


# Wilfred Owen, Selected Poems:


## (e) Religious Imagery


 refers to links on [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info)




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- ❖ **Lesson focus:** To explore attitudes to religion in Owen's poetry with particular focus on:
  - *At a Calvary near the Ancre*
  - *Le Christianisme*
  - *Parable of the Old Man and the Young*
  - *Soldier's Dream*.
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** Empathy task: What were the religious beliefs of the average soldier in WW1?
  - What might the impact of war be on these beliefs?
    - Try writing a short prayer from a WW1 soldier to God.
  - Hear some student examples and consider the range of emotions expressed – fear, anger, etc.
  - Discuss what we know about Owen's background and beliefs. From memory, how are these suggested in his poetry?

 (Religious/philosophical context > Religion and doubt)
- ❖ **Textual examination:** Re-read *At a Calvary near the Ancre* and *Le Christianisme* (see **Student worksheet e**)
  - Consider and annotate the themes and ideas of each poem:
    - How is God/the church presented?
    - How are they impacted/spoiled by war?
    - How is the message of Christianity shown to stand at odds with the violence of war?
  - Then consider and annotate the detail of the language.
    - Biblical references and their impact (these may need some explaining!)
    - Use of proper nouns
    - Religious imagery vs war imagery

 (*At a Calvary near the Ancre* > Synopsis and commentary; Language, tone, and structure; Imagery, symbolism, and themes)

 (*Le Christianisme* > Synopsis and commentary; Language, tone, and structure; Imagery, symbolism, and themes)
- ❖ Next, re-read *Parable of the Old Man and the Young* and *Soldier's Dream*.
  - Establish the 'story' of each poem and the 'twist' at the end of each.
    - Consider the characters and how (un)sympathetically they are presented.
    - Explore the use of archaic/biblical language and that associated with weaponry, and assess its impact.
    - Consider the titles – is it significant that these are 'stories' (a parable and a dream) whereas the other two poems are based on sightings of actual things/events?
      -  (*Parable of the Old Man and the Young* > Synopsis and commentary; Language, tone, and structure; Imagery, symbolism, and themes)
      -  (*Soldier's Dream* > Synopsis and commentary; Language, tone, and structure; Imagery, symbolism, and themes)
- ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Looking at the four poems together, discuss what clues the reader gains about Owen's views on religion.
  - Is it possible to distinguish between Owen's attitudes towards God, Jesus, and the church?
  - How does Owen use and adapt biblical stories, imagery, and language?
- ❖ **Recreative task:** Take another Bible story (eg. Noah's ark, Daniel in the lions' den) and use it as the basis for a short anti-war poem. This could be done with a 'twist' at the end to change the story, as Owen does in *Parable of the Old Man and the Young* and *Soldier's Dream*.
- ❖ **Critical task:** 'In his poetry, Owen struggles to reconcile a God of love with the realities of war.' Discuss with reference to two or more poems. (An overview of the themes in the poetry of Wilfred Owen > Religion)

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- ❖ **Extension task:** Visit [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info) to help you examine Owen's use of biblical references in his other poems more closely (eg. *Sonnet on Seeing a Piece of Heavy Artillery being brought into Action* and *Futility*).
  - What impact might these references have had on the contemporary reader?
  - What more do we learn about Owen's attitude to religion from these poems?

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