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## “ Half Past Two,” and “ Dear Mr Lee” by U. A. Fanthorpe Essay Sample

The two poems “ Half Past Two,” and “ Dear Mr Lee,” are both written by U. A. Fanthorpe. They are both about school-life, one from a young child’s point of view and the other from an older child’s point of view.

The titles of these two poems do not, at a first glance, give the reader the distinct impression that they are about school-life. The reader’s first thought on the poem “ Half Past Two,” is probably that it is about a meeting. A first impression from “ Dear Mr Lee” could be that it was a letter. Although both the ideas fit very well into the poems, it is hard to get a full impression of what is exactly going on in the poems.

Both poems give quite negative impressions of school. “ Half Past Two,” mentioning that the child does not quite understand what is going on, and that the teacher has left him on his own “ I forgot all about you.” Fanthorpe makes the reader feel quite sympathetic towards the child as the poem implicates him feeling quite bewildered and worried. “ He was too scared of being wicked….” This could perhaps make the reader have negative feelings towards school, once realising what a terrible time the boy was having. “ Dear Mr Lee,” gives strong, negative feelings towards the teacher, the teaching system, and school.

An older child writes the poem and expresses his opinions on his favourite book in contrast to his feelings about English lessons and exams, in which he had to analyse the book in quite a critical way in order to pick up more marks “…. your view of the class struggle is naï¿½ve….” The student gives the impression that the teacher does not only dislike the book, but also feels quite negative towards the boy himself. “ Mr Smart says for anyone with my punctuation to consider poetry as a career…enough to make the angels weep.” The student writes the whole poem in one sentence without any full stops, which would explain such a comment. But this would not encourage someone to try and improve himself. This would also make the reader feel very disapprovingly towards this school/teacher.

“ Half Past Two” is written in eleven three-line verses. As this poem is about a young child, this particular style works very well. This is because it gives the impression of a child’s abruptness and awkwardness. Some of the verses use enjambment to give the same feeling.

E. g. “ Timetogohomenow, Tvtime,” (new verse)

“ Timeformykisstime…”

This gives the reader the feeling of being a child and could perhaps remember stopping and starting in the middle of sentences and changing the subject. Also, the way Fanthorpe uses capital letters on the words “ Something Very Wrong” emphasises the fact that the child has done something bad and that shows what is important to him. He finds it irrelevant that it is not grammatically correct to use capital letters in the middle of a sentence and puts them there to show how he feels about the fact that he is in trouble. “ Dear Mr Lee,” on the other hand, is written in one long paragraph/sentence. It is obvious from this that the student is not really thinking about accuracy before he writes but is far more focussed on putting his feelings and opinions into the poem.

It is also very clear that he has not written a plan before writing the letter as it takes him the whole poem to come to the point, and even then it is not precise. He very abruptly manages to change the subject without successfully finishing the first “ I’ve got the next one ( book)…. about Spain, and I asked mum about learning…. the fiddle.” He also seems to find a subject that interests him (negatively or positively) and will talk about that, even if it was not something he meant to talk about. “ I used to hate English…. as for Shakespeare…. he’s a national disaster.” When really what he meant to say was “ I used to hate English, but having read your book, I now love it.” The student also begins the letter four times, showing that he does not find it easy to focus and finds himself getting sidetracked and distracted, making it impossible to get his point across.

After reading the poem “ Dear Mr Lee,” the reader would probably have a feeling of speed, as if in a race. Because the poem is written in one sentence, it is quite easy to get lost in the poem and not to pause, as there are no allotted places in which to do so. The poem rushes the reader through it without giving them time to think about what they are reading. It is easy to get the feeling of amazement when reading “ Dear Mr Lee.” “ Half Past Two” gives almost the opposite effect. As it does contain basic punctuation, there are chances to pause whilst reading. The language also gives a time-consuming effect. E. g. the repetition of the word “ ever” gives the impression of long periods of time. Also, the fact that the child cannot tell the time nor completely understands the concept of it makes the reader almost slip into a timeless state.

The boy talks about the times he knew “ Gettinguptime, timeyouwereofftime….” But he does not know the specific time “ Half Past Two.” He seems to start daydreaming. “ So he waited beyond onceupona” “ escaped into the clockless land of ever.” And repeats the word “ into.” These all give impressions of boredom/relaxation as he has removed himself from the world in which time is one of the most important things. “ Dear Mr Lee” can be looked upon from a different angle too. Although the student is obviously not very academic and rather bad at exams, in particular, English, he is obviously finds this book quite amazing and he even knows parts of it by heart. He talks about wishing he “ had your uncles and your half sisters.” This shows that he has researched about the author as well as reading his book.

“ Half Past Two” could remind the reader of what it was like to be a young child, not knowing all that there is to know and feeling lost/misunderstood. Fanthorpe shows that the child is young in the way that the specific times are written “ timeformykisstime.” Fanthorpe has written that as one word because it is the way that a child would think of it. Also, when he talks about the teacher, he never says her name, only “ her” and “ she.” This is something that, amongst older people, is considered rude, so by him using these things, it emphasises his youth.

At the end of “ Half Past Two.” The poet wants to make the reader feel quite relaxed. The ideas in the poem, of there being no time or not understanding it, make the poem lengthier and the use of long words. E. g. “ chrysanthemums” lengthen the poem and make the reader take more time whilst reading. The poet also seems to want you to feel quite sorry for the boy, due to the fact that the teacher has forgotten him. Also because he has been left on his own for what seems like eternity without knowing how long he must stay.

“ Dear Mr Lee,” at the end of the poem, would probably give the reader a feeling of bewilderment because of the structure of the poem and the ongoing speed, which is kept up. It would also give the reader quite a pleased feeling as, the student shows so much enthusiasm towards the book “ Cider With Rosie” and even after failing his exam, he still manages to love the book without feeling angry that the exam was on his favourite book, and he failed. It is also possible, from another angle, to understand where the teacher is coming from. It would be very difficult to act differently towards the child when he finds him so hopeless in English. Even though he does not encourage him, he tries to push him towards the right direction. E. g. correct punctuation.