

The early purges by seamus heaney essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



'The Early Purges' by Seamus Heaney focuses on the traumas of childhood, and how impressionable we are when we are young. The poem is sad: it is about a child who sees kittens drowning, along with many other animals being killed in various methods on a farm. At the time the child is terrified, but by the end of the poem the fully-grown child is doing all the deeds he was so scared of when he was young. The poem is about how we lose innocence.

Theme:

The main theme of the poem is all about how we change when we grow up. There is direct contrast between the first and last lines: 'I was six when I first saw kittens drown'

And the last line;

'On well run farms pests have to be kept down'.

Poetic techniques used:

Similie- The kittens are compared to "wet gloves"/ comparing the dead kittens bodies to being "crisp as summer dung."

Onomatopoeia- "sickening tug" of the hens' necks.

Alliteration- "soft paws scraping" "...soon soused" "slung on the snout."

War poem, "Base details" by Siegfried Sassoon.

Background to the poem:

Siegfried Sassoon was a soldier who fought in World War I. He witnessed the horrendous slaughter of thousands of young soldiers on the battlefield. Much of this killing was totally senseless and was a result of poor planning and incorrect strategies employed by the majors. This angered the poet so much that he was driven to write this angry poem. He imagines himself being a major and sarcastically suggests that he would be: " Fierce, bald and short of breath,"

And he would send young soldiers, or " glum heroes," to their deaths, while remaining far from the battlefield himself. " Guzzling and gulping in the best hotels." He imagines himself reading a book containing the names of the dead soldiers and pretending to express some sympathy. " Poor young chap," When the war is over the major would die, not heroically on the battlefield, but home in bed.

Theme:

The main theme of this poem is the deep anger left by the poet at the behaviour of the majors and generals during World War I.

Language and style:

This poem is a satire, in which Sassoon bitterly attacks the majors and those in charge of military matters who send thousands of young soldiers to their deaths in the name of patriotism. Sassoon uses many features of style in constructing this poem. There is a regular rhyming scheme used with line 1 rhyming with line 3, line 2 with line 4, etc. Each line is made of ten syllables each and the last two lines rhyme. (This is a rhyming couplet.) It is a very

descriptive poem with Sassoon making use of effecting adjectives. For example, the Majors are described as “scarlet,” while their faces are said to be “Puffy and petulant.” Some of the verbs he chooses are also interesting. He writes about the majors “Guzzling and gulping.” Here onomatopoeia is used to add to the effectiveness of the image. Onomatopoeia is also found on the last line of the poem when we are told that the Majors “toddle” home. Excellent examples of alliteration are found in lines 4+5. “Puffy, petulant face,” and

“Guzzling and gulping,” which is also an example of assonance (repetition of vowel sounds).

Dulce Et Decorum Est by Siegfried Owen.

The poem describes a gas attack on a trench in World War One. The poem reveals to the reader the terrible consequences of a gas attack: ‘the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs’. It also presents the unglamorous reality of trench life, with the soldiers described as being ‘like old beggars’.

The Latin used at the end of the poem means ‘It is sweet and honourable to die for your country’, a concept Owen is strongly denying.

Structure

There is not a clearly defined structure to the poem, although Owen does make use of rhyme, mostly on alternate line endings.

The poem opens with a description of trench life and the conditions faced by the soldiers. Then comes the gas attack, and the poem offers a graphic description of the effects of such an attack.

Language

The opening stanza is characterised by language about 'fatigue': the soldiers 'marched asleep', they 'trudge', and 'limped on'. They are 'deaf', 'lame' and 'blind'; all rather pitiful language intended to reveal the reality of war and its effects.

The speaker describes a vision in a dream of a gas victim 'guttering, choking, drowning'. The listed verbs are associated with a lack of air and death.

