale contrast, Rosenberg’s painterly discourse is remarkably present in “Louse Hunting”, probably due to the fact that he no longer had the possibility to continue his ambition as a painter. It seems as if he was intent on capturing form and colour in the description of the soldiers’ movement that was caused by these inferior creatures. In addition to the capture of motion, the poem illustrates his skill of portraying “the mobile elements of a grotesque conglomeration of bodies and limbs” (Johnston 218). As ‘raging limbs/ whirl over the floor one fire’ (line 3-4), the movement of the soldiers is paralleled to that of inferior animals.

However, a much more recurring theme is animal imagery to show the degrading circumstances in the trenches. As such, Northrop Frye (qtd. in Al-Joulani, 114) states that the rat is seen as a demonic creature that represents the changing nature of humans and animals, which the exposure to trenches caused. This degradation and transposition of the human body evokes images of fear and suffering. In Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches" he mentions the 'sardonic rat' (line 4). Since rats lived side by side with the soldiers in the trenches, it is not surprising to find these creatures in Rosenberg's poetry charged with the task of representing degradation and suffering. The rat with 'cosmopolitan sympathies' (line 8) in this poem travels back and forth between the two enemies' trenches. According to Silkin, the idea of a 'cosmopolitan' rat alludes to the absurdity of the situation in which a rat, a supposedly inferior creature to humankind, is free "to do what men dare not" (277). Whereas the soldiers have no freedom of choice, the inferior creature is permitted to cross between the two enemies' trenches.

Animal imagery in specific contributed to the pretence of any realism in war poetry. Herbert Asquith's "After the Salvo" similarly portrays the rat and the poppy, another familiar war symbol. However, unlike Rosenberg's representation of the rat, Asquith's presence of a rat is "to emphasize, photographically, the general dereliction created by shellfire" (Silkin 276). On the other hand, Rosenberg's conveyance of the rat implicitly seems to suggest that the rat will live because the soldiers do not. This idea can be confirmed by Rosenberg's emphasis on the body parts: 'Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes' (line 14). It seems as if Rosenberg portrays strong Greek statues in this verse instead of common mortal soldiers (Simpson 133). In addition, Rosenberg reaches a contrast between the inferior animal and the soldiers by ironically suggesting that these athletes are 'Less chanced than you for life' (line 15). Since these denizens fed on the corpse, which was a never-ending process between 1914 and 1918, "rats were a constant reminder of death" (Clausson 124). Although Rosenberg does not suggest that his cosmopolitan rat is immortal, the reader is consistently reminded of the soldiers' mortality.

5.2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that in order to render physical pain, war poets recurrently evoked visual images that create associations with pain or images that accurately describe, just like a photograph, wounds, diseases or bodies in pain. Images of eyes, necks, hands and limbs appear in Rosenberg's trench poetry as a "quotidian routine" (Das 91) that clearly

contrast from Owen's theatricality or indirect representation of the body by means of a synecdoche. I suggest that these descriptions of intense and short-lived pain create in the mind of the reader a visual imagination that has the same power as a photograph. Moreover, they even opposed this static art since it is not capable of transmitting the same experience they felt. Therefore, both Owen and Rosenberg adopted the discourse of danger, pain and warning to intermingle the communication with soldiers with a narrative towards the reader of the poem.

Secondly, the analysis has shown that both the wound and the weapon can be used associatively to express pain. In comparison with references to bullets or bayonets, both Rosenberg and Owen referred mostly to shells. This results is, however, not surprising when considering the form of warfare between 1914 and 1918, but whether this is also the case in the poetry of other war poets is an implication that needs further research.

Furthermore, the physical threat of mud and its power to founder and drown soldiers is registered by means of active verbs in their poetry that show the physical contact and suffering as a result. Unlike Rosenberg, Owen seems to create in the mind of the reader an associative image that enables one to parallel mud with infection and disease.

Animal imagery is used to parallel the soldiers' movement in the trenches to that of inferior creatures since they constantly had to lower their body, but it is also employed to reveal the degrading circumstances they had to live in. In specific, Rosenberg recurrently evoked the image of the rat and louse to suggest that these creatures could live because the soldiers did not.

5.3 Stylistic mechanisms

5.3.1 In general

This chapter will solely focus on Owen's poems, since rhyme and sound patterns are considered to be inherent to his writing and are less recurrent in Rosenberg's sample. Rosenberg's style is, unlike Owen's, seemingly unstructured and fragmented. His imagination, though more detailed than Owen's, "frequently lacks coherence in form and conception" (Johnston 246). Rosenberg seemed to have the intention of translating his pain and distress to imagery and symbols, rather than focusing on stylistic mechanisms.

