

SIEGFRIED, WILFRED AND THE IMAGES OF ‘BLOOD’, ‘ CORPSE AND HELL’, ‘GHOSTS AND SPIRITS’, AND ‘TRENCH’

HOSSEINOMIDI

Research Scholar, Department of English, Faculty of Arts Banaras Hindu University,
Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

For the most part, blood, corpse and hell, ghosts and spirits, and trench are among central constituents of the poetry of war. Indeed, Siegfried Loraine Sassoon (1886-1967) and Wilfred Edward Salter Owen's (1893-1918) war poetry is not an exception. Without a doubt, many poets have written about wars of which they have had no firsthand experience. Being involved directly in the horrors and pains caused by The First World War, both of them were able to report repetitively the fears and agonies of The Great War. Nonetheless, the above mentioned images are hinted all over their poems. Since, both, the soldier poets, Siegfried and Wilfred were involved directly in the frontlines, they had the direct experience and actual knowledge of what war could do, both to the body and to the psyche. Examining their war poems through applying Freud's Psychoanalytic Approach proves the fact that there is repetition compulsion on various levels including images like 'Blood', 'Corpse and Hell', 'Ghosts and Spirits', and finally 'Trench'. As a matter of fact, such kind of repetition occurs, in some occasions, not only in the single poems but through all the poems all together.

KEYWORDS: Blood, Corpse and Hell, Freud, Ghosts and Spirits, Owen, Poetry, Repetition, Sassoon, Trench, Thanatos, War

INTRODUCTION

Incontrovertibly, "the large-scale devastation of human lives and property in the wake of the First World War is part of history and the writers have responded to that peculiar situation in accordance with their training and accomplishments" (Omidi "Extremely"). As a point of fact, "many poets have written about wars of which they have had no direct experience; it is the young combatants Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen who have the firsthand experience and actual knowledge of what war can do, both to the body and to the psyche"(Omidi "Colloquial"). To tell the truth, they seemed to beswept up in the boldness of battle in a way that they were transmuted. What's more, "fighting in France frontlines, both Wilfred and Siegfried experienced the inordinate horrors and terrors of war" (Omidi"Formic Repetition").The World War One had a huge impact on reconsideringSigmund Freud's psychoanalytic Approach and his view of dreams with regard totraumatic events such as shell-shock, suffering, mental pains.Repetition Compulsion was applied to include the recurrence of behaviour or life styles, mostly as a "key component in Freud's understanding of mental life, "repetition compulsion"...describes the pattern whereby people endlessly repeat patterns of behaviour which were difficult or distressing in earlier life" (Clark 38). In his essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914), Freud wrote that "the patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, he acts it out, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it...For instance, the patient does not say that he remembers that he used to

be defiant and critical toward his parents' authority; instead, he behaves in that way to the doctor" (Bowie 28). In his work "Modules on Freud: Transference and Trauma", Felluga, Dino defines Repetition Compulsion as:

The mind's tendency to repeat traumatic events in order to deal with them. The repetition can take the form of dreams, storytelling, or even hallucination. This compulsion is closely tied up with the death drive. (<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetothetheory/psychoanalysis/freud5.html>)

In other words, the compulsion to repeat is the coercion of the individual inner self to recur painful experiences repeatedly. Being dedicated completely to satisfaction, both principles of reality and pleasure are willing, sensibly, to overlook the traumatic experiences. Thus, it was not easy for psychoanalysts such as Freud to justify and even comprehend this phenomena. Accordingly, he was treating shell-shocked individuals of The Great War as well, Sigmund Freud composed his significant "Beyond Pleasure Principle" (1920), in which he introduced the Death drive, as a natural want to "re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life" ("Ego and the Id" 709). Thanatos permitted him to understand and reason the individual's propensity to destruction, even self-destruction. Regarding shell shock and stressful experiences, the compulsion to repeat was not related totally to Eros' labours in consuming life instinct's cathexis of sensual dynamism. As a matter of fact, Freud claimed it as an exertion to face, challenge, and to admit the inevitable reality of demise. According to Freud Repetition Compulsion is not found only in neurotics, this phenomenon can be traced in ordinary individuals, as well. Robert Clark in the entry "Repetition Compulsion," observes that in his important work "BPP":

