Dulce Et Decorum Est: Terms And Imagery in A Poem

Wilfred Owen’s poem “Dulce et Decorum Est” explains his personal experience while fighting during the First World War. The author’s voice used inside of this poem is perceived as horrifyingly ironic and against war entirely based on how Owen describes his involvement in the war. Several examples of figurative languages are displayed in the poem including metaphors, similes, imagery, and onomatopoeia. Literary devices like these help engage the reader by creating actual visuals as you they read.

One of the strongest metaphors in “Dulce et Decorum Est” is where Wilfred Owen describes a soldier’s death in a poisonous gas attack. The author states, “As under a green sea, I saw him drowning”. Owen talks about seeing a drowning man in a green-colored toxic gas, through his gas mask appearing as if he was in a green sea sinking. Wilfred even goes as far as explaining how he continued to re-experience the traumatic death scene, using another drowning metaphor. Stating in the next lines, “In all my dreams before my helpless sight, He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning”.

However, Owen has incorporated many similes that compare one thing to another using like or as usual. Inline one, it says that soldiers are “Bent double, like old beggars under sacks”, basically comparing the soldiers to beggars who carry sacks over their shoulders similar to the worn-out soldiers during World War I. The speaker uses a wide variety of onomatopoeia words giving sounds their specific word association. For example, the poem says, “Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge”. Words like ‘coughing’ and ‘knock’ explain both a sound and action giving more of an expressive description.

Imagery is found all over Wilfred Owen’s poem, in the last stanza he says, “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 Patria Mori”. The author addresses the audience by saying that if you could experience some of the same things, he has then you wouldn’t commend the soldiers who die in war.

In conclusion, Wilfred Owen’s personal feelings are based on how he sees the war affect people's lives. Certain feelings of anger, helplessness, and battle trauma really stick out in this poem. Even though Owen fought in World War I, he firmly disliked the pressure to enroll undermined young men into the military before knowing what they are actually committing themselves to.