Furthermore, Johnston asserts that the lyric mode only partially sufficed for the expression of individual experience and that this intention of communicating reality demands a “fuller and more objective expression in narrative or dramatic form” (249). Owen, on the other hand, regularly sought a form of expression in the sonnet and shaped his inspiration in harmonious units, rhythms, his well-known use of half-rhyme and meticulously constructed stanzas. He is considered to be the “great renovator of English poetic form” (Pinto 150) and succeeded in creating new sound patterns that express the war poets’ new attitude after abandoning the patriotic themes. Not only was he a great renovator of the poetic form, but he also identified with the soldier’s physical pain and was able to transmit that by means of sound. Although this chapter will only take into account Owen’s poems, it is a crucial analysis when searching for mechanisms to communicate pain as the idea of an unfulfilled rhyme may stand for an unfulfilled youth or the aestheticisation of violence may come to surface through sound patterns.

5.3.2 Half-rhyme

One of the most notable characteristics in Owen’s poetry is his use of half-rhyme or para-rhyme. This poetical device consists in a vowel change while the consonantal framework is retained (Welland 226). A word pair like ‘leaves/lives’, for example, has similar consonant sounds while the vowels are different (Hibberd 11). Owen applied half-rhyme much more frequently in his later war poems. According to Welland, it is no coincidence that of the fourteen poems that contain half-rhyme, thirteen were written in the last twenty months of his life (236). Of those thirteen poems, only two of them are not connected with the theme of war. Therefore one cannot ignore the connection between Owen’s use of half-rhyme and its contribution to communicating physical pain.

One of Owen’s themes “is that the war prevents young soldiers from fulfilling their lives” (Hibberd 12). As regards the realization of this theme, Hibberd claims that half-rhyme is partly responsible for creating this idea in the mind of the reader since half-rhyme, just like the soldiers’ lives, evokes incompleteness (12). The lines are unfulfilled and where the reader expects a full rhyme, one gets an incomplete rhyme (Hibberd 12). Since this idea of unfulfilled rhyme stands in connection with an unfulfilled youth, Hibberd declares that the effect is one of frustration and melancholia, “as though the ideal of completeness, which can still be perceived in the rhyme, is being destroyed as we read” (12). Nevertheless, without this assumption of critics like Welland and Hibberd, one cannot conclude that Owen’s deliberate

use of half-rhyme creates the image of dying young soldiers in the mind of the reader nor evoke the idea that completeness is destroyed. However, I agree with the fact that half-rhyme may possibly bring out more forcefully the pity in Owen's poetry.

"Exposure" is considered to be his first poem containing half-rhyme. The poem opens with a poignant description of life in the trenches. J. Loiseau draws attention to the similarity between the opening lines of the poem and Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale", in which 'Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds' (line 1) of "Exposure" resemble Keats' 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains' (line 1) (Loiseau qtd. in Johnston 169). The positive experience of Keats is, however, replaced by misery in Owen's version. As stated before (see chapter 5.1.4), the hopeful vision we principally find in the Romantic lyric is transformed into a trench lyric that seemed more intent on conveying the harrowing truth. Whereas Rosenberg transformed the Romantic nature landscape into a battlefield filled with murdered soldiers, Owen skilfully transforms Keats' aching heart with a mournful device like half-rhyme.

Although it is many times overlooked, rain and cold were able to cause more damage than artillery. In creating half-rhyme with the winds that 'knife us' (line 1) and 'nervous' (line 4), Owen may suggest the relation between spiritual and bodily freezing (Silkin 202). Johnston states that this sense of tension and suffering is therefore strengthened by the use of half-rhyme, which means that it creates "painful discords" (170). Owen's word choice is one that contains negative value such as 'merciless iced east winds' (line 1) or 'poignant misery of dawn' (line 11). In addition to these words with negative connotation, Edmund Blunden considered the effect of half-rhyme as one of "remoteness, darkness, emptiness, shock, echo" (Blunden qtd. in Johnston 170).

In addition to the use of half-rhyme, Welland mentions Owen's deliberate choice of vowels that fall from a high-pitch to a low-pitch (237). To illustrate this statement, Owen uses 'dearth' as a half-rhyme for 'death' in "The Show". However, the word 'death', which has a higher pitch than the other, is placed initially which causes a fall from high- to low-pitch. The same counts for "The End" in which 'And when I hearken to the earth' (line 11) precedes 'It is death' (line 12). This is also the case with the succession of the words 'mean/moan/men' (lines 23; 25; 28) at the end of each verse in "The Show". Welland asserts that this fall from high- to low-pitched vowels is done deliberately to incorporate a sense of hopelessness to the poems (237). This is verified by the fact that the falling-vowel sequence never changed over the various versions of one poem. Owen's sense of hopelessness and lost youth, which undoubtedly originated from his trench experiences, is therefore forcefully emphasised by his

preoccupation with form and technique. Welland states that this preoccupation is clearly illustrated in “Insensibility” where half-rhyme caused an even more “intricate effect” (238). This poem is an example of creating a sense of compassion in the reader by making him feel the distress and hardship of the soldier’s life (Gardett 224). For example, the echoing of the end-rhyme ‘mean/immune/man’ (lines 52; 54; 55) by the internal words ‘moans/mourns’ (line 55;57) shows Owen’s preoccupation with complex rhyme forms. By means of word choice such as ‘moans’ and ‘mourns’ as well as complex sound patterns, Owen is able to create a connection between the suffering soldier and the reader. In other words, it can be stated that Owen deliberately chose the fall from high- to low-pitch to give the sound of the poem a sort of ‘dying fall’ that matches his feeling of hopelessness and frustration with the trench experience (Welland 238). Whether or not the reader notes this ‘dying fall’ is perhaps an implication that needs further research. In addition, I suggest that whether or not Owen used this device to give expression to suffering, the visual images and symbols remain the most accurate mechanisms to render physical pain.