Freud relates how he observed a boy of around 36 months who had just mastered a few words and basic sounds throwing a wooden reel out of his cot and exclaiming "fort" ["gone"], and then reeling it in and exclaiming "da" ["there"]. The episode was often repeated, as was his habit of throwing toys away into a corner or under a bed, then struggling to get them back. Other parents have often noted similar behaviour as children around this age toss a favoured toy out of their cots and then wail miserably until it is returned to them. The "fort – da" episode (18:15), as it is now often called, was interpreted by Freud as a game. (<http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true & U ID =947>)

The child's repetition of the same play was understood by Sigmund Freud as his exertion to dominate "unpleasurable" event. The reality "that the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always unsuit it for play" extremely shocked Sigmund Freud (V.18:17). He comprehended that the same story is going on in Übertragung (transference) in talking cure. At that time, Freud supposed that the repetition of infantile instincts in Übertragung permitted him/her to release the patient's suppressed sensual senses and emotions, and consequently, has to create some desire even if masked as frustration or odium. Nevertheless, he had to recognise the fact that "the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed" (18:20). Subsequently, Freud writes that there is no other way but to assume a "compulsion to repeat" which "seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides", that he called Thanatos (18:23). Additionally, "Obsessive-compulsive disorders" in the classification of "anxiety disorders" was categorised by two psychologists in their work. Rosenhan and Seligman think that "individuals who are afflicted with obsessions also have compulsions" (267). On the other hand, both of them illuminate that manias are monotonous images, considerations, instincts which assault "consciousness" while impulses are the reactions to compulsive considerations. In this context, what they observe is true

that: "[Compulsions] consist of rigid rituals (such as hand washing or checking) or mental acts (such as counting or silently repeating words) that the person feels driven to perform in response to the obsession" (267). As a matter of truth, this article discusses some of Sassoon and Owen's poems considering Freudian Psychoanalytic Approach to find the real meaning of the work of art through penetrating the truth out of the mind of the writer. Indeed, this article tries to hint repetition compulsion, which is introduced by previously mentioned psychologist in his Death Instincts Concept (Thanatos), on imageries such as Blood, Corpse and Hell, Ghosts and Spirits, and finally Trench in the above mentioned war poets.

DISCUSSIONS

Both Sassoon and Owen use identical words to express very similar subjects. To tell the truth, both of them were interested in using a limited number of words, which shows their obsession and infatuation which is once more related to the repetition of words as a compulsion in their poetry. There is a straightforward relationship between the repetition of the words and repetition of ideas and images. It seems to me that both Sassoon and Owen generate and regenerate, over and over again, the same backgrounds, opinions and thoughts, emotions and moods, observations, atmospheres, characters and contexts. In consequence, the same terms and subjects which include numerous images are echoed frequently in Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon's poetry. Among the most frequent images we may mention some such as 'Blood', 'Corpse and Hell', 'Ghosts and Spirits', and 'Trench'.

The image of "blood" is frequently used in a substantial sum of poems of Sassoon and Owen. Concerning Wilfred Owen's usage of this imagery in his poetry, there are many instances such as the poems: "1914": "Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed" (Breen 37); "Inspection": "Was blood, his own. / 'Well, blood is dirt,' I said" (47)/ 'Blood's dirt,' he laughed, looking away/... Young blood's its great objection" (48); "Dulce Et Decorum Est": "But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind" (50) / "If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood" (51); "Disabled": "One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg" (52); "Asleep": "And soon the slow, stray blood came creeping" (57); "Arms and the Boy": "How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood" (75); "Mental Cases": "Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black" (77) etc. And in Siegfried Sassoon's Great War poems like: "The Last Meeting": "And dawn and sunset flame with my spilt blood" (War Poems 33); "The Road": "And dead men, bloody-fingered from the fight" (51); "They": "On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought" (57); "Conscripts": "There's no such thing! Blood's red, and skies are blue" (69); "The Optimist": "And cursed it for a senseless, bloody stunt" (74); "To the Warmongers": "Young faces bleared with blood/ sucked down into the mud" (77); "Sick Leaves": "Are they not still your brothers through our blood?" (94); "The Investiture": "Wearing a blood-soaked bandage on your head" (98); "Glory of Women": "Trampling the terrible corpses--blind with blood" (100); "A Footnote on The War": "Propped in his pool of blood/ while we were throwing/ Bombs at invisible Saxons ..." (150) and many other verses.