The language used in the sections depicting the gas attack is strong, representing both the anguish of the victims of the gas attack as well as the effect on those haunted by what they have seen: 'watch the white eyes writhing in his face, / His hanging face'. The repetition of the word 'face' makes it clear which element disturbs the speaker most: the transformation in the face of the victim. The use of alliteration on the 'w' sound reflects the agonised twisting of the gas victim.

Attitudes, ideas and imagery.

The opening of the poem suggests Owen pities the state to which the soldiers have fallen. Instead of youthful, strong fighters they are 'Bent double', 'Knock-kneed, coughing like hags'. Owen's imagery presents the

men as prematurely old and weakened. War has broken these men, and they are described in the most unglamorous, inglorious manner. Owen's bitterness at this transformation is obvious.

Owen's disillusionment with war is also clear from the closing lines of the poem. After describing the horrifying effects of the gas attack he addresses the reader:

' My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie'

He is rejecting the accepted attitude back at home that serving your country in war is glorious. He is critical of the ' high zest', or great enthusiasm, used to convince men to go to war. He sees war as brutal and wasteful of young lives. His choice of the word ' children' is also significant; impressionable young men are almost lured to war by the promise of ' desperate glory'.

Sample Question

What might you want to say about the poet's presentation of war in the poem *Dulce Et Decorum Est*? Briefly note down some points that you would want to include in your essay, then compare your ideas with those in our sample answer on the next page.

Sample Answer

- War transforms soldiers, breaking them physically and mentally: ' Bent double' ' Knock-kneed'. Rather than glorious men, Owen presents the soldiers as weakened old ' hags'.
- The experience of war is something no

soldier can escape: ' In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me'. • The effect of gas used in World War One is communicated to the reader through Owen's use of verbs linked to death by a lack of oxygen: ' guttering, choking, drowning', ' smothering'. • Owen offers the reader very graphic imagery associated with suffering, aiming to present the truth about the war experience, arguably arising from his first-hand experience of war. • Owen presents the soldiers as victims who have been betrayed by those who encouraged them to go to war. He uses words such as ' innocent' and ' children' to reinforce his positive attitude to the soldiers. • Owen is bitter about war and the encouragement given to go to war. He angrily refers to ' The old Lie' that dying for your country is sweet and honourable. • The detailed description of a soldier dying as a result of gas attack is intended to make the reader feel discomfort, forcing him or her to confront the reality of war, something which is far from honourable or sweet.

" Conquerors" by Henry Treece.

LEARN OFF!!!!

The Theme of the Pity of War- Dulce et Decorum est and Conquerors.

" Dulce et Decorum Est", by William Owen and, " Conquerors", by Henry Treece are both examples of poems revealing the horrific and doleful aspects of war. Each poet writes with a different style but both try to convey the reality and consequences of war through their poems.

In " Dulce et Decorum Est", Owen graphically illustrates the truth about war. Creating very descriptive imagery and using various poetic devices, he

manages to convey that war isn't as glorious as some people may think. This message is spread throughout the poem; however it is strongest at the end.

The first stanza describes the shell-shocked and exhausted soldiers trudging through the sticky mud. Owen's use of words such as " bent double", " old beggars", " knock-kneed", " coughing like hags", and " sludge", help to provide the reader with an image of the state the soldiers are in. The carefully chosen compound word, " blood-shod" conjures a very visual and bitter image in the readers mind showing them the awful conditions the men had to put up with. Soft consonants are used to describe the gas, almost giving the phrase an onomatopoeic touch.

" Of gas-shells dropping softly behind."

The poem is carefully constructed with a regular rhyming pattern of ' ABABCD CD'. Written in iambic pentameter, the reader is guided through the poem swiftly which allows you to keep reading the poem until the end.

There is a huge contrast in the second stanza as the pace of the poem speeds up rapidly. The first four words show this change in tempo. The punctuation used and the repetition of the word ' GAS' instantly changes the atmosphere, almost giving the reader a fright.