5.3.3 Sound

Just like Owen was able to shape his ideas in half-rhyme, he equally evokes an aestheticisation of violence in his use of sound patterns. In the opening lines of “Disabled”, for example, the sequence of hissing sounds makes the reader wince while reading ‘Legless, sewn short at elbow’ (line 3) (Das 141). Das suggests that despite the comma after legless, the alliteration of ‘legless sewn’ drives the reader forward and only stops reading after ‘short’ (141). However, the ‘o’ and ‘w’ sounds in ‘sewn..short..elbow’ make us realise that the soldier has not only lost his legs, as the caesura made us believe, but has lost all four limbs. In other words, the physical mutilation is partly accomplished by the sound pattern of the opening lines, which makes the reader wince the more he reads. However, whether this sense is created by the caesura after ‘short’ or by the hissing sounds, I believe the reader is more shocked by reading ‘legless’ at the beginning of the verse and ‘elbow’ at the end. If this is the case, sound patterns are no longer at stake but we rather speak of a visual mechanism here. The opening lines of “Disabled” hence attract the reader both visually and presumably also aurally. This urges the reader to keep on reading the description of visual unattractive moments from which we would otherwise shiver. Such is also the case with ‘limbs knife-skewed’ (line 8) in “Greater Love” or flesh torn apart in ‘shatter of flying muscles’ (line 16)

in “Mental Cases”. As such, unlike Rosenberg, Owen is able to skilfully shape his visual unattractive images of suffering soldiers in harmonious rhythms.

A night march and a gas attack are described in Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est”. Although visual mechanisms are clearly present, one could also draw attention to sound and how it evokes the sense of pain. The alliterative sound in ‘bent double, like old beggars’ and ‘knock kneed, coughing’ (lines 1-2) stimulate our visual mind although the iambs and trochees move along slowly within the pentameter which alludes to the marching sound of the soldiers in the sludge (Das 155). In the second stanza the focus shifts from a perception outside the body to the body from within. The testimony of the gas attack is no longer a visual impression as was the case in the first stanza, but is now a “gluttural process”¹³ (Das 156). This means that the sounds likewise depart from a relation between the soldier’s body and the world to sounds connected with the inside of the body such as ‘guttering, choking, writhing, gargling’ (lines 16;19;22). “Dulce et Decorum Est” illustrates an accurate description of the experience soldiers had with mustard gas and is hence preoccupied with the insides of the body. While war poetry is predominantly written with an emphasis on wounds, amputations and blindness, Owen provides us here with a “visceral imagination” (Das 156), achieved by sound patterns in these specific verbs.

According to Das, one should pay extra attention to the sound pattern in the second stanza because the sibilance and labials of the verbs ‘fumbling/stumbling/drowning’ (lines 9; 11;14) create “a sonic realm that obscenely mimes, if not aestheticises, the spectral space created around the floundering body through its own jerky, erratic movements” (157). In other words, not only visual mechanisms are present in the second stanza, but also sound patterns that transmit a live-experience of soldiers in pain. At the same time, Owen may have put the three gerundives at the end of each verse to put focus on the eternal now of the gas experience, suggesting the haunting effect it has on its victims (Das 157). This syntactic phenomenon is known as the ‘principle of end focus’¹⁴. Owing to the fact that the focus of a sentence is normally placed at the end, I suggest the impact of pain is rendered more intensely because those words (‘fumbling/ stumbling/ drowning’) are emphasised as well as

¹³ Mustard gas was able to burn the lungs and “corrodes the body from within” (Das 156). As such, Owen moved his focus from the outside of the body (‘Bent double’ and ‘Knock-kneed’ in the first two lines) to the inside of the body.

¹⁴ The ‘principle of end focus’ consists of the assumption that the most important information is placed at the end of a sentence.

remembered more directly in the reader's mind. This means that the principle of end focus along with the -ing form, that suggests an ongoing suffering of the soldier, also create a recurrent remembrance of that experience in the mind of the reader as the experience lives on.

Owen's "Futility", on the other hand, inspired critics to elaborate on the relationship between the body of the soldier and the landscape along with a reference to genesis. However, it must be noted that at the level of sound, the first stanza can be seen as a culminating cry. More specifically, the sound pattern in this stanza is weaving itself into a combination of half-rhyme ('sun' and 'sown' in line 1 and 3), assonance ('sown' and 'snow' in line 3 and 5), alliteration ('snow' and 'now' in line 5 and 6) and full rhyme ('now' and 'know' in line 6 and 7) (Das 160). The repetitive 'o' sound in this stanza culminates at the end of the poem in the penultimate line: 'O what made fatuous sunbeams toil'. Das states that these "sensuous folds of sound only highlight by contrast the unresponsive body they contain" (160). However, such interpretation is left open for discussion as I suggest that one would not immediately associate the sound pattern with the "unresponsive body" (Das 160), but rather with a sense of hopelessness, which leads us to the theme of pity.