The images of "Corpse and Hell" which objectively represents doomsday, fate of the sinful human beings, their hardships, misery, painful and sorrowful end of the world and humanity and its dreadful destiny, as well as the horrific experiences of the soldiers in the trenches etc. can be traced over-frequently in Sassoon and Owen's poems. Concerning Owen's usage of this imagery in his poetry, there are many instances such as: "The Sentry": "And gave us hell, for shell on frantic shell.../ With fumes of whizz-bangs, and the smell of men Who'd lived there years, and left their curse in the den,/If not their corpses/ The sentry's body; then his rifle, handles" (Breen 52); "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo": "Behind

the barrage, dead as my platoon/...With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell" (59); "Le Christianisme": "But a piece of hell will batter her" (60); "Cramped in That Funnelled Hole": "They were in one of many mouths of Hell/...As teeth of traps; when bones and the dead are smelt/Under the mud where long ago they fell" (61); "Mental Cases": Drooping tongues from jays that slob their relish, Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?/... Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms/...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,/ Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,/ Carnage incomparable, and human squander/ Rucked too thick for these men's extrication/ Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,/Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses." (77) etc. And with reference to Sassoon's War poems: "The Redeemer": "Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask/ Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shine. (War Poems16); "Died of Wounds": "'they snipe like hell! O Dickie, don't go out.../ I fell asleep ... Next morning he was dead / And some Slight Wound lay smiling on the bed.'" (41); "The March-Past": "'Eyes right!' The corpse-commander was a Mute" (65); "Blighters": "To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume." (68); "To the Warmongers": "'I'm back again from hell/... And horrors from the abyss.'" (77); "Glory of Women": "When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run, / Trampling the terrible corpses--blind with blood." (100); "Trench Duty": "We raid the Boche; men waiting, stiff and chilled, / Or crawling on their bellies through the wire." (124); "Memorial Tablet": "(Under Lord Derby's Scheme). I died in hell" (137); "Aftermath": "Do you remember the rats; and the stench/Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench" (143).And a number of other poems.

Mark Edwin Dollar in his essay published in (2004) attempts to have a detailed investigation of the symbolic significance and interpretations of the presence of the "Ghost Image" in Siegfried's Great War poems. He talks for his pals who battled and expired in the war, even almost thirty years after the end of the Great War. Sassoon's passionate pacifism throughout the confrontation directed him to condemn Britain's continuous participation in a war he believed unfair. As a result Siegfried saw people slaughtered in combat as sacrificed unfairly. The dead fighters' ghosts seem to have troubled, haunted, and made him remorse tremendously. He considers the ghosts as damaged, eyeless figures mutilated and deformed by the war. Sassoon was known as a revenging spirit that echoed the voice of severely overwhelmed young soldiers. In his verse "On Passing the New Menin Gate," the theme of revenge can be sensed strongly, while Siegfried walks from side to side in a recently opened Great War graveyard (War Poems153). Siegfried states that as a fly he was "buzzing against the window pane of 'reality' beyond which there is the world of the spiritual and the supernatural" (qtd. in Moeyes 236). It is impossible for him and even many to penetrate this kind of obstacle, however, only Sassoon's ghosts can go through the window. The ghosts tell him again of the battle bloodshed and the dreadful trenches of the frontline which were always full of dead bodies, this make Sassoon, as a survivor of such a horrific situation, feel guilty, pushing him to strive for explanation for their untimely deaths (War Poems 97). Returning ghosts functioned as great cues of the catastrophic Great War experience, for Siegfried Sassoon, offering almost a non-corporeal presence to being haunted by the war that directed Sassoon to generate a totally different kind of verse centered on smooth detachment and flat objectivity. In his dissertation in which he studies the uses of the grotesque in English poetry from the First World War and shows how it fluctuates from numerous previous differences, Mark Dollar argues that:

The grotesque images of soldier-poets Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, Herbert Read, and David Jones are deeply personal visions of death that reveal their ongoing struggles with fear, grief, or guilt. Sassoon is haunted by the ghosts of dead comrades... they are consistent in their disgust for the war, they often focus on more intimate concerns than pacifism. They revert to traditional, unrealistic language about death in

order to cope with their personal anguish over the war. (<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/dissertations/AAI3018188/>)

