

On the idle hill, the drum and drummer hodge

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War, in any shape or form, affects people in many different ways. Many people choose to express their feelings and experiences of war in poems.

The three poems I have chosen all have different moods, structures and rhythms but their meanings are all the same – war is ruthless terrifying and pointless. The poem ‘ On the Idle Hill’ is by A. E. Housman. Housman wrote the poem in 1896 and he was not writing about any particular war but just the horror of battle in general.

Housman never partook in any war but heard about the terror of it from other people’s experiences. The first stanza portrays a peaceful, happy, warm scene. Words such as ‘ summer’, ‘ sleepy’ and ‘ streams’ emphasise this. However, the ‘ steady drummer’ cuts through this peaceful atmosphere.

It is the sound of the army coming, looking for new recruits to go to war with them. The first stanza seems to be about the drum and how it calls people to war and tears them away from their homes. The line; ‘ Drumming like a noise in dreams. ‘ makes the drum seem like a nightmare, something everyone dreads. In the second stanza, the tone is a lot sadder and darker.

The phrases, ‘ Far and near’ and ‘ low and louder’ are suggesting that war is everywhere, and can be seen in different levels all over the world. Probably one of the most striking and powerful lines in the poem, ‘ Dear to friends and food for powder’ is very shocking and adds a more personal theme to the poem, because the soldiers are now being seen as friends, fathers and real people instead of just toys in war. The ‘ powder’ is gunpowder so the poet is hinting at the fact that the men are just food for the war. The war is made to

sound like a real living thing; this is a good example of personification. The final line of stanza two, ' Soldiers marching, all to die.

' is depressing and it emphasises the pointlessness and horror of war. Stanza three maintains the sad, depressing tone. There is more powerful and graphic imagery such as, ' bleach the bones', which is very sinister and shocking, and, ' of comrades slain'. ' Slain' does not just mean killed, it means murdered and it outlines the brutality of war.

Another graphic phrase is, ' Lovely lads and dead and rotten'. These are contrasting images, and the writer is trying to put the idea across that innocent, good people can be killed in war for no reason. The final line of the stanza, ' None that go return again. ' sums up A. E. Housman's view on war – that it is just something which takes the lives of anyone who fights in it and has no point whatsoever.

The rhyme in ' On the Idle Hill' is ' abab' and it keeps a slow, steady rhythm throughout the poem, giving a sad, melancholy tone to the poem. The form in which the writer has set out the poem, in four stanzas, is effective because each one talks about a different aspect of war. This poem shows A. E.

Housman's hatred of battle and how pointless and ruthless he thinks it is. War has obviously effected him deeply and we can see from his language throughout the poem that he feels very strongly about it. The poem ' The Drum' was written by John Scott, who was a Quaker. The significance of this is that according to Quaker beliefs, he was a pacifist and so was completely against war and violence. His poem concentrates on the famous recruitment drum which called people to war.

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He opens the poem directly by saying, ' I hate that drum's discordant sound,'. We immediately know what Scott's feelings about war are – he hates it. Even the rhythm is drum-like, as seen in the repetition of the word 'round'. This has a hypnotic effect, just like the drum was to know recruits. Scott is bitter about the drum and criticises its ability to hypnotise young men, as seen in the phrase, ' To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields. ' The poet is saying that the drum almost takes advantage of the young men.

The next two lines, ' To sell their liberty for charms Of tawdry lace, and glittering arms. ' are suggesting that was takes your freedom for something material and worthless, the uniform and the weapons. The poet's thoughts here are that was may seem exciting and a chance to be a hero but it is really taking your freedom and life. Scott uses the words ' tawdry', ' charms', and ' glittering' to create an image of honour and glory.

In the following line, Scott makes the word ' Ambition' seem like a person – this is a good example of personification. He is stressing the fact that ' Ambition', or the war officers, only have to give one order to send you to your death. The final line of stanza one, ' To march, and fight, and fall in foreign lands. ' s used by the poet to tell us that in war, you are always marching to die.

Stanza two begins with the same two lines as stanza one, with the hypnotic repetition of the word 'round'. The poet now puts his personal feelings into the poem by saying ' To me it speaks'. He uses powerful imagery, as seen in the words ' ravaged', ' burning' and ' ruined', to create a scene of destruction and death. Also, words such as ' mangled' and ' dying' provoke

horror and terror in the reader's mind. The following line, ' And widow's tears and orphan's moans. ' is depressing and it shows the aftermath of war – the families ruined.

The final two lines, ' And all that Misery's hand bestows, To fill the catalogue of human woes. ' are summing up Scott's view on war, it is terrible, destructive, pointless and terrifying. Again, he uses personification and makes ' Misery' seem like a person. The form in which ' The Drum' is set out is quite effective – the first stanza is about the recruitment of men and the pointlessness of war and the second is about the aftermath and the death.

The rhyming scheme ' abab' is used throughout the poem and it is drum-like in sound, which is very fitting to the subject of the poem. In summary, ' The Drum' shows John Scott's hatred of war. Being a pacifist, he obviously did not fight in any wars but he knew enough about them to know of the destruction and death which came with them. He has written the poem to express his views on war and also to try and dissuade people from going to them.

' Drummer Hodge' was written by Thomas Hardy after he read about a local drummer boy who had been killed at war. He thought how sad it was that a young boy, who didn't know the horror of war, should be buried in an alien landscape so far from home. The boy died in the Boer War (1899-1902), which took place in South Africa. The poem has a very pessimistic, sad tone. The first stanza is about how the young boy is buried.

The phrases ' they throw' and ' uncoffined' suggest to us that no thought was put into his burial and he had no proper funeral. He wasn't even given the luxury of a wooden box, he was just thrown into a hole. Hardy

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emphasises the fact that he is miles away from home with the phrase 'foreign constellations.' The reader feels sorry for the poor boy, buried away from everything familiar to him.