As regards "Spring Offensive", critics go even further as to say that sound no longer aestheticises, but that half-rhyme and sibilance introduce an approaching terror (Das 164). This is obtained by revealing culminating details with a hissing sound: 'Sharp on their souls hung the imminent ridge of grass, / Fearfully flashed the sky's mysterious glass' (line 11-12). The sibilance of these lines hints at the anticipated slaughter that emerges in the second stage of the poem. Sibilance in these lines characterises the preparation of the soldiers before the attack, while brusque and sharp word choice containing occlusive consonants represents the second stage of the poem, more specifically the attack: 'Breasted the surf of bullets, or went up / On the hot blast and fury of hell's upsurge' (lines 34-35). Unlike the 'o' sound in "Futility", I suggest that the rendering of violence is more successfully achieved within this sound pattern as it shifts from soft and hissing sounds before the attack to occlusive consonants and hence hard sounds in the second stage of the poem.

5.3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of Owen's "Exposure", "Disabled", "Dulce et Decorum Est", "Futility" and "Spring Offensive". As regards the use of half-rhyme, I suggest that Hibberd's idea about Owen's device rather creates the sense of pity than that it accurately reveals how soldiers suffered. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the instances in which Owen

creates these “painful discords” (Johnston 170) such as the combination of winds that ‘knife us’ (“Exposure”, line 1) with ‘nervous’ (line 4). Although it is not a recurrent phenomenon in his trench poems, the image of physical and psychological suffering is hence strengthened by half-rhyme. Furthermore, the aestheticisation of violence possibly comes to surface through sound patterns. Owen provides us with a “visceral imagination” (Das 156), achieved by sound patterns in these verbs like ‘fumbling/stumbling/drowning’. The poet is therefore able to skilfully shape a range of visual unattractive images of suffering soldiers within harmonious rhythms.

6 Results

The investigation of this dissertation is divided into an analysis of symbolic, visual and stylistic mechanisms, of which the visual mechanisms were the most recurrent device for transmitting physical pain. This is also confirmed by Scarry who states that within the scarcity of literary representations of pain, writers consistently rely on visibility and descriptive devices (11). Secondly, pain's resistance to language gave rise to imagining symbols, which is also regularly found in the sample of both war poets. The third mechanism consists of Wilfred Owen's use of sound patterns as well as his well-known use of half-rhyme. Symbolic and stylistic mechanisms were found to a lesser extent in their verse, although we cannot minimize the recurrent symbols for expressing their concern with language insufficiency or the use of sound patterns to transmit a sense of hardship.

Following Scarry's assertion that pain takes no external content or object and that it therefore "resists objectification in language" (5), this analysis showed that symbols are one of the mechanisms the war poets used to cope with that resistance. Religious imagery is most successfully used by Rosenberg who employs it as a tool to parallel the soldiers' suffering to that of Christ. For Owen, on the other hand, religion serves to emphasise the senseless slaughter and mourns the soldiers who died too young. Moreover, both Owen and Rosenberg employed facial and vocal imagery to express the inexpressibility of pain. This symbol serves to illustrate that they are silenced and hindered by witnessing soldiers in pain. Several references in their oeuvre to the mouth, tongue and the final utterances of a dying soldier show that the poet's voice is obstructed in describing their pain. Thirdly, nature and the war landscape seemingly function as a metaphor for suffering. It symbolises the male and mutilated body and shows that soldiers, just like the fields of Flanders, are characterised by

destruction and disfiguration. It is important to note that landscape rendering cannot be analysed without focusing on the Romantic nature lyric, on which their trench poems were partly based. In particular, Rosenberg transformed the hopeful image of union between man and nature to a devastated landscape that is equally mutilated as the male body in pain.

Furthermore, I suggest that the visual mechanisms most successfully render physical pain, as it is equally powerful, just like a photograph, to describe the suffering of other soldiers. Images of necks, hands and fingers appear in the poetry of both poets. In Rosenberg's sample, however, these body parts are rendered in a realistic manner, whereas Owen opts for a theatrical mode in which he represents the body in an indirect way by means of, for example, a synecdoche. Both poets also adopt a discourse of danger, pain and warning as they opposed the static art of poetry. Consequently, they amalgamate the direct orders to soldiers or cries for help with a narrative addressed to the reader of the poem in, for example, 'Down – a shell – O! Christ.' ("In the Trenches", line 13).

