

Cannon fodder and the armistice essay sample



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The two poems are both written during the time of the First World War, and reflect the emotions felt towards the war. Both poets have different experiences of the war, yet share a common grief. They reflect their grief and other emotions through their use of language. In the poem "Cannon Fodder", Wilfred Owen tries to convey to the reader the terror that he felt when discovering the corpse of the soldier seven days after his death. Owen uses very powerful imagery to show the reader the horror of the corpse: "Feeling the damp, chill circlet of flesh Loosen its hold On muscles and sinews and bones"

This represents the decay and decomposition of the corpse, and he shows us the horror of seeing the extent of the decay by using a metaphor. The flesh isn't really holding on to the dead soldier's body, but it is there to inform us that it is falling apart. Owen also tries to convey to the reader the feeling of futility towards the war. He shows the pointlessness of it all by using rhetorical questions: "Is death really a sleep?" The soldier who has discovered the corpse is asking the corpse this question, but of course, the soldier will get no answer because he is talking to a dead man.

This task in itself is pointless, and reminds us just how pointless all of the war seems to Owen. Owen also uses a lot of Prefixes on words instead of using a different word. This can change the mood of a sentence: "Uncared for in the unowned place" The use of the suffixes makes the place sound so desolate, that it is not worth dying for. The place is called "no man's land", and this is why it is referred to as unknown. Uncared makes us feel that there is no recognition of the bravery of the soldier, or for the respect to bring his body

in from no mans land. In Owen's poem, we also feel for the soldier who found the corpse.

He thinks back to what the dead soldiers life at home was probably like. This makes us feel as though the soldier wishes he was at home, feeling all of the comforts presented in the soldiers thoughts: " But at home by the fire" The word but instantly indicates that the mood of the poem is about to change, and that the reader is about to see a contrast between what they have just read, and what they are about to read. Owen also uses his line structure to add power to the words and the meaning he is trying to convey: " Your bright-limbed lover is lying out there Dead"

The last line of the quote is very emphatic and powerful, because death is such a strong word and it is being used alone, almost being used as a false stop to the idyllic life being lived by the dead soldiers lover. During stanzas two, three and four, Wilfred Owen uses the soldier to try and tell the story for the people back home by using the context that they will understand: " O mother, sewing by candlelight, Put away that stuff. " This quote was used to show the reader that the war would affect them back at home almost as badly as the soldiers are feeling it over in France.

In stanzas two, three and four, one can detect a large amount of bitterness, and possibly anger, yet the anger is conveyed more subtly than in poems like " dulcet et decorum et" where the stanzas are set out almost like tirades. We detect this bitterness by the rudeness to the people back at home. In stanzas three and four, he even tells the mother and the lover what to do. In the poem, " The Armistice" by May Wedderburn Cannan, the reader

feels some entirely different emotions than the ones conveyed in " Cannon Fodder". The first different emotion that the reader detects from the poem is relief.

The whole office feels this, as it descends in chaos: " One said, " it's over, over, it's the end: The War is over: ended" The reader can feel the hustle and bustle of the people in the office, as their excitement and relief boil over. This is shown by the repetition in the workers speech. They repeat the words end and over. This is to stress the key fact that the killing will come to an end, and that their families and loved ones will get them back. In the second stanza, the workers also begin to recollect: " I can't remember life without the war"

This shows that to the people, war had become a way of life, and that people had forgotten their old lives. The fact that the people are reflecting about the war is good, because it shows their concern and respect for the men on the front line, and this is probably Wedderburn Cannan's subtle way of saying thank you to the men who were frontline. The reader can also detect feelings of isolation from the two women left behind after the others leave the room: " Big empty room" This suggests that the women do not feel left behind by the other staff, but left behind by their men who went and fought, and died in the army.

The big empty room is a metaphor for the women's empty hearts now that the loves of their lives have left them for good. The reader is also given a view of the idyllic thoughts that one of the women is thinking about the front line: " It will be quiet tonight Up at the front: first time in all these years, And

no one will be killed there anymore” This is an idyllic view of the frontline, however it is also ironic, because it is a well-documented fact that lives were lost even after the armistice because it took a while for news to spread of the end of the war. It is also a little upsetting, because these men’s lives are being lost in vain.

Wedderburn Cannan also makes us feel empathy towards the two female characters at the end of the poem: “ It’s over for me too... my man was killed, Wounded... and died” The pauses in the dialogue make the reader feel that the woman is struggling to force back tears. It also makes us feel that maybe she is contemplating what the future holds, and reflecting on her dead husband. The poem comes to an extremely sombre ending, and this is very similar to the ending of the war: “ Peace could not give back her dead. ” This makes us feel that the whole war was worthless.

Even in the times of peace, people like the woman in the poem are still feeling the grief that devastation of the war had caused. The two poems are from different times, wartime and post-war but the anti-war message is still the same and is still being utilised effectively by the strong language used in both poems. In “ Cannon Fodder”, Wilfred Owen displays to us the full of horror of the war in gory detail, whilst in “ The Armistice”, the horror of the war is the loneliness of the people left behind. Whereas Owen uses shock tactics to put his message across, Wedderburn Cannan tries to draw the reader’s empathy instead.