The image of "Ghosts and Spirits" can be found in Sassoon's War Poems such as: "To My Brother: "Your lot is with the ghosts of soldiers dead," (War Poems 18); "The Last Meeting": "And speak with him before his ghost has flown" (31) "For now,' he said, 'my spirit has more eyes" (33) "His human ghost, remembered in the love" (34); "Enemies": "Those patient, stupid, sullen ghosts of men" (66); "Editorial Impressions": "And the amazing spirit of the troops (89); Ex-Service": "Whose swindled ghosts are crying" (155) etc. And regarding Owen there are numerous instances such as: "The Unreturning": "When far-gone dead return upon the world/ There watched I for the Dead; but no ghost woke./...But they were all too far, or dumbled, or thrilled" (Breen 35); "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo": "Behind the barrage, dead as my platoon/ And sailed my spirit surging, light and clear" (59); "Exposure": "Slowly our ghosts drag home": "glimpsing the sunk fires glozed/...We turn back to our dying" (62); "Insensibility": "Their spirit drags no pack/ Their old wounds save with cold cannot more ache" (64); "Strange Meeting": "I would have poured my spirit without stint (66); "A Terre": "Carry my crying spirit till it's weaned/To do without what blood remained these wounds"(70); "The Kind Ghosts": "She sleeps on soft, last breaths; but no ghost looms/...Her wall of boys on boys and dooms on dooms"(78). And other numerous verses.

And finally the "Trench" imagery, which symbolises protection, hardships, misery, and the horrific experiences of the soldiers in the Great War can be found repeatedly in Sassoon and Owen's poems. This image reveals expressively the paradoxical situation and the misfortune of the young fighters who fight at least in two fronts simultaneously. From one hand, they are protected by the ditches while fighting against the Central Forces; and from the other hand, they fight against the natural threats and difficulties of the trench life itself. Concerning Owen it is this image is traced in pomes such as: "The Sentry": "We'd found an old Boche dug-out, and he knew/ And gave us hell, for shell on frantic shell" (Breen 52); "Disabled": "He's lost his colour very far from here,/Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry" (51); "Cramped in That Funnelled Hole": "Cramped in that funnelled hole, they watched the dawn" (61); "The Dead Beat": "Didn't appear to know a war was on,/ Or see the blasted trench at which he stared" (46); "S.I.W": "But never leave, wound, fever, trench-foot, shock,/ Untrapped the wretch. And death seemed still withheld/ For torture of lying machinally shelled" (66) etc. Regarding Sassoon's War Poems there are many examples like: "A Night Attack": "Then I remembered someone that I'd seen/ Dead in a squalid, miserable ditch" (War Poems 42); "The Redeemer": "While we began to struggle along the ditch" (17); "Dreamers": "I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,/ And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain, (88); "Atrocities": "Downstairs in dug-outs. 'Camerad!' they cry / Then squeal like stoats when bombs begin to fly" (145); "A Subaltern": "In trenches, crouching for the crumps to burst, /While squeaking rats scampered across the slime" (25); "Stand-To: Good Friday Morning": "Deep in water I splashed my way/Up the trench to our bogged front line" (28); "Attack": "Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear, / They leave their trenches, going over the top" (95); "Counter-Attack": "And clink of shovels deepening the shallow trench"(105)/ "An officer came blundering down the trench" (106); "Suicide In The Trenches": "In winter trenches, cowed and glum, / With crumps and lice and lack of rum,/ He put a bullet through his brain"(119) etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Indeed, literary books, particularly verse, are full of Repetition Compulsion; as it is used universally in such works. Without doubt, repetition is contained within tropes such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm, consonance,

and numerous other literary terms. Considering repetition, Sassoon and particularly Owen who “observed and absorbed the violence of the frontlines and the human cost of war” (Omidi “Frustrated”) are unique. However, in Owen and Sassoon’s poetry we can find repetitions in some motifs. In both of them the creation of poesy was somewhat unconscious rather than a conscious activity. Their shocking trench experiences involved them emotionally, and extremely changed their career as poets. For that reason, in their poetry repetition appears to be a result of certain mental conditions. For the most part, blood, corpse and hell, ghosts and spirits, and trench are among central constituents of the poetry of war. Indeed, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen’s war poetry is not an exception. Without a doubt, many poets have written about wars of which they have had no firsthand experience. Being involved directly in the horrors and pains caused by The First World War, both of them were able to report repetitively the fears and agonies of The Great War. Nonetheless, the above mentioned images are hinted all over their poems. Since, both, the soldier poets, Siegfried and Wilfred were involved directly in the frontlines, they had the direct experience and actual knowledge of what war could do, both to the body and to the psyche. Examining their war poems through applying Freud’s Psychoanalytic Approach proves the fact that there is repetition compulsion on various levels including images like ‘Blood’, ‘Corpse and Hell’, ‘Ghosts and Spirits’, and finally ‘Trench’. As a matter of fact, such kind of repetition occurs, in some occasions, not only in the single poems but through all the poems all together.

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