

Poetry, post-1914 – literature coursework

Literature



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With detailed reference to three poems, compare and contrast the poets' presentation of war through their choice of language and form.

World War One was one of the most influential events over Western literature. The three poems which I will analyse in this essay are "Dulce Et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" by W. B. Yeats and "Anthem for Doomed Youth" also by Wilfred Owen. Poets such as Owen decided to write very powerful poems at this period of time to show the world what was going on in the war. By these poems being written and published in various newspapers, the world would get to see what was really happening in the war, rather than seeing all the propaganda that many governments showed the public.

The forms of the three poems are mainly very different. "Anthem for Doomed Youth" is written as a sonnet, which is generally associated with love. This association suggests that "Anthem" was written as a celebration of their lives, rather than as a poem to commemorate their lives. Another slight similarity is that "Anthem" and "Dulce" are both written using stanzas, rather than "An Irishman" which is written in free form, even though it is significantly longer than "Anthem". The rhyme schemes of "Dulce Et Decorum Est" and "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" are the same, following the ABAB... pattern, however "Anthem For Doomed Youth" has a very different rhyme scheme, sometimes using ABAB... and sometimes using AABB... the times in which these rules are used are very random.

"Dulce Et Decorum Est" was written by Owen to tell the world about what was really happening in the war. Most of the poem is made up of phrases

describing the torment and pain that soldiers went through during this time. An example of one of these phrases is when he says " Knock-kneed, coughing like hags", by using this simile, Owen is conveying to the audience that many soldiers were injured and suffering badly during the war. Yeats uses a similar technique to get the message of bad conditions through to the audience, he says " Those I fight I do not hate", stating that he doesn't even know the people that he is fighting, so cannot have hate for them, even though they could kill or injure him. He is also showing a different tone to the poem, saying that it is indifferent, calm and detached.

" An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" is written in first person, giving it a personal feel, making you feel like you know the " Irish Airman" and understand his problems and sorrows. Contrary to this, both " Anthem for Doomed Youth" and " Dulce Et Decorum Est" are written in third person, making the reader feel like the poems are more of a story than a person account of the war, even though Owen fought in the war.

There are many messages in each of the poems. One of the most easy to see hidden message occurs in " Anthem for Doomed Youth", line three is the longest line throughout the whole poem and it says this: " Only the stuttering rifles' raid battle". This phrase can be interpreted in many different ways. One of these could be that the " stuttering rifles" are the prayers that are being said for the soldiers have been saying, however the " stuttering rifles" could mean the rifles are causing a long and painful death, and this is, in fact the reason why the line is so long. In " Dulce Et Decorum Est" the same technique is also used. This time the longest line is the second line which says " Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through the sludge". This <https://assignbuster.com/poetry-post-1914-literature-coursework/>

line is saying how the soldiers were so injured and worn out that they " cursed through the sludge" meaning it took them a long time. This is the reason why the line is so long. The longest line of " An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" does however not follow the same pattern.

The first line of " Anthem" is written in the form of a rhetorical question, this question makes you think about what happened to all the people that died " like cattle" die in inhuman ways, and just being slaughtered. " Dulce" immediately starts by using a simile; " Bent double, like old beggars under sacks", this simile is showing you the extent of the injuries suffered, it made them " bent" like old people would be, not young people who should have fit and healthy bodies. " I know that I shall meet my fate" is the opening line of " An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", this immediate impact, by the man saying he is going to die is very dramatic; it engages the reader and creates suspense about what is going to happen.

The past, present and future are all mentioned in " An Irish Airman Foresees His Death". " I know that I shall meet my fate" is the airman saying that he knows that he will die soon, this is in the present, " The years to come, seemed waste of breath" is saying that the years to come seem a waste of time, talking about the future and " A waste of breath the years behind" is saying that the years gone by also seem like a waste of time. This use of all three tenses is giving the audience a briefing about what happened in the past, what is happening at the moment and what the airman fears will happen in the future. Both " Dulce Et Decorum Est" and " Anthem for Doomed Youth" are written in the present because they have a main purpose

of telling the audience what is happening, rather than what happen in the past and what will happen in the future.

During the early 1900's many British people were religious, rather than today, where only a small fraction of people keep any religious observance. The fact that people kept to there religion meant that a lot of this type of imagery was put into poems during the war. " Anthem for Doomed Youth" has all the components in it to tell you what a funeral for one of the fallen soldiers would be like, it mentions " bells" as in bells at a church, but Owen may also be referring to the noise of the rifles, it also mentions " prayer" which could also be the hope that the soldiers had in order that they would survive and it also mentions many others including " choirs" which could be the other soldiers. Similarly to " Anthem", " An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" also uses religious imagery; this occurs when Yeats says " my country is Kiltartan Cross", this can be perceived in the way that " Kiltartan Cross" is his religion, because it is where he is from, and he has great passion to fight for them, in order that they win.

Both " Dulce Et Decorum Est" and " Anthem for Doomed Youth" describe injured servicemen in great detail. This is done because the injuries were so great that some of the soldiers had, the poets felt a 'responsibility' of telling the public what was happening. One example of this poetic device in " Anthem for Doomed Youth" is when it says;

" The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;

Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds"

This is saying that their faces were the colour of a coffin cloth (white) and that they had wounded minds like a patient in hospital. One type of this imagery used in "Dulce" is when Owen says;

"If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs"

This is saying that blood was spooling out of the "corrupted" lungs, making you imagine a dead or struggling soldier on the floor with blood oozing out of him. Contrary to these two poems "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" does not describe injured soldiers; this may be because Yeats wanted to make his poem seem different to many poems which were appearing in the media at the time.

After writing this essay, I have realised that different poets use different techniques to write their poems, making them appealing to different types of audiences.