SOUND AND SEMANTIC LEVEL IN “DULCE ET DECORUM EST” AND IN “THE SOLDIER”

DULCE ET DECORUM EST

The poem was written by Wilfred Owen in the 1920. It consists of four stanzas of various lengths and it is based on the poet’s experience of war (there is a first person narrator). In the poem all the atrocity of war comes to life.

The rhyme scheme of the poem is: ABA. The rhythm of stanza one is slow and reflects the sad routine of the horror of war experience. In stanza two the rhythm is faster and it reflects the panic felt by men. Stanza four emphasizes the particular horror of lines 20 and 24.

In *Dulce et Decorum Est* Owen does not spare the reader anything about the terror of the gas attack. The tone of this poem is angry and critical. In the first two lines of the poem the soldiers are described as: “bent double”, “knock kneed”, “coughing” and cursing through “sludge”. These negative words suggest exhaustion.

In the first few lines of the poem the sound of the repetition of the consonant “k” in "sacks," "knock," "coughed" and "cursed" might even sound like the rifle fire, which was the sonic backdrop of the battlefield in World War I.

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

In the second stanza, a cry, "Gas! Gas!" draws the reader into the middle of the action, he feels as if he were at the frontline himself. The reader tries to make sense of language that seems to create a chaotic action. Owen uses contrast to intensify the horror experienced by soldiers. For example, in line 8 he takes the reader off guard: the “gas-shells” drop “softly”, as gentle rain might, and are “behind” rather than in front. These words seem unthreatening. The shock of “Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!” is followed by “an ecstasy of fumbling” (line 9). Owen emphasizes the panic by his use if the word ‘ecstasy’.

The speaker describes a dream where the gas victims are “guttering, choking, drowning”. The listed verbs are associated with a lack of air and death.

The poet also draws the reader’s attention to the most important actions and themes of the poem by the use of repeated short words: “All” (is repeated two times in line 6, to underline that no one escaped); “Gas! GAS!’, draws the reader into the awareness of the terror of the attack and the war; “drowning” (lines 14 and 16), underline the fact that for Owen it is impossible to forget man’s suffering; the repetition of the construction ‘If .. you’ at (lines 17 and 21) highlights Owen’s anger and direct communication to his readers.

Owen’s use of alliteration builds as the pain worsens. In the “wagon” (line 18) Owen exhorts the reader to “watch the white eyes writhing” (line 19).

Last but not least it is important to notice the last line of the poem:”Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”. It is in Latin. Latin is a dead language. It is not spoken. And it I s a bit creepy to end with a language that is itself dead. It might poses a question to the intelligent reader: how does one "speak" a language that's not spoken?

THE SOLDIER

The soldier is a poem written by Rupert Brooke. It belongs to a series of poems called 1914 and it is the finale of the collection.

The first line creates a nostalgic idea, as if the speaking voice were already dead.

The poem deals with a kind of immortality; the speaker comforts the reader and reassures himself of his rewards in heaven. He will get to repeat his happiest experiences again.

To that end, this poem's use of sound emphasizes a kind of "continuation" (returning to England in heaven, after death) by using a lot of alliteration. In lines 2 and 3, there is the alliteration of sound “f”: "foreign field" and "forever." In lines 7 and 8, there is the alliteration of sound “b”: "bodies," "breathing," "by," and "blest by." Line 12 alliteration of the consonant “s”: "sights and sounds," line 13 alliteration of the consonant “l”, "laughter, learnt," and line 14 ends with the repetition of the consonant “h”: "hearts" and "heaven." Alliteration creates the atmosphere of the poem and combined with the repetition of "England" and "English" emphasizes the theme of patriotism in the poem.

The repetition of the sound “f” (lines 2-3) makes a gentle tone; this helps the soldier to reassure his family that his death is not something to be upset about.

The alliteration of consonant “b” at lines 7 and 8: “A body of England's, breathing English air, Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home” combined with the repetition of "England" and "English" emphasizes the theme of patriotism in the poem.

The narrator uses alliteration to communicate the rhythm, that helps the reader to focus not on the image of a soldier that might die but focusing on the way that his death would make a corner that would be "forever England" through his death.

It is interesting to notice that the speaker isn'tdead yet, but the use of sound in the poem seems to suggest the same sorts of repetition he might expects if he goes to heaven.

The Metaphor at line 4: “… in that rich earth, a richer dust concealed…” compares the soldier’s body with a treasure (calling it “rich”); this helps the reader to understand the value of the gift he has given back to his motherland dying.

Through the use of the personification England is compared to a mother (“England… bore… shaped… made aware” (line 5); “England… blest… washed” (line 8)): she gave life to soldier; she educated him etc..

The reader understands that the soldier considers his country like a mother, it did a lot for him. This helps the reader understand why the soldier will sacrifice his life to keep England safe.