" An ecstasy of fumbling,

Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,"

These two lines create a sense of panic and the words, filled with clumsy consonants, add to the tension. " Ecstasy", normally associated with

excitement, strangely fits very well in the phrase as it conveys horror brilliantly. The simple word “ But” destroys any sense of relief in just one word as the reader knows straight away that something has gone wrong. The pace of the poem is slowed right down by the Assonance used, helping the reader realize that one of the soldiers didn’t get his helmet on “ just in time”.

“ As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.”

The simile used paints a graphical picture for the reader and you are able to see all the soldiers standing around, wanting to help but not being able to. The repetition of ‘ ing’ in the next stanza reinforces the pain and suffering the man is going through. The three words “ guttering”, “ choking”, and “ drowning” give such a strong image and is very shocking the way they are said one after the other. “ Guttering” is almost onomatopoeic; allowing you to visualize and hear the torture the soldier is going through.

The audience is attacked in the next stanza as Owen suddenly involves the reader in the poem. The use of alliteration:

“ And watch the white eyes writing in his face”

intensifies the agony of the soldier and almost makes you feel guilty for not being there even if there were no way you could help. However the next line is such a powerful description that the picture created is so vivid.

“ Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,”

This line is so disgusting and horrific making the event, all the more chilling. The use of Assonance is so straight forward emphasizing the revolting scene.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-early-purges-by-seamus-heaney-essay-sample/>

“ Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues.

In the last stanza it talks to the audience as “ My friend” changing the relationship between the poet and the reader from the previous stanzas. This gesture is encouraging, allowing the reader to feel more comfortable. The words “ children”, “ ardent”, and “ desperate” tell the reader that the young boys are too passionate about going to war for the “ glory” that they are blinded by what really happens. Owens constant use of imagery does not allow the readers mind to wonder.

The last two lines emphasize that war is not glorious or brave. Owen’s use of rhyming words helps bring the poem to a finale and also help you flow through to the end. The use of the capital letter in “ The old Lie:” enhances the meaning of “ Dulce et Decorum est: Pro patria mori.” This makes the message stand out very clearly.

The intense descriptions throughout the poem are spine chilling and compel the reader to see through the eyes of the poet, allowing them to contemplate the bitterness of war. Owen expresses the reality of war, contradicting the glorification some may see it as like in the “ Conquerors,” by Henry Treece. However, towards the end of this poem, Treece depicts the immoral and inhumane aspects of war.

“ Conquerors,” is also about war but not quite as disgusting and shocking. The mood is very sombre and melancholy. There is no rhyming pattern; however there are many enjambments which allow the readers to flow through the poem.

The pace of the poem is very slow and thoughtful. It is not very straight forward which makes the reader think carefully about the message Treece is trying to get across.

The first few lines make you aware of your senses and you can picture that everything is silent and untouched.

“ For the sorry drip of rain from blackened trees”

This line is very picturesque and emphasizes the sad, depressing tone of the poem. The two words “ sorry”, and “ melancholy”, increase the poems grey, low key mood.

The use of Assonance and enjambment pulls you through the poem, helping you read on to the next line.

“ Then through a broken pane some of us saw

A dead bird in a rusting cage, still”

Treece’s use of words such as “ dead”, and “ rusting”, perceive to the reader that the village has been isolated and a lot of time has passed. The Alliteration in the next line moves the reader swiftly on and at the same time stresses what had happened in the village. The description of the bird gives the reader an idea of the fear and the sense of being trapped or locked in that the people of the village had before they died.

The silence almost makes the soldiers feel scared or guilty as they rush to get out. The dog described in the poem is fragile and weak. “ to die at least

in peace”, implies that there must have been an uproar or panic in the village when the people were killed, contrasting with the dog’s death.

Treese expresses his message in the next line express conveying that war is not so victorious after all:

“ No one had told us victory was like this.”

The reader realizes that the soldiers are starting to regret and the joy of conquering is not so triumphant after all.

The “ grey child” leaves such a poignant image in the readers mind and it makes you want to stop and think. The horrific picture in your mind makes you think of the innocent children being left to die.

