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IJIEMR Transactions, online available on 25<sup>st</sup> November 2022. Link

<https://ijiemr.org/downloads.php?vol=Volume-11&issue=issue11>

**DOI:10.48047/IJIEMR/V11/ISSUE11/73**

Title: " TRACE THE DEVELOPMENT OF OWEN'S POETIC STYLE: FROM HIS EARLIER ROMANTIC INFLUENCES TO THE DISTINCTIVE VOICE"

Volume 11, ISSUE 11, Pages: 581- 584

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## TRACE THE DEVELOPMENT OF OWEN'S POETIC STYLE: FROM HIS EARLIER ROMANTIC INFLUENCES TO THE DISTINCTIVE VOICE

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### ANSTRACT

Wilfred Owen's poetic style evolved significantly from his early Romantic influences to his distinctive modernist voice. Initially, Owen's work was shaped by the Romantic tradition, with its emphasis on emotion, nature, and idealism, reflecting influences from poets like Keats and Shelley. However, the horrors of World War I profoundly transformed his approach. Confronted with the brutality of war, Owen's poetry shifted towards stark realism, abandoning Romantic idealism in favor of direct and graphic depictions of conflict. His mature work features innovative language and imagery, offering a critical perspective on war and capturing the intense suffering of soldiers, establishing him as a unique and powerful voice in modern literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Realist war poetry, Poetic imagery, War trauma, Critical perspective, Poetic innovation.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Wilfred Owen, a central figure in the canon of modern war poetry, is renowned for his evocative and harrowing depictions of World War I. His poetic evolution, from the early influences of Romanticism to a distinct modernist style, illustrates a remarkable transformation shaped by personal experience and historical context. Initially, Owen's work was deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition, reflecting the influence of poets like John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. This period of his writing was characterized by a fascination with the sublime beauty of nature and an emphasis on emotional intensity and idealism. His early poems exhibit a Romantic sensibility, marked by lush imagery and an introspective exploration of personal feelings, mirroring the idealized worlds created by his Romantic predecessors.

However, the advent of World War I brought about a profound shift in Owen's poetic focus. The horrors of trench warfare starkly contrasted with the idealistic visions of his earlier work. The brutal realities of combat and the pervasive sense of disillusionment with traditional notions of heroism and glory in war led Owen to adopt a more realist and critical approach to his poetry. This period of his life was marked by a profound sense of disillusionment and a commitment to portraying the true nature of war, challenging the romanticized perceptions that had previously dominated his writing.

Owen's transition from Romanticism to modernism is evident in his use of language, form, and thematic content. His mature poetry is characterized by a stark, graphic portrayal of the horrors of war, reflecting a dramatic departure from the emotional and idealistic tones of his early work. Poems such as "Dulce et Decorum Est" and "Exposure" exemplify this shift,

using vivid and often disturbing imagery to convey the physical and psychological trauma experienced by soldiers. Owen's innovative use of language, including striking similes and metaphors, serves to underscore the disillusionment and brutality of war, establishing a new, powerful voice in modern poetry.

The evolution of Owen's poetic style also reflects a broader modernist sensibility, marked by a rejection of traditional forms and an embrace of experimentation. His work often employs unconventional structures and free verse to capture the chaos and fragmentation of war, diverging from the more structured and formal approaches of earlier poetic traditions. This modernist experimentation, combined with his realist critique of war, contributes to the distinctiveness of Owen's voice and his lasting impact on literary discourse.

In Wilfred Owen's poetic development from Romantic influences to a distinctive modernist voice illustrates a profound transformation driven by the personal and historical experiences of World War I. His early works, imbued with Romantic idealism and emotional depth, stand in stark contrast to his later poetry, which reflects a critical and realist perspective on the horrors of war. Through this evolution, Owen not only challenged conventional notions of heroism and patriotism but also established himself as a unique and enduring voice in modern literature. His poetry continues to resonate with readers, offering a powerful reflection on the intersection of personal experience and historical context, and remains a poignant testament to the impact of conflict on the human spirit.