In the transformation of pain into visual descriptions, the weapon is one of the most central images. A weapon is recurrently associated with a wound, be it within their verse or created in the mind of the reader. Furthermore, the analysis of weapon imagery resulted in a high number of shell images. This result is not surprising when we consider how the First World War was fought. Protected by the dugout from the enemies' artillery, explosions caused the highest number of wounded soldiers. Whether that is mere coincidence or whether we can also find this result in the poetry of other war poets, is perhaps a concept that can be developed in further research.

Thirdly, mud, which was as threatening to the soldiers as continuous bombardments, equally constitutes one of the most important protagonists in their sample. In particular, we notice the dominant presence of verbs such as 'blinds', 'drowns', 'closes' and 'buries'. Although these verbs accurately describe the threat of mud, 'drown' is one of the verbs that both poets used frequently in association with mud. As such, the pain and possible threat that soldiers encountered when they came into contact with mud is mostly conveyed by means of verbs. Animal imagery, on the other hand, is frequently employed by Rosenberg and shows how degraded the living circumstances of the soldiers in the trenches were. Their movements in the dugout are paralleled to that of animals or the poet reveals how rats continue to survive in the trenches because soldiers do not.

The stylistic mechanisms focus solely on some of Owen's trench poems. The poet skilfully transforms the brutality of trench life into rhythm, half-rhyme and sound patterns. I oppose the assumption that a fall from high- to low pitch conveys physical pain, but one cannot ignore the instances in which the transition of hissing sounds to occlusive consonants strengthens the image of violence. Physical mutilation is hence partly accomplished by sound patterns.

7

Conclusion

When the outbreak of the Great War caused a tremendous production of poetry, war poets quickly considered the sonnets, patriotic themes and ‘high diction’ untruthful as a poetic model for rendering their agonizing experience with warfare. Attempts to support the soldiers with high morale were diminished to worthless. Instead, they sought to find poetic models that enabled them to render the truth about war. While both Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg relied on the Romantic lyric, they frequently expressed their concern with language insufficiency and the impossibility of rendering pain into words. Between 1914 and 1918, nearly 41.000 soldiers had their arm or leg amputated (Bourke 33). This elevated number of amputations was never seen before and pictures of bloody soldiers, who are dismembered and desperate, are the ones that we nowadays associate with this war. However, once participating in this conflict it is not only difficult to judge the agonizing events, but also to describe, realistically, the experience behind the words.

The trench poetry of Owen and Rosenberg is one of the artistic genres where the male body in pain “was fluently translated into a lyric voice” (Das 189), thereby opposing Virginia Woolf’s assertion of the absence or “near-absence” of literary representations of pain (Woolf qtd. in Scarry 10). This dissertation has shown the specific mechanisms Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg employed to convey physical pain in their trench poems. Based on Elaine Scarry’s idea about the impossibility of communicating pain because of its resistance to language, this study has illustrated how two of the most recognised anti-war poets tried to overcome the unshareability of pain by adopting symbols, visualising images, or by means of rhyme and sound patterns. All in all, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg have both complained against the inexpressibility of physical pain in their letters as well as by adopting suggestive symbols in their poems such as the voice or the mouth or by using biblical images such as Absalom’s death.

This dissertation was divided into three main chapters. Both Owen and Rosenberg adopted symbolic mechanisms since physical pain, unlike psychological suffering, lacks any referential content. As such, poppies, wire, no-man's-land or Christ function as symbols to transmit the feeling of pain. Moreover, within the discussion of symbols, it is also important to note that the influence of Romantic nature lyric is most visible in Rosenberg's poems, although Owen's poems sometimes refer to Keats, who expressed the Romantic will to suffer. Keats may be ever present in Owen's mind, but Rosenberg relied more heavily on this Romantic lyric to represent what seems ungraspable. This was predominantly remarkable in his portrayal of the war landscape that serves as a metaphor for the mutilated body as well as his employment of animal imagery to show the soldiers' horrendous living circumstances.

Within the analysis of the visual mechanisms, on the other hand, I classified the images that readers generally associate with pain. As such, damaged body parts, wounds and amputated limbs are examined, but also weapons, mud and animal imagery. The lexicon of both poets reflects attention to contorted corpses, killing devices and landscape texture. Rosenberg's images of necks, hands or limbs do not have the same sensuality and theatricality of Owen's verses. His use of body parts hence differs from Rosenberg's, who used the body in a painterly discourse. In other words, Rosenberg's body is rendered in a realistic and agonizing way, which shows his strong imaginative intensity. Although Owen's poems are sharp, precise and contain a highly dramatic rendering, Rosenberg secures the energy that is necessary for transmitting physical pain. His "descriptively verbal force" (Silkin 285) is what distinguishes the lower rank soldier from Owen's sensitive lines. All things considered, I suggest that these latter mechanisms are more accessible for the reader because the association with physical pain is more consistent.

The stylistic mechanisms, on the other hand, are only discussed within the poems of Owen. One cannot ignore that Owen shaped his experience in meticulously constructed stanzas, rhythms and his use of half-rhyme. Although the latter mechanism does not explicitly illustrate wounds, diseases and mutilated bodies, it is perhaps able to create unconsciously a shivering that we experience every time we re-read his lyric verse. But whether or not these stylistic mechanisms contributed to a great extent to the expression of pain is left open for discussion.

