

The importance of "in flanders fields" by colonel john mccrae essay sample

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The Importance of “ In Flanders Fields” by Colonel John McCrae Essay Sample

Colonel John McCrae wrote “ In Flanders Fields” on the 3rd of May 1915, the day after he witnessed the death of his best friend Lieutenant Alexis Helmer. The poem is vital to “ Up the Line to Death” as it encapsulates all of the emotions and pain in the war. The poem is seen as one of the most famous poems written during world war one, it was written in the form of French rondeau which was a popular form in that period of time however many see it as an adaptation of traditional sonnet form. The poem is known as the most popular poem produced during that time and this is why it seems to be perfectly placed at the most moving and powerful section of the anthology so far.

There are a use of symbols throughout the poem which are current throughout the anthology so far. The two symbols that are prominent are the poppies and the larks, the larks and all birds are symbols for the beloved soldiers who kept on fighting hard, the bird symbols are commonly used throughout the anthology, evidence for this can be found in “ Magpies in Picardy” were the birds symbolise the different types of soldiers. The poppies stand for all of the death that occurred to help liberate Belgium during the First World War. The poem is the perfect depiction of the horrors and death found in the battle of Ypres in the spring of 1915 and this is why it slots seamlessly into the anthology.

The main symbol is the poppy flower, the flower represents all the dead that have been buried in the ground, this contrast between the bright and vivid

red of the poppy is vast when compared to the colours that would have been seen on the battlefield. Colours are another key theme that runs throughout the anthology so far, "poured out the red/ sweet wine of youth", this quote from "The Dead" effectively uses colour to be a symbol for all the young blood lost and this is also done in "In Flanders Fields" with the colour red not only representing the buried dead but also being a symbol for all the blood shed. This use of representational colours is another vital piece of reasoning behind the point that "In Flanders Fields" is of key importance to the anthology.

Many of the themes that run through the first part of the anthology are all present in the poem, three of the main themes are death, honour and mourning for the deceased and these can be found in almost all of the poems studied so far. Death is probably the most written about subject throughout the whole anthology, "We are the Dead", in many of the poems death is personified and dieing is seen as being taken by this personified death, this is in the poem "Death's Men" for example "goes Death's trim men" this is a powerful use of personification and it is cleverly used to give off maximum effect. "In Flanders Fields" is based around death and due to the severity and sensitivity that surrounds this theme it only heightens the depth and meaning of the poem. Not only does McCrae give us the raw, plain information about their deaths, he demands that the readers recognise the dead soldiers' place in the big picture of the universe by constantly referring to images of nature, for example the "dawn" and the "sunset", the larks and of course the poppies.

The use of nature to enhance the emotions felt when reading the poems is used a lot through out the start of the anthology, mainly it is used to describe how beautiful places were before the war, for example in " The Call" there is a lot of stunning imagery which describes untainted landscapes, " sun-splashed grass" and " hills of dawn". Once again the reoccurring theme of nature being used is reflected in " In Flanders Fields" and this therefore adds to the importance of the poem at this specific time in the anthology.

The last stanza is seen as encouraging young men to go on battling the enemy coming to destroy them and their families. This is done because the cause they are fighting for is thought to be a noble one at that time in the war - hence the reference to the torch which is being handed on and this is a key reference to honour and this is another key theme that runs through the anthology so far. Many of the other poems do comment on honour a lot, for example " love throbs out in blissful sleep" this quote is from " Rendezvous" and is showing an extreme of how honour was depicted in some of the poems however in some of the poems death is not seen as honourable, but seen as something that is inevitable, " men waiting to be dead" from " Officers mess" this quote shows us a different view on whether death is honourable in war. Furthermore I believe that " In Flanders Fields" is the most important poem in the anthology so far because it has references to " honour" however it is coupled with the powerful and undermining statement that the war is just a " Quarrel" and this therefore shows us as readers the two contradicting views on honour in death via war.

John McCrae wrote the poem in three very contrasting stanzas, this offers the reader a poignant insight into the process of thought that McCrae went through to convey all off the differentiating emotions and imagery found in each individual stanza. In many of the poems in the first section of the anthology the poem will start with it being pre-war and beautiful, with pretty imagery and lovely pictures, then will move through the stages of war ending up with death, the ends of the poems are usually gritty and realistically shocking. A good example of this is " Officer's Mess", it starts by describing a happy-like room full of joyous men however the poem fishes with the powerful line " Among men waiting to be dead", this gradual change in tone is another reoccurring technique and the fact that it occurs in " In Flanders Fields" adds to the argument that McCrae's poem is the most important poem in the anthology so far.

The overall message of McCrae's poem is that the living must repay the dead by continuing to fight and therefore keep dieing. There is a stark contrast in this view compared to the sentiment expressed by other World War I poets, such as Wilfred Owen, whose poetry posed controversial ideas that the war was pointless and that the futility of the war was at an obscene level. McCrae lived only a few years after this poem was published, and " In Flanders Fields" is the only piece of writing for which McCrae is well known.