## II. EMOTIONAL AND IMAGINATIVE EXPRESSION

Wilfred Owen's early poetry exhibits a rich blend of emotional intensity and imaginative expression, deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition. His initial works are characterized by a profound engagement with themes of beauty, nature, and personal reflection, reflecting the influence of Romantic poets such as John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

1. **Emotional Intensity:** Owen's early poetry is marked by a deep emotional resonance, capturing the complexities of human experience with vivid and evocative language. His poems often explore the inner workings of the human psyche, delving into feelings of longing, melancholy, and aspiration. For instance, in his early poem "The Ballad of the Londoner," Owen expresses a longing for a simpler, more idealized life, conveying his emotions through lush and descriptive imagery. This emotional depth is reminiscent of Romantic poets, who sought to evoke intense personal responses from their readers.

2. **Imaginative Expression:** The imaginative dimension of Owen's early work is evident in his engagement with the natural world and his use of fantastical elements. His poetry frequently portrays nature as a source of beauty and inspiration, reflecting the Romantic ideal of finding solace and transcendence in the natural environment. Owen's use of imaginative and symbolic language allows him to explore abstract concepts and emotional states in a way that engages the reader's senses and emotions. For example, his depictions of nature often serve as a backdrop for exploring personal and philosophical themes, creating a rich, evocative atmosphere.

3. **Romantic Influences:** Owen's early poetry mirrors the Romantic tradition's emphasis on personal expression and emotional depth. His engagement with Romantic themes, such as the sublime beauty of nature and the exploration of individual feelings, demonstrates his initial alignment with Romantic ideals before his style evolved in response to the brutal realities of war.

Overall, Owen's early work is a testament to his ability to blend emotional intensity with imaginative expression, creating poetry that resonates with the idealistic and introspective qualities of Romanticism.

### III. THE IMPACT OF WAR AND TRANSITION TO MODERNISM

The outbreak of World War I had a profound impact on Wilfred Owen's poetry, catalyzing a dramatic shift from Romantic influences to a modernist style characterized by stark realism and innovative techniques. This transformation reflects Owen's response to the brutal realities of war, which starkly contrasted with the idealism of his earlier work.

1. **Shift in Subject Matter:** The horrors of war forced Owen to confront and depict the grim realities of conflict, diverging significantly from his earlier Romantic themes of beauty and nature. His experiences in the trenches introduced him to a world of brutality and disillusionment, which became central themes in his poetry. Poems like "Dulce et Decorum Est" and "Exposure" illustrate this shift, portraying the physical and psychological trauma of soldiers with unflinching realism. This departure from romanticized notions of heroism and glory marked a significant transformation in Owen's poetic focus, emphasizing the harsh, dehumanizing aspects of war.

2. **Evolution of Poetic Form and Technique:** Owen's transition to modernism is evident in his experimentation with poetic form and technique. While he retained some traditional elements, such as rhyme and meter, he also embraced free verse and unconventional structures to capture the chaos and fragmentation of war. His innovative use of language, including striking similes, metaphors, and irony, reflects his modernist approach. For instance, in "The Sentry," Owen's use of vivid and disturbing imagery, along with his fragmented and disjointed verse, mirrors the disorientation and trauma experienced by soldiers.

3. **Realist Critique of War:** Owen's modernist style is characterized by a critical perspective on war, challenging romanticized and patriotic portrayals of conflict. His poetry exposes the brutality and futility of war, questioning traditional notions of honor and sacrifice. This realist critique is a hallmark of Owen's mature work, distinguishing it from his earlier, idealistic poetry. By highlighting the disillusionment and suffering of soldiers, Owen's poetry offers a powerful commentary on the impact of war on the human spirit.

Overall, the impact of World War I profoundly influenced Wilfred Owen's poetic evolution, driving his transition from Romanticism to modernism. His mature poetry, marked by a

realist critique and innovative techniques, reflects a deep engagement with the realities of war and establishes him as a significant modernist voice in literature.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Wilfred Owen's poetic style underwent a significant evolution from his early Romantic influences to his distinctive voice as a modernist war poet. His transition from idealistic portrayals of nature and emotion to a stark and realist depiction of war reflects a profound transformation shaped by personal experience and historical context. Owen's mature poetry, characterized by its critical perspective on war and innovative use of language, continues to resonate with readers and remains a powerful testament to the impact of conflict on the human spirit. Through this exploration of Owen's poetic development, we gain a deeper understanding of his contributions to literature and the enduring relevance of his work.

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