

Comparison of dirge of the dead sisters by rudyard kipling

Literature



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In 'Dirge Of The Dead Sisters' and 'War', Edgar Wallace and Rudyard Kipling express different views on war. Kipling's focus is on the Role Of woman whereas Wallace shows the role of men. Wallace gives an insight into the gory operation on soldiers straight from the front line and their horrid death referred to as 'it'. Kipling's quite different as the poem describes nurses and their struggle as they care for soldiers behind the front line. Both poems show the roles of men and women who gave their lives for war, but in different ways.

The Boer War took place between 1899-1902. In this period around 28, 000 British soldiers lost their lives in the South of Africa. This horrific war was the consequence of British miners lured to Africa after the discovery of gold deposits. The inhabitants loathed the new settlers, and to show their appreciation they taxed them heavily and denied them voting writes. Eventually the friction between both sides built until the settlers lead a revolt in Johannesburg against the Government.

This essay focuses on the anti-war poetry written as a result of the Boer War, which portrays the true colours of war. Both poems are set in the same war, but focus on different roles of men and women. However the traditional roles of soldier and wife are not used in these poems, they change to surgeon, orderly and volunteer nurse. The poem by Edgar Wallace, appropriately named " War", emphasises the harsh reality in which the soldiers would have to face and the conditions in which the surgeons would have to work in.

Unlike the poem " Dirge Of The Dead Sisters" this poem is actually set in the battlefield. A wagon which would most likely be horse drawn, carries the

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injured from the battlefield to the tent, where the medical orderlies would deal with them, " A tent that is pitched at the base: A wagon that comes from the night " The soldier has been brought from " The night" this may be the darkness or evil, which surrounds the tent. The surgeon is holding a light, this may be a similar light to the street lamp in " A wife in London", another poem written from the Boer War by Thomas Hardy.

It may be a metaphor for the soldier's life, which the surgeon is holding, and it is the surgeon who has the power and the knowledge to rekindle the flame and save the soldier from death, but if the flames " glimmers cold" then the chances for survival are slim. The once gallant and brave, young men who were once so young and eager to join the military and become noble heroes, have been reduced to " A whimper of sobs at the rear" The soldiers are no longer ready and willing, they are totally unprepared for the horrors and bloodshed of war, as it was cunningly hidden from the public, now the soldiers cowered in distress " at the rear"

Within the tent there is a table, however it would not be a clean, sterile table of today's standards, it would most likely be numerous planks of timber held together with a few rusty nails, still stained with the bodily fluids of the previous patient " A table that's laid out for one" Wallace is exaggerating the lack of basic equipment which the surgeons had, in the line " A waterproof cover-and nought". The " Waterproof cover" would most likely be the roof of the tent, which kept them out of the worst of the weather.

Nought" this is slang in some Northern dialects for " nothing". The soldier is a mess from the enemy bullet he received " The limp mangled work of a gun"

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Wallace once again uses a metaphor for the soldier's life, he links the flickering light within the tent to the soldier's soul, the light flickers in a similar fashion to the street lamp in the poem "A wife in London". The flickering may show that the flame is dying and as the flame dies so does the soldier, "The flickering light of a soul."

The wounded man is described as "The Wreck" The surgeon orders the orderly to hold the patient's hand, this may be because the surgeon knows that he is going to die and feels that it would be more humane if he were to die with the comfort of someone being beside him, even if it is a complete stranger. The surgeon uses chloroform to put the patient out, "A sigh as the chloroform drips" The soldier slowly dies. "Bluer and bluer the lips"

The soldier is totally dehumanised by the surgeon, which shows the harsh reality, as the surgeons must have no sentimental attachments, "Orderly, take it out" The orderly prepares for the next patient, they have no idea who it will be or what the case is, but they do know that there are more, lots more, as it is a constant flow through the tent, it is their job to do the most for the patients even with the most rudimentary tools, "Orderly, clean the knife" The other poem by Rudyard Kipling is dedicated to the nurses who died in the South African war.

The poem is called "Dirge of the Dead Sisters". Kipling admired the determined sisters, however he feels pity for them, as many people did not value their work. Surrounding the nurses are the tents, which look like "violet peaks", blending into "into the crystal evening air" suggesting there is no difference between landscape and tents, presenting it as an idyllic

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picture. Kipling describes the laughter of the sisters, as " Noble laughter" " nobility" is often associated with people who have high moral qualities, which the sisters have in common.

The poem is filled with rhetorical questions, these are questions, which are not meant to be answered, and they are used to encourage thought from the reader. Kipling makes the business of the sisters apparent, " Sisters with the dust upon their hair" This " dust" could also be a result of idleness, as dust is often associated with inactivity, however due to Kipling's respect and appreciation for the nurses this may be interpreted as the lack of time they have to groom themselves.

The nurses would have had to endure " blanket hidden bodies... ollowed by the flies" The conditions would have been very poor for the nurses, they would have had very little light to work under and would have probably suffered as badly as the soldiers, all the rations would have gone to the remaining soldiers in the bloody battlefields, so it would be unlikely that the nurses would have not received anything better. Kipling may be suggesting that the nurses might be after the glory of war, like many of the soldiers, "... the faces of the Sisters with the glory in their eyes".

Throughout the poem the " s" of " sisters" is capitalised, this may be to show their importance and respect, which Kipling feels they are so greatly owed. The sisters may be suggested to be Saints, as " All-hallows" is a less common term for All Saints Day, a day where the past Saints must be remembered, " In the open camp all-hallowed" The poet describes the nurses as " Patient,

wise and mirthful... " This poem is a poem of great sympathy and passion; it reflects the physical and mental torture, which the nurses would deal with.

The comparisons between the two poems are that they both are anti-war and consider the consequences of war wither involved directly or in-directly. The poem 'war is presented as a formal poem with regular stanzas with a strong rhythm and rhyme pattern. This has the effect of emphasising the relentless work on injured bodies. In comparison 'Dirge Of The Dead Sisters' looks less formal, the poem is structured in stanzas but with rhyme pattern perhaps reflecting the disturbed lives of the Sisters.

The use of enjambment helps to give the idea of the Sisters carrying on in difficult circumstances. Also much of the poem is written in parenthesis and if looked out without the lines in brackets show that the lines in brackets show the reality of the situation. In this respect both poems show the usually unseen side of war, " the part that is not for show". I think these poems are very similar and show the different roles of men and women thought the same war.