

Proposal: The Evolution on the View of War in British Society

The proposed paper will analyze how the disillusionment of British citizens over the Great War in the early twentieth century can be traced through war poetry, specifically that of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and the newspapers of England in 1914-1917. Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were both soldiers in the British Army, and like most young man in England, longed for the glory of romantic war, but soon discovered that modern warfare was anything but romantic. Their poems protesting the war and speaking frankly on the horror of it is regarded as some of the greatest works produced during that tumultuous period. While analyses have been done on the poets and their lives, little has been done on connecting the poets to a larger context. This angle of research will help combine the gritty details of the emotions on the front with the societal attitudes that can be glimpsed in newspapers. The poetry is the man of the society, while the paper is the society at large.

World War was unique among all the previous wars leading up to in all of human history. Books such as *The Pity of War* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, serve as windows into the horrors of The Great War, along with films and even graphic novels. When those windows are peered through, one finds “old world” ideals mixed with new age industrial technology and military ordinance. Those ideals would lead many young men into war expecting great triumph over the Germans and the opportunity to prove martial bravery. This romantic fantasy was quickly broken within just a few short weeks of the war, as the men on the front lines began to understand their dire situation. Stubborn generals sent men to their doom as they refused to evolve with the new realities of twentieth century warfare. The romantic bayonet charge under a hail of enemy fire and despite all odds overcoming the enemy through sheer patriotic fervor did not work. Men died in the hundreds of thousands and as the war progressed and trench warfare

was established, men had to fight in muddy trenches filled with human waste, corpses, and water. Due to machine gun fire, men could not even get out of the trench to bury the fallen and so they would be buried in the trenches. The soldiers on the front lines were quite literally standing on the bones of their brothers for months at a time with no relief. War was supposed to be a beautiful display of gallantry, but the twentieth century ushered in a new era. War was no longer anything glorious, it was hell. To view this horror, one need not look any further than the works of the time.

Heavy reliance on primary sources is essential for this proposed paper. Online archives, like the British Newspaper Archives, make this research possible by providing scans of original newspapers throughout England during of the Great War. Poems by Sassoon and Owen are easily available through multiple compilations, for example, *The collected poems of Wilfred Owen*. There are letters written by Owen in particular which allow for better context and understanding of the man writing the poem. Biographical information for Sassoon is also readily available and an essential resource for providing context to his works. The proposed project is thus not one that will want for sources; the narrowing down of sources is more likely to be a hindrance. In order to keep the literature to a manageable size, the proposed paper will focus on newspapers before and during the war, and only on the poems of Owen and Sassoon. This approach will limit the scope of the paper and enable a unique research angle.

The use of secondary sources, like that of *Remembering, We Forgot*, written in 1979, will be pivotal for the proposed project. This work focuses on the disillusionment of poets in the Great War, and while it covers a wider topic, much of the sources present in the monograph will be valuable, such as newspapers, letters, and poems. The analysis and context given in many of the secondary sources pair well with the poetry of the two men; then using the newspapers to

frame the larger context and establish the world these poets inhabit will provide insight and clarity. This proposed topic will take both the visceral emotions and descriptions of men who were in the thick of the previously described horrors of modern warfare, and the society trying to solidify its feelings on that war, under one umbrella and work to connect the two to prove its worth.

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work.

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