The last line removes all the glorious feelings the ‘ conquerors’ would have had before coming to the village. The soldiers forget all about their victory and the only thing on their minds are the families.

This poem has a very dreamy, unrealistic feeling to it. The images are very poignant and allow the reader to remember the picture vividly. The message is portrayed throughout the whole poem and leaves the reader to stop and think about it. The poem portrays the cruelty and misery war beholds on people and stresses the love everyone has for their families, no matter what side they come from.

Both poems indicate how inhumane war can be. I thought “Dulce et Decorum est” was very vivid and disgusting. The poem illustrated the ugly and brutal reality of war, depicting the horror many soldiers go through. “Conquerors”, was more emotional, making me feel a certain amount of sorrow and distress about the consequences of war. Each poem portrayed its message through to the reader using different poetic devices and tones and was successfully able to convey them.

“But You Didn’t” by Merrill Glass.

Theme:

The central theme for the poem appears to be youthful regret, perhaps even time wasted. How many times, especially when young, do we say or do things that may be hurtful however we claim harmless fun? How often have we wanted to tell someone that they are special, important and valuable to us but we put it off because we believe we have all the time in the world? We take for granted that all will be as we hope and rarely learn how beautiful and fragile life is until we lose someone we love. The young narrator tells of incidents that most readers can relate to: careless driving, flirtations, general disregard for the feelings of others.

The narrator is not a ‘bad’ person; simply young and naive (the way we all want to be). Perhaps the poet would like us to learn that we are mortal and that nothing lasts forever. We need to get over ourselves and appreciate what we have; it is perfectly OK to acknowledge someone who is important to us. It is a sign of strength of character not weakness to tell someone you love them; don’t wait. This is a very straight forward and touching poem

discussing love, loss and regret. There is no mystery here to the meaning. The poet tells you all in her reflections and her use of the phrase “ But you didn’t.” Her lover was never quick to judge; he loved her unconditionally and didn’t run away at the first bump in their relationship.

“ Nettles” by Vernon Scannell.

Context

Vernon Scannell was most famous as a war poet, having fought in World War Two. His other poetry also has echoes of his war experience, as in this poem

Nettles

Subject matter

Nettles is about a child – Scannell had six children – falling into a patch of nettles and seeking comfort from his parents. The speaker in the poem, after attending to his son’s injuries – sets about destroying the nettles, only for them to return with the passing of just “ two weeks”.

Structure and language

Structure

The poem consists of a single stanza and has alternately rhyming lines. The poem is a narrative account, focused on the father’s perspective of an accident involving his son.

Language

Martial (to do with war) imagery and language dominate this poem, which

may appear strange at first given the domestic subject matter. By bringing the two ideas together, Scannell is offering his opinion on each.

The nettles are personified as an opposing force. They are a “ regiment of spite”, and are described using the metaphor “ spears”. Within the first three lines the nettles are presented as a violent and aggressive group of soldiers to reflect the speaker’s need to protect his child.

When the speaker is taking revenge on the nettles the writer again personifies them, describing them as a “ fierce parade” as if they were soldiers standing to attention, cut down by his scythe. They are even given a “ funeral pyre” (a wooden structure made for bodies to be burned on instead of being buried). Within “ two weeks”, “ tall recruits” have been “ called up” to replace the nettles, a reference to soldiers being conscripted (forced to join the army), but also communicating the idea of an enemy force that cannot be defeated.

The child is presented using emotive language, reflective of the compassion and sympathy the speaker feels for his injured son: “ White blisters beaded on his tender skin”. The alliteration using the ‘ b’ sounds, “ blisters beaded” suggests the swelling, painful injuries, and the child’s skin is “ tender”, a strong contrast to the language used to describe the nettles. The “ watery grin” is another emotive description, implying the child is being helped to get over his painful experience by loving parents.