As regards Rosenberg's sample, his complex experiences as well as his manipulation of language in which he used the device of transposition is precisely what contributed to the analysis of visual mechanisms. His painterly discourse shows that he conveys suffering and

death usually in a direct way, ignoring the fact that these things should not have been happened. Giving his training as a painter, Rosenberg's visual intensity served him to bring the world of the trenches alive and accurately convey suffering. Wilfred Owen's poetry, on the other hand, is often admired for its greatness that "lies in its moral power" (Pinto 149), but the relation between his writing and bodily damage was too often ignored by critics. Nevertheless, I suggest it is important to connect the sense of touch with Owen's poetry, as it is fundamental to understanding his verses.

Further research could be conducted to investigate whether the implications of this research are mere coincidence or whether one could also find these results within the poetry of other anti-war poets. As regards the visual representation of the male body in pain, the image of the feet is rather limited in comparison to the image of the hand. There are, however, references to the marching sound or football matches, but references to wounds on legs or amputated legs remain limited. This result is striking when one takes into account that of the 41.000 soldiers who had their limbs amputated, 69 per cent lost a leg compared to 28 per cent who lost an arm (Bourke 33). Moreover, whereas weapon imagery is generally associated with wounds, both Owen and Rosenberg frequently referred to shells compared to the few references to bullets or bayonets. This result is not surprising when we take into account how the First World War was fought, but whether one may also found this elevated number of shell-references in the oeuvres of other war poets is left open for discussion.

Furthermore I would like to add that these results do not account for every war anti-war poet, but despite the limited scope of my research, I was able to uncover how both Rosenberg and Owen expressed their concern about language insufficiency and how they partly accomplished to accurately convey the physical pain behind the words.

All in all, both poets used the devastated war landscape as a metaphor for the disfigured male body in pain, they both accurately described the soldiers' body parts in pain and expressed their concern with the insufficiency of language. As such, the analysis of Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg's limited sample of trench poems showed us that "the near-absence of literary representations of pain" (Scarry 10) could be opposed by a visualising discourse, suggestive symbols and poignant sound patterns amongst others. They have managed to translate pain into words and hence triumphed Elaine Scarry's assertion of the "unshareability of pain through its resistance to language" (4). As such, these poets not only provided lyrical mechanisms to express physical pain but they also opposed the secretiveness of public awareness.

8

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9 Appendix

9.1 Poems by Wilfred Owen¹

Exposure (Feb. 1917)

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
 But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
 What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,
 But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deathly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew;

¹ The analysed poems are extracted from *The First World War Poetry Digital Archive* (University of Oxford):
<<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/>>

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces---
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses,
-Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,---
We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.

Anthem for Doomed Youth (Sept. 1917)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
-Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,---
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Dulce et Decorum Est (Oct.1917)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!-An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,---
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Disabled (Oct.1917)

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.
* * *

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
And girl glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,---
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girl's waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.

All of them touch him like some queer disease.

* * *

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

* * *

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join.---He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.
Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

* * *

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

* * *

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

Apologia pro Poemate Meo (Nov. 1917)

I, too, saw God through mud,-
The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled.
War brought more glory to their eyes than blood,
And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a child.

Merry it was to laugh there-
Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.
For power was on us as we slashed bones bare
Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder.

I, too, have dropped off Fear-
Behind the barrage, dead as my platoon,
And sailed my spirit surging light and clear
Past the entanglement where hopes lay strewn;

And witnessed exultation-
Faces that used to curse me, scowl for scowl,
Shine and lift up with passion of oblation,
Seraphic for an hour; though they were foul.

I have made fellowships-
Untold of happy lovers in old song.
For love is not the binding of fair lips
With the soft silk of eyes that look and long,

By Joy, whose ribbon slips,-
But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong;
Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;
Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong.

I have perceived much beauty
In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight;
Heard music in the silentness of duty;
Found peace where shell-storms spouted reddest spate.

Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare
And heaven but as the highway for a shell,

You shall not hear their mirth:
You shall not come to think them well content
By any jest of mine. These men are worth
Your tears. You are not worth their merriment.

Insensibility (March 1918)

1

Happy are men who yet before they are killed
Can let their veins run cold.
Whom no compassion fleers
Or makes their feet
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.
The front line withers.
But they are troops who fade, not flowers,
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling:
Losses, who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.

2

And some cease feeling
Even themselves or for themselves.
Dullness best solves
The tease and doubt of shelling,
And Chance's strange arithmetic
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.
They keep no check on armies' decimation.

3

Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.
Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more ache.
Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
And terror's first constriction over,
Their hearts remain small-drawn.
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
Now long since ironed,
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

4

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:
His days are worth forgetting more than not.
He sings along the march
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,
The long, forlorn, relentless trend
From larger day to huger night.

5

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?
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
Dying, not mortal overmuch;
Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

6

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones.
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
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;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

Mental Cases (May 1918)

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,---but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?

