

”dulce et decorum
est” and ”electricity
comes to cocoa
bottom” essay
sample

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In the poems 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' and 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', both authors employ various linguistic devices such as vivid imagery and descriptive detail to put across a specific message to the reader. By doing so, they successfully evoke a series of emotions from the reader throughout the course of both poems. Although in terms of content 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' and 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom' are worlds apart, as one is a war poem and the other is about technology coming to paradise, they both come back to the same central idea of a corrupting influence. In 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' it is that of war's corrupting influence on innocent young men and in 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', it is the corruptive nature of technology when it tries to harmonise with something natural like an exotic, untouched island.

Wilfred Owen uses graphic descriptions of the soldiers in order to paint a clear message for the readers. Described as defeated and worn-down like old "beggars", the soldiers are tired, hungry, and cold - hence they are perpetually standing "hunched over". The contrast between the actual young man and the way he is described to the reader is striking and implies that war corrupts the youth and innocence of these men. He also says that they "[fit] the clumsy helmets just in time" which again, makes the reader realise that no one really wants to wear them but are forced to put them on, which contrasts with the generalised perception of a soldier at war; always willing and ready. Owen pairs this juxtaposition with personification, when he describes the helmets as "clumsy". This is ironic, as again instead of being alert and prepared, it is the soldiers who are clumsy. The words "green sea" imply slush and swamp-like 'decaying' conditions - unsuitable for young

men as well as highly dangerous. The thick haze of gas, through which the soldier's sight is obscured, contributes to Owen's message that people's perception of war is also distorted.

Similarly, in 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', Marcia Douglas uses rich language in order to put across a message to the reader, albeit a more ambiguous one. Her descriptions of the village and nature's reaction to the arrival of the technology are rather unnatural and indicate disorder. For example "drawn like a pencil line across the sun" evokes a sense of disturbance in the reader's mind, as if the cable should not be in the way of the sun's light. "The fireflies waited in the shadows" is also rare as fireflies tend to emit light and are then attracted to each other. Douglas does this yet again when she states, "a fluttering of wings" - which indicates commotion and thus how the introduction of a corruptive influence such as electricity creates disorder in a formerly peaceful environment. However this can be interpreted in two ways; whether the poet is describing a disturbance in nature or simply anticipatory behaviour.

On the other hand, in 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', the reader is given no doubt that Owen paints a very bleak, grey and extremely negative picture of war. The first stanza is written in pentameter, which creates a slow, marching rhythm. This indicates discipline and control, which explains why the soldiers can't escape their fate - they have to follow orders and stay at war. The reader learns that the soldiers have become desensitised, as they are "deaf even to the hoots [of] gas shells dropping softly behind". The word "softly" contrasts with the sound one would associate with shells, things that are

imagined to be loud and destructive. This shows the reader the surreal mindset of the soldiers. The sentences are quite long, and a lot of commas are used to create pauses. Owen uses stylistic syntax in order to force the reader to read the stanza slowly, further enforcing the ever-present theme of the soldier's disconnected mindset. All through the stanza there is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness.

Owen employs another technique in the second stanza in order to evoke pity in the reader's mind due to the soldiers' helplessness. Owen uses several verbs, which add to the sense of hurry and action. The soldiers, "drunk with fatigue" are unable to react to their rapidly changing surroundings.

Metaphors and similes are used to further accentuate their inability to fight: "floundering like a man in fire...under a green sea [he was] drowning." The tone in this stanza is quite desperate and helpless, indicating to the reader that there is no hope for the soldiers. Owen says, "In all my dreams before my helpless sight", which shows the reader how blind the soldiers are, and so isolated from reality, that "dreams" and hallucinations are taking the place of those things they can't see. It also talks about the drowning man to be "guttering, choking, drowning." The use of triplet emphasises how many things occur so fast and at once that the soldiers are unable to react. The reader sympathises with the soldiers' situation and realises their feeling of being trapped and falsely glorified - most soldiers are naive men who have been fooled into their own inevitable death.