The father’s reaction to the nettles is as violent as the nettles’ stings. He explains the process of dealing with the nettles in a very careful, calculating

manner: " I took my hook and honed the blade". First he selected his weapon (a scythe), then sharpened it; then he " slashed in fury" until " not a nettle ... / Stood upright any more". The father takes revenge in his strong desire to protect his son and punish those who injured him.

Attitudes, themes and ideas

This poem explores the impulse for a parent to protect a child, using whatever means necessary. The emotive language used to present the child and the violence of the father's response suggests a powerful instinct has been provoked.

The poem is also about the inevitability of " wounds" being felt through life, whatever a parent may do to prevent it. The nettles grow back quickly and the speaker realises his son will feel pain again. The poem is about a parent realising that life will present children with hurtful situations, ones which cannot be avoided or prevented.

Martial imagery can at first seem out of place - after all, the events of the poem are very insignificant compared to the realities of war. However, the imagery and language is chosen to communicate the idea that such incidents are significant and important in the eyes of a parent. References to war might also suggest that the battle is futile. Whatever the father does the nettles will grow back and his son will probably be hurt again, just as wars will continue to occur, however violent the attempts to end them.

Facts about the poem " Nettles."

- Nettles is about the protection offered to a young child by a father.
- Nettles presents a father who is violent in his desire to protect his son from the “wounds” of life.
- Nettles is written from the perspective of the father. Brief observations are used to communicate the tenderness and love of the parental relationship with a child.

“Mid-term break” by Seamus Heaney.

Rhyme & Form: Iambic Pentameter (The iambic pentameter is defined by its rhythm of pairing ten syllables for each line into five pairs.) Tone: Sombre

Imagery: Death, Grief

Themes: Death, Frailty of Life, Growing up

Poetic Techniques: Onomatopoeia, Alliteration, Assonance, Simile, Metaphor

Summary

A boy sits in the school's medical area waiting to be given a lift home - the ringing of the school bell further enhance the fact that he is waiting for something. When he finally arrives home he sees his father on the porch, crying. The house is packed with neighbours and strangers who offer their condolences. He notices his baby sister in a cot laughing and cooing while his mother takes his hand - she is so overcome with anger and grief that she is unable to cry. Later, the body of his younger brother arrives in an ambulance. The next morning, when the house is quiet, the boy goes up to the bedroom to see his brother for the last time. Theme

'Mid-Term Break' is a first-person account of the experience of facing death for the first time. This death is especially tragic as the dead boy was only four years old, and this is driven home as we find out, by delving into Heaney's past, that the incident in the poem actually happened. As he confronts death for the first time he sees how it affects those he loves. In the porch he meets his father "crying", and later his mother holds his hand. She is too upset to cry, instead she "coughed out angry, tearless sighs". There is also a sense in the poem that the boy has been forced to grow up by what has happened. When he comes to the house we read: ...I was embarrassed/
By old men standing up to shake my hand... In the next stanza he tells us,

Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,
Away at school.

As the eldest in the family, he is treated as an adult by neighbours and seen as a comfort to the family. Since he does not shed tears like his father, or appear severely grief-stricken like his mother, he emerges as the strongest character in his family. Imagery

A mid-term break is usually associated with time off school, holidays and fun. The poem's title suggests a holiday but this "break" does not happen for pleasant reasons as we find out that there is a death in the family. 'Mid-Term Break' is told over the course of three main parts. In the first the boy waits in the college sick bay to be brought home by a neighbour, the reason for his father not collecting him could be due to his family not owning a car (this was in the 1950s). The second occurs in the family home where he meets his grieving parents, family friends and neighbours, who have

gathered for the wake. The final scene takes place the following morning when the boy sees his little brother's body laid out surrounded by flowers and candles. In the opening stanza there is an ominous atmosphere as the bell is "knelling classes to a close", however at this stage we do not know what has happened. The second stanza begins with the stark, sad image of the poet's father waiting for him to return: In the porch I met my father crying