-These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
Always they must see these things and hear them,
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
Carnage incomparable, and human squander
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
Back into their brains, because on their sense
Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.
-Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,

Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
-Thus their hands are plucking at each other;
Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.

Futility (June 1918)

Move him into the sun-
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds-
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
-O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Spring Offensive (Sept.1917)

Halted against the shade of a last hill
They fed, and eased of pack-loads, were at ease;
And leaning on the nearest chest or knees
Carelessly slept.

But many there stood still

To face the stark blank sky beyond the ridge,
Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.
Marvelling they stood, and watched the long grass swirled
By the May breeze, murmurous with wasp and midge;
And though the summer oozed into their veins
Like an injected drug for their bodies' pains,
Sharp on their souls hung the imminent ridge of grass,
Fearfully flashed the sky's mysterious glass.

Hour after hour they ponder the warm field
And the far valley behind, where buttercups
Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up;
When even the little brambles would not yield
But clutched and clung to them like sorrowing arms.
They breathe like trees unstirred.

Till like a cold gust thrills the little word

At which each body and its soul begird
And tighten them for battle. No alarms
Of bugles, no high flags, no clamorous haste,-
Only a lift and flare of eyes that faced
The sun, like a friend with whom their love is done.
O larger shone that smile against the sun,---
Mightier than his whose bounty these have spurned.

So, soon they topped the hill, and raced together
Over an open stretch of herb and heather
Exposed. And instantly the whole sky burned
With fury against them; earth set sudden cups
In thousands for their blood; and the green slope
Chasmed and deepened sheer to infinite space.

Of them who running on that last high place
Breasted the surf of bullets, or went up
On the hot blast and fury of hell's upsurge,
Or plunged and fell away past this world's verge,
Some say God caught them even before they fell.

But what say such as from existence' brink
Ventured but drave too swift to sink,
The few who rushed in the body to enter hell,
And there out-fiending all its fiends and flames
With superhuman inhumanities,
Long-famous glories, immemorial shames-
And crawling slowly back, have by degrees
Regained cool peaceful air in wonder-
Why speak not they of comrades that went under?

The Sentry (Sept 1918)

We'd found an old Boche dug-out, and he knew,
And gave us hell; for shell on frantic shell
Lit full on top, but never quite burst through.
Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime,
Kept slush waist-high and rising hour by hour,
And choked the steps too thick with clay to climb.
What murk of air remained stank old, and sour
With fumes from whizz-bangs, and the smell of men
Who'd lived there years, and left their curse in the den,
If not their corpses...

There we herded from the blast
Of whizz-bangs; but one found our door at last,-
Buffeting eyes and breath, snuffing the candles,
And thud! flump! thud! down the steep steps came thumping
And splashing in the flood, deluging muck,
The sentry's body; then his rifle, handles

Of old Boche bombs, and mud in ruck on ruck.
We dredged it up, for dead, until he whined,
'O sir---my eyes,---I'm blind,---I'm blind,---I'm blind.'
Coaxing, I held a flame against his lids
And said if he could see the least blurred light
He was not blind; in time they'd get all right
'I can't,' he sobbed. Eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids',
Watch my dreams still,-yet I forgot him there
In posting Next for duty, and sending a scout
To beg a stretcher somewhere, and flound' ring about
To other posts under the shrieking air.

Those other wretches, how they bled and spewed,
And one who would have drowned himself for good,---
I try not to remember these things now.
Let Dread hark back for one word only: how,
Half-listening to that sentry's moans and jumps,
And the wild chattering of his shivered teeth,
Renewed most horribly whenever crumps
Pummelled the roof and slogged the air beneath,-
Through the dense din, I say, we heard him shout
'I see your lights!'-But ours had long gone out.

9.2 Poems by Isaac Rosenberg²

Chagrin (1915-1916)

Caught still as Absalom,
Surely the air hangs
From the swayless cloud-boughs,
Like hair of Absalom
Caught and hanging still.

From the imagined weight
Of spaces in a sky
Of mute chagrin, my thoughts
Hang like branch-clung hair
To trunks of silence swung,
With the choked soul weighing down
Into thick emptiness.
Christ! end this hanging death,
For endlessness hangs therefrom.

Invisibly-branches break
From invisible trees-
The cloud-woods where we rush,
Our eyes holding so much,
Which we must ride dim ages round
Ere the hands (we dream) can touch,
We ride, we ride, before the morning
The secret roots of the sun to tread,
And suddenly
We are lifted of all we know
And hang from implacable boughs.

² The analysed poems are extracted from *The First World War Poetry Digital Archive* (University of Oxford):
<<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/>>

Marching-as seen from the left file (1915-1916)

My eyes catch ruddy necks
Sturdily pressed back,-
All a red brick moving glint.
Like flaming pendulums, hands
Swing across the khaki---
Mustard-coloured khaki---
To the automatic feet.

We husband the ancient glory
In these bared necks and hands.
Not broke is the forge of Mars;
But a subtler brain beats iron
To shoe the hoofs of death
(Who paws dynamic air now).
Blind fingers loose an iron cloud
To rain immortal darkness
On strong eyes.

