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psychiatry in music

Corporal Clegg

Russell Hinton

'Corporal Clegg', written by Roger Waters, appears on the second Pink Floyd album, the psychedelic space rock, *A Saucerful of Secrets*, released in 1968. The album represents something of a crossroads for the band with it being the first to feature David Gilmour and the last to feature Syd Barrett, whose declining mental health would ultimately result in him being forced to leave the band.

The song is about a soldier who has developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of his combat experiences. It is one of the first Pink Floyd songs to incorporate themes of mental illness and anti-war sentiment, which foreshadows much of their later work such as 'Brain Damage', 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond', 'Wish You Were Here', 'Comfortably Numb', 'Another Brick In The Wall', 'In The Flesh', 'Goodbye Blue Sky', and 'Bring The Boys Back Home'.

On first listening the track sounds somewhat comical and simplistic and uses a kazoo as well as incorporating various sound effects for which Pink Floyd would become renowned. 'Corporal Clegg had a wooden leg. He won it in the war in 1944'. Clegg's wooden leg is symbolic of his PTSD that he 'won' in the war. He is later reported to have found the leg 'in the zoo', which attests to the utter chaos of war.

'Were they really sad for me? Will they really laugh at me?', illustrates the complex feelings veterans often experience regarding their service, simultaneously questioning whether their civilian compatriots understand the degree of their sacrifice, whether they are being ridiculed for the mental health issues which they have developed or for having served in a conflict which many oppose. 'Mrs Clegg, you must be proud of him. Mrs Clegg, another drop of gin?', reminds us that for many sufferers of PTSD and their families substance misuse is a maladaptive and dysfunctional way of coping with their trauma and has been for centuries.

'Corporal Clegg, umbrella in the rain, he's never been the same', tells us that Clegg is depressed and profoundly scarred by his wartime experiences. Near the end of the track, 'Corporal Clegg received his medal in a dream', questions whether indeed he was even awarded a medal and whether his sacrifice was worthwhile. Later an officer shouts, 'Clegg! Been meaning to speak to you. About that leg of yours!', which could be viewed as reticence by commanding officers and top brass to address mental health issues, which alas still exists to this day.

Roger Waters' father was killed in action near Anzio in 1944, when Waters was only an infant. This, coupled with Barrett's demise, would serve as major influences in Waters' writing. Waters has been quite open about how his upbringing, including having an overbearing mother and not having a father, profoundly affected him and that he spent over 20 years in therapy trying to come to terms with these issues.

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