

Arms and the Man — Bernard Shaw criticized warfare. Satirises the concept the war which is wrapped in an aura of Romanticism.

Srideep Mukherjee

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SPRING OFFENSIVE- WILFRED OWEN'S ATTITUDE TO WAR.

In his essay 'Literature of the First World War' D.J Enright says, (" Wilfred Owen is the war poet for those who desire the reality.") While the poetry of Brooke & Grenfell extolled the 'patriotism' of war, realists like Owen & Sassoon found the misery of war to be shocking in its squalidness & nihilism that amounted to atrocities against humanity.

It was Owen in particular, killed just a week before the Armistice, who has virtually come to be designated as the face of war poetry: perhaps even of W.W I itself. His incessant presentation of the horrible effects of war in a technique that befits the exposition of such bestiality has made O an icon of the Peace Movement. As in a host of his other poems, so in Spring Offensive he relentlessly goes about exploding the myths of war & revealing its true face- ugly and sordid. Even at the cost of repeating a cliché, one must put down O's own comment about his poetry to facilitate a complete understanding:

Owen himself records in his unfinished (Preface to his Collected Poems)

"Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity."

(Strange Meeting — I mean the truth untold/ The pity of war, the pity wars distilled)

The very title of the poem epitomizes the conflict that is contained in the text- the unnatural offence of war against nature. This element of conflict is also embodied by O in the stark contrast b/w the two sets of people he finds during the period of the wars. The anger of Insensibility is recognizable in the differential depiction of the insensible, who remain unaffected by the action on the warfront, & find 'comfortable chests and knees' to immerse themselves in a careless sleep. The other set comprises of real combatants who know that '...their feet (have) come to the end of the world' & they are reconciled to a life in death situation.

The distortion of events & responses as a result of the war is so gross that O takes an apocalyptic view of the relation b/w man & nature. This is evident in the landscape of trench warfare that he describes as the 'imminent line of grass' which very skillfully conceals the underlying trap of death. Thus the swirling grass dancing to the May breeze & the murmurings of the wasp & the midge deconstruct romantic parallels with Keats' 'Nightingale Ode', a poem that SD closely subverts in expressions like 'Marvelling they stood'. This is further evident in the drug that has to be injected "for their bodies' pains" (unlike Summer that oozes into their veins), & the new sky of terrifying flashes alongwith the mysterious ominous 'impersonality of grass'.

Nature in O's poetry thus becomes a symbol of hostility & this antipathy pervades the rest of the poem as well. The memory of his brother Harold's boots being covered with buttercups in the fields of Shrewsbury is revived in the 3rd stanza, but it is hardly romantic. O. resorts to the pathetic fallacy of plants trying to restrain the men from their deeds by blessing with gold '...their slow boots coming up.' But as long as the soldiers have not totally obliterated their selves, they remain contemplating nature & therefore become a part of it :

" They breathe like trees unstirred."

Like the Keatsian bliss that has earlier been subverted, here [O reverses the Ruskinian ideal of pathetic fallacy to suggest that beneath the soldier's façade, there lies an individual with a heart & soul. And this individual finds solace in losing himself amidst the beauties of nature.]

Dulce Et Decorum Est : (condition of the soldiers)
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-shed. All went lame; all
blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped
behind.

{ In all my dreams, before my helpless
sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking,
drowning.
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 friends, you would not tell with such high
revels
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.) Anti-war attitude.

The Send-off: Down the close darkening lanes they sang their way
 To the siding shed,
 And lined the train with faces grimy gay. (Only dull porters +
 a school tramp
 watched them
 as they went.)

So screechy like wrongs hushed - up, they went.
 They were not ours; which front (these) were sent.
 We never heard to which front (these) were sent.

Ending of The Send-off: Shall they return to beatings of great bells
 In wild train-loads?
 A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,
 May creep back, silent, to village wells
 Up half-known roads.

Such an expectation is however belied with a force, the race of the soldiers gives a speed to the poem while describing their march to the battlefield & therefore into death. (As they move, thus singled out, what seems to be the whole of nature or at least its hostile aspect symbolized by the sky, bursts into a fury of attack against them. There is no romance, neither is there any of the much vaunted patriotism of war. The soldiers seem to have cut themselves off from the creative principles of life:

"The sun, like a friend with whom their love is done.") *

(The enemy is transmuted onto a universal plane - they are just not mentioned, like the fighting soldiers who are never identified. The impersonal nature of the attack is sustained for the rest of the poem, the tenor kept up with formal unity & control in terms of the landscape & nature images. The change from the pastoral to the mortal is evident in the buttercups that earlier blessed their boots, now becoming sacrificial chalices to hold the blood that is spilled. The horizon is transformed into the edge of the world & is the sheer chasm down which those sacrificed fall to their deaths. Thus the hill-valley topography that is described as the battlefield also becomes the dungeon/altar of sacrifice.)

(This image of the sacrifice at the altar of 'Golgotha' is continued in stanza 6.) In the death of the innumerable soldiers there is however no glory, for they are decimated into piles of hands & feet as they fall to bullets or are blown up by shells that emit heat like the fires of hell. O's introduction of an element of doubt in his moral indignation is deliberate:

"Some say God caught them before they fell."

The identity of the 'some' is definitely vague, perhaps they are the easy-lying people of the 1st stanza, more conversant with the myths of war than its true nihilistic potential. Far more important than their responses are the words of those who '...from existence' brink/ Ventured but drove too swift to sink.