Break of Day in the Trenches (June 1916)

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old Druid Time as ever.
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems, odd thing, you grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurl'd through still heavens?
What quaver-what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping,
But mine in my ear is safe-
Just a little white with the dust.

Louse Hunting (1917)

Nudes-stark aglisten
Yelling in lurid glee. Grinning faces of fiends
And raging limbs
Whirl over the floor one fire,
For a shirt verminously busy
Yon soldier tore from his throat
With oaths
Godhead might shrink at, but not the lice.
And soon the shirt was aflare
Over the candle he'd lit while we lay.
Then we all sprang up and stript
To hunt the vermin brood.
Soon like a demons' pantomime
The place was raging.
See the silhouettes agape,
See the gibbering shadows
Mixed with the battled arms on the wall.
See gargantuan hooked fingers
Dug in supreme flesh
To smutch the supreme littleness.
See the merry limbs in hot Highland fling
Because some wizard vermin
Charmed from the quiet this revel
When our ears were half lulled
By the dark music
Blown from Sleep's trumpet.

Dead Man's Dump (1917)

The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
Upon our brothers dear.

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched,
Their shut mouths made no moan,
They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,
Man born of man, and born of woman,
And shells go crying over them
From night till night and now.

Earth has waited for them,
All the time of their growth

Fretting for their decay:
Now she has them at last!
In the strength of their strength
Suspended-stopped and held.

What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit
Earth! have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,
And flung on your hard back
Is their soul's sack,
Emptied of God-ancestral essences.
Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
When the swift iron burning bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth.

What of us, who flung on the shrieking pyre,
Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,
Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed,
Immortal seeming ever?
Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,
A fear may choke in our veins
And the startled blood may stop.

The air is loud with death,
The dark air spurts with fire,
The explosions ceaseless are.

Timelessly now, some minutes past,
These dead strode time with vigorous life,
Till the shrapnel called 'an end!'
But not to all. In bleeding pangs
Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,
Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.

A man's brains splattered on
A stretcher-bearer's face;
His shook shoulders slipped their load,
But when they bent to look again
The drowning soul was sunk too deep
For human tenderness.

They left this dead with the older dead,
Stretched at the cross roads.

Burnt black by strange decay
Their sinister faces lie

The lid over each eye,
The grass and coloured clay
More motion have than they,
Joined to the great sunk silences.

Here is one not long dead;
His dark hearing caught our far wheels,
And the choked soul stretched weak hands
To reach the living word the far wheels said,
The blood-dazed intelligence beating for light,
Crying through the suspense of the far torturing wheels
Swift for the end to break,
Or the wheels to break,
Cried as the tide of the world broke over his sight.

Will they come? Will they ever come?
Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,
And the rushing wheels all mixed
With his tortured upturned sight,
So we crashed round the bend,
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face.

Daughters of War (1917)

Space beats the ruddy freedom of their limbs-
Their naked dances with man's spirit naked
By the root side of the tree of life
(The underside of things
And shut from earth's profoundest eyes).

I saw in prophetic gleams
These mighty daughters in their dances
Beckon each soul aghast from its crimson corpse
To mix in their glittering dances.
I heard the mighty daughters' giant sighs
In sleepless passion for the sons of valour,
And envy of the days of flesh
Barring their love with mortal boughs across,-
The mortal boughs-the mortal tree of life,
The old bark burnt with iron wars
They blow to a live flame
To char the young green days
And reach the occult soul;-they have no softer lure-
No softer lure than the savage ways of death.
We were satisfied of our Lords the moon and the sun

To take our wage of sleep and bread and warmth-
These maidens came-these strong everliving Amazons,
And in an easy might their wrists
Of night's sway and noon's sway the sceptres brake,
Clouding the wild-the soft lustres of our eyes.

Clouding the wild lustres, the clinging tender lights;
Driving the darkness into the flame of day,
With the Amazonian wind of them
Over our corroding faces
That must be broken-broken for evermore
So the soul can leap out
Into their huge embraces.
Tho' there are human faces
Best sculptures of Deity,
And sinews lusted after
By the Archangels tall,
Even these must leap to the love-heat of these maidens
From the flame of terrene days,
Leaving grey ashes to the wind-to the wind.

One (whose great lifted face,
Where wisdom's strength and beauty's strength
And the thewed strength of large beasts
Moved and merged, gloomed and lit)
Was speaking, surely, as the earth-men's earth fell away;
Whose new hearing drunk the sound
Where pictures lutes and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought,
Essenced to language, thus-

'My sisters force their males
From the doomed earth, from the doomed glee
And hankering of hearts.
Frail hands gleam up through the human quagmire,
and lips of ash
Seem to wail, as in sad faded paintings
Far sunken and strange.
My sisters have their males
Clean of the dust of old days
That clings about those white hands,
And yearns in those voices sad.
But these shall not see them,
Or think of them in any days or years,
They are my sisters' lovers in other days and years.'