The patriarchal image of the father-figure in the 1950s is torn down here as we see his father crying - we know now that something personal and terrible has happened. His father, apparently always strong at other funerals, is distraught by his child's death, while "Big Jim" says that it was a "terrible blow". The young Seamus is made uneasy by the baby's happiness on seeing him, by hand shaking and euphemisms "Sorry for my trouble", and by people whispering about him. Inside the house, the boy notices his baby sister lying in her pram "cooing and laughing"; too young to understand what has happened or to realise why the house is filled with strangers. Old men stand up to shake his hand, treating the young boy as a mature male member of the family. The boy meets his mother who is in shock and too upset, even to cry. Finally in the fifth stanza we learn of the cause of the tragedy: an ambulance arrives with the bandaged body of his brother who was killed by a car: At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived

With the corpse

In the last two stanzas the boy goes to the room where his brother's body is laid out. This is the encounter that the entire poem has been moving

towards, the climax of the whole piece. There is an almost peaceful feeling in the poet's description of the room: "snowdrops and candles" soothe the bedside scene. His brother is paler than he remembers, and the only sign of his fatal injury is the "poppy bruise" on his left temple. The young boy sees his brother for the last time and faces death for the first. In the final image the poet compares the small size of his brother's coffin with the shortness of life: No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

Language

The sombre mood of 'Mid-Term Break' is established in the opening lines as the boy sits in the college sick bay with nothing to do but count the bells "knelling classes to a close". Notice how the poet uses the word "knelling" instead of ringing. This gives us a hint of the mood: the bell, which is bringing classes to an end, reminds the boy of a church bell "knelling" for a funeral mass, and perhaps is forewarning him of the death he is about to face. 'Mid -Term Break' is about death and naturally the mood throughout the poem is sombre. The boy meets his father "crying" in the porch and his mother "coughed out angry tearless sighs". The shocked sense of sadness is lifted for a moment in the third stanza when the boy sees his sister in her cot. She coos and laughs, too young to understand what has happened. As well as this central feeling of loss and sadness in the poem, there is also an interesting secondary mood. The boy feels awkward and uncomfortable at being expected to behave like the "eldest" in the family and says: ...I was embarrassed

By old men standing up to shake my hand

His brother's death, as well as being a great tragedy, is a rite of passage for the boy. He is treated as an adult and perhaps as a support to his parents in their terrible grief - he is the only member of the family not crying. In the final two stanzas the mood is heightened as the boy goes alone to see his brother's body. Heaney's language now is much more poetic than it was when he referred to his brother as a corpse: note the personal pronouns "him", "his", "he" - as opposed to "the corpse". The calm mood is shown in the serene picture of "Snowdrops/And candles soothed the bedside" - literally they soothed the young Heaney.

The flowers are a symbol in the poem, but also in reality for the family as a symbol of new life, after death. The bruise is seen as not really part of the boy - he is "wearing" it, as if it could come off. Heaney likens the bruise to the poppy, a flower linked with death and soothing of pain (opiates come from poppies). The child appears as if sleeping, giving us a simile. The ugly "corpse, stanced and bandaged", becomes a sleeping child with "no gaudy scars" - dead, but, ironically, not disfigured. The last line of the poem is most poignant and skilful - the size of the coffin is the measure of the child's life. We barely notice that Heaney has twice referred to a "box", almost a flippant name for a coffin. The shock, sadness and confusion of the earlier stanzas give way to an almost peaceful, calm feeling: "snowdrops/ And candles" by the bed soothe the boy. And finally, there is also a great tenderness and intimacy as he looks at his dead brother for the last time lying in his coffin. Rhythm

“ The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram

When I came in...”

The quick pace of these lines make the poem seem more light-hearted for a moment as the boy sees his baby sister in the pram. But when the poem returns to the room of mourners the lines again become slow and heavy.

Structure

In stanza 5 there are instances of half rhyme (sigh/arrived) (corpse/nurses) however it is in the final two lines of this stanza that the poet uses the only full rhyme found in the poem. This helps bring closure to the poem and gives the ending a sense of finality, emphasising the theme of death: No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.