The conclusion of the poem turns to those who 'managed' not to die, that is how O looks upon the survivors who have undergone the 'hopelessness' of war & have experienced the sinister reality of 'truth(s) untold'. One is indeed reminded of the nether world of Strange Meeting where the futility & meaninglessness of war is projected in the interaction b/w the 2 dead soldiers:

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend"

In all his poems which are a continuous castigation of war, O looks upon Hell not as a geographical entity but, like Mephistophilis in Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus', as a mental state that is the handiwork of man himself. The surviving soldiers in SO have had a realistic understanding of this through their lived experiences, so their tribute to their dead comrades is through silence that underlies an awareness of how thin the dividing lines b/w life & death have been. [So the demagoguery of public speakers & of those who profess that the 'todays' of the soldiers are meant for the safe 'tomorrows' of the nation can never be the line of thought of those that really bear the brunt of it all. It is ultimately this antithesis that reinforces the sense of alienation in SO while sharply reflecting the convictions of Owen, the poet turned soldier who bore out the authenticity of his statements with the price of his own life.]

Futility → * Move him into the sun,
 Gently its touch awoke him once,
 --- The kind old sun will know.

'Was it for this the clay grew tall
 — O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
 To break earth's sleep at all?'

Strange Meeting — The poet has a visionary meeting with a German soldier whom he has killed and who is made to express his own sense of waste, 'I mean the truth untold, / The pity of war, the pity war distilled.' (after their death) — (Now men will go content with what we spoiled, / By their content, being bloody, and be spilled / They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress) / None will kneel nor make, though nations look from purple) / I am the enemy you killed, my friend.

Anthem for Doomed Youth: What passing bells for those who die as cattle?

Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
 Can patter out their hasty orisons.

(Progress — St. John Ervine)

Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
 Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes. } life of the soldiers

(And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds.)

The year 1927 is remarkable in the life of Eliot.
With his conversion to the Church of England on June 29, 1927 paved the way for a new style and dictum in his poetry since the pub. of Waste Land in 1922. Eliot was himself searching for a new style in his poetry. His poems pre 1927 and post 1927 presents both a deviation ~~for~~ in terms of theme and language. The doubts, the dilemma, frustrations, irritations the Prufrock faces

"Will he disturb the universe/ask the overwhelming question only to retrace back to his inertia for the fear of being transfixed to a pin by the gaze of the women the women who come and go talking of Michael Angelo."

The frivolity of existence, the meaningless of life devoid of any proper purpose leads Prufrock to ponder and hesitate to sing his purpose. The divided self, disjointed identity and fissured existence of man post First W. War is projected in the very opening lines 'Let us go U & I when the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherised upon a table' — the very U & I are not two diverse selves but the doppelganger of Prufrock / his interior monologue his subsumed subconscious mind / his 'the other self'.

This boredom and dilemma of Prufrock finds an extension in the Preludes where the 4 parts are ~~so~~ but a mechanical reflection & repetition of existence sans spirituality sans faith. With short square fingers, yellow soles and muddy feet human life is devoid of even artistic beauty. The evening or the morning is but the two sides of the same monotony. The smell of steaks only give way to smell of stale beer and light creeps up stealthily behind the ~~gutter~~ building and sparrows chirp in the gutter. This precarious existence and the hollowness are thus the very predicament of Modern Man at a crucial juncture in a historical time when things are falling apart and the centre fails to hold. These hollow men and the stuffed men brains filled with straw do not find solace even in death. Life has been a personification of death like situation. The barrenness the utter futility and ~~waste~~ waste land they inhabit does not bring any redemption. The barrenness of the landscape the stony waterless topography and the barrenness of the soul fuse to witness 'the shadow' that inevitably falls the idea and the motion/the action and the conception. This shadow can be lightened only through the soul's journey in a metaphorical way from inferno to purgatorio to paradiso as in the journey of the Magi where a new order needs to estd. at the cost of the death of the old decayed order. The winter give hostility give way to cold

end of her stories are the human being and not a strident and shrill ethnic or national identity." (74). In *Hema And Kaushik*, Kaushik in the final part says, "I don't live anywhere at the moment" which hints of his cosmopolitan fluid identity and discards the rigid geographical borders. Hema's act of losing her bangle before boarding the flight for India is an indication of a part of herself left behind in US. Thus, Lahiri's characters merge both the roots and the routes in their lives in the end and it rings Liesl Schillinger's words, "the place to which you feel the strongest attachment isn't necessarily the country you are tied to blood or birth: it's the place that allows you to become yourself. This place [...] may not lie on any map."

The garden which Ruma's father plants metaphorically lays down the roots for a new composite culture ~~with~~ ^{which the} Akashes of the third generation might practice. In this Lahiri builds upon Nathaniel Hawthorne's excerpt from *The Scarlet Letter* that human nature will not flourish until they strike their roots in unaccustomed earth, and this is close to creating a space which in the words of Edward Soja is, "A space of radical openness, a vast territory of infinite possibilities and perils [...]. It can be mapped but never captured in conventional cartographies, it can be creatively imagined but obtains meaning only when practiced and fully lived." (Third space 33, 37). Akash walking barefoot, no longer afraid of stones or twigs, in the end of the title story, is treading towards the possibility of a new nation space. Lahiri also creates a third and final continent – a more humanized space where ^{maladies are healed only} differences are _{when} accepted and taken along.

Note:

All the textual quotations are taken from Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, Random House India (2009).