

A commentary on the poem

Literature



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Dinner Party 1940 While narrative in the form of novels, plays, and short stories is able to capture elements of everyday experience in ways unique to its format, perhaps no literary style is more adept at articulation the essence of everyday experience more than the poem. Philip Sherlock is a Caribbean born poet who was knighted by the Queen of England for his intellect and brilliance. His poems span a wide array of concerns, however he has been most recognized for his articulation of regional experience. This essay examines Sherlock's 1986 poem ' Dinner Party 1940' in terms of a number of literary elements.

One of the most overarching concerns is the poem's title. This title gives away that the poem is about the Second World War. A general examination of the narrative and characters demonstrates that the people in the poem are most probably high-class people as they are eating guava jelly, a very special and exotic fruit. Sherlock begins, " Do you mind the news while we eat?" (Sherlock 1) This line refers to the housekeeper asking the guests to switch on the radio. The poem continues, " The well-bred voice from Daventry;" (Sherlock 3) this refers to the voice speaking over the radio. Even though the narrator is talking about an event as horrible as war, the people remain talking and apathetic. Sherlock continues, " Its syllables...not silencing augmenting" (Sherlock 6-7) refers to the pointless chitchat that wont stop and just keeps getting bigger, but it also refers to the war that keeps escalating.

Although the basic narrative premise is established within the opening lines, the continuation of the text establishes the poem's further articulations. One of the most powerful literary techniques Sherlock implements is juxtaposition. Sherlock writes, " Where for five days a storm has raged/ a few
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were killed” (Sherlock 10-11); this line is immediately followed by, “ More mutton Alice” (Sherlock 12). The juxtaposition is complex. While it demonstrates that the patrons are largely apathetic to the news, this apathy could either demonstrate that the news is so monstrous that they must unconsciously ignore; additionally, it could function as a social critique demonstrating that the people are wealthy to the point that the war will not affect them. The poem’s final lines adds further punch to the earlier narrative juxtapositions. Referring ostensibly to cold mutton Sherlock writes, “ And does not seriously incommode/ Like cold lead in the belly” (Sherlock 26-27). The clear figurative implication is that the ‘ cold lead’ is a simile that draws connections to the lead used in bullets and artillery. Ultimately, these final lines seem to indicate that the patrons are attempting to block out the true realities of warfare.

In conclusion, this essay has examined Philip Sherlock’s poem ‘ Dinner Part 1940’. Within this context of investigation the essay has argued that the poem is a consideration of events at a dinner party surrounding World War II. Specifically, the text is concerned with the juxtaposition between dinner conversation and news about the war. Ultimately, through this juxtaposition the poem powerfully and poignantly highlights the difficulty of fully comprehending warfare.