Likewise, in 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', nature can do nothing about the 'debut' of electricity but wait and see what happens. In this way,

they are also helpless. The poet uses verbs like "waiting" and "watching" to describe the atmosphere of anticipation and excitement when all you can do is wait - therefore rendering them helpless. Douglas comments on nature's behaviour by using personification. She writes, "a breeze coming home from sea held its breath" and "bamboo... stopped its swaying". This is significant as she is trying to say that it too has 'feelings' and should be preserved, unlike what will happen if technology's destructive influence takes control.

However, contrasting with the soldiers in 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', Douglas shows that 'all of nature' is perfectly capable to put forward a strong opinion about how they feel about their circumstances - they disapprove. Douglas effectively uses onomatopoeia, repetition and personification respectively to convey how much technology clashes with nature. The birds went "tweet-a-whit", there was "such a swaying, swaying" and the "breeze rose... swelling and swelling into a wind" as if to mark territory. Even from the children of Cocoa Bottom, "there [arose] such a gasp".

Grannie Patterson, an old lady belonging to the older generation doesn't seem to approve of the newfound electricity and therefore only "peeped through the crack in her porch door" fearfully. Contrastingly Mr Samuel is very pleased, "smiling on the verandah". He can be compared to the politicians who encouraged the war that Owen talks about in 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' and the now horrified children to the soldiers who later dreaded joining the war. The children "camped on the grass bank outside his house" till "the sky turn[ed] yellow orange", are excited at first, just like the nave young men who had been told the old lie "Dulce et decorum est

pro patria mori" (meaning "it is sweet and becoming to die for one's country"). It is only once the truth about these corruptive influences such as technology and war are known, that an appropriate judgment can be made.

Another similarity between the two poems is the build up of tension. In 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', the tone changes from a slow trance-like state, to a quick one in stanza two in which the first couple of words are "Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!" This immediately depicts a tense situation due to the 'rushed' nature of the syntax. Owen describes the men as "floundering like a man in fire" indicating panic. The picture of a burning man is extremely graphic and disturbing in nature therefore contributing to the tension in the poem. There is also the overshadowing sense of desperation; there is a constant battle with time, and the soldiers are only just making it, i. e. "Fitting the ... helmets just in time". "An ecstasy of fumbling" and "yelling and stumbling" depict rushed movement and overall, an intense situation.

Similarly, in 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', a sense of tension is present from the very start, in either the form of anticipating tension (first stanza) or eventful tension (second stanza). Anticipating tension is omnipresent in the first stanza as everyone is waiting for the mysterious electricity to finally turn on. In this poem, the first stanza is read slower and is more peaceful than the second stanza due to the natural and picturesque imagery used: "kling-klings swooped in", "waiting for sunset" and "sky turning yellow, orange". These descriptions paint a beautiful and serene picture in one's mind. The metaphor "soft as chiffon curtains" creates an effect of something slow and calmly moving, in general increasing the

appealing nature of the surroundings. This is a strong contrast to 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', where the author uses slow-moving descriptions in order to highlight the exhaustion and "fatigue" of the soldiers. Douglas uses the word 'Light!' to begin the second stanza and immediately we know that it will be an eventful stanza, where there will be lots of movement. Even though there is a sense of tension present, it has an extremely different effect to that of 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'. Descriptive words like "yellow shimmer" and "marvellous light" are used, thus creating a far more exciting prospect than that of the other poem.

In conclusion, the two poems although very different, come back to the same idea of a corruptive influence. 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' relates the shocking consequences of war, whereas 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom' talks about nature's response to something new and different. Owen describes dying men with 'glazed eyes' and 'frothed-mouths', whose bodies are racked by a meaningless end. He stresses how the naive men have given up their lives running after empty dreams of glory and success. His persuasive and expressive diction completely convinces the reader that war is undignified, humiliating and disgusting and that no one could knowingly wish it upon another. Similarly, in 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', the author's view of nature and its beauty is shown by her choice of imagery and vivid description.

She also shares her view of how ultimately, things like technology don't matter and this is shown when her poem ends with an anti-climax. The children have seen the light and then make their way home in the dark. It is

clear that the ' moment' was ephemeral and that it will not be recorded. The descriptive details in the poems are also used contrastingly, in accordance with the mood and tone of the poem, ' Dulce Et Decorum Est' being negative, while ' Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', being more positive and slightly ambiguous. Overall, both authors are able to effectively convey their respective opinions on two distinct corruptive influences by utilising various descriptive details and linguistic features.