

Prompt: "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "Dulce Et Decorum Est" (521) are both war poems, but they have very different kinds of diction. (See text for "Charge of the Light Brigade" in this week's course materials). For this assignment, please write two paragraphs.

Paragraph 1: Using terms like concrete and abstract, specific and general, formal and colloquial, Latinate and Germanic (or Anglo-Saxon) describe the differences in the diction of these two poems. For more on these terms, see in chapter 14 of our text the sections, "DICTION" (529) and "WORD CHOICE AND WORD ORDER" (536-37).

Paragraph 2: Explain how diction in these poems serves to support different purposes. In particular, explain how the diction of these poems suggests different attitudes towards war.

Comparison of War Diction

Comparing the differences in diction in the two war poems "Dulce et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen and "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson shows how word selection augments the mood, feel and delivery of a piece of writing. In the former, Owen uses concrete words to describe the horrors of war, such as "drown", "bitter" and "blood"; and in the latter Tennyson employs more abstract words and terms to paint a picture of unfolding events within a conflict, such as "storm", "jaws of Death", and "mouth of Hell". Both poems use a mixture of Latinate and Germanic words, without one having a noticeably greater presence over the other in either poem. However, it is possible that since Owen's poem was written to be more specific that his piece may contain more words having roots in Anglo-Saxon history, given that these also tend to be more specific. Contrarily, because Tennyson's poem is more general in its presentation, his word selections might be predominantly Latin-based.

Each author's method of diction works to achieve a particular focus for these two poems. In the case of Owen, he is deliberately drawing his reader's attention to the horrors of war through a number of startling yet specific details and scenes. With the lines, "Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light, / As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. / In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning" (444), it is impossible to misunderstand or make a liberal interpretation of his message: war is terrible and without glory. Tennyson's work is much different in that, due to his more general form of diction, a great amount of room is left for the reader to make her own interpretation on war. Glory is very much present, but Tennyson leaves it up to his readers to decide whether it is the good, bad or neutral kind. He does, however, subtly support the negative side of it, with lines such as, "Back from the mouth of Hell, / All that was left of them, / Left of six hundred", in the fifth stanza and, "Not tho' the soldier knew / Some one had blunder'd:", in the second stanza.

Re: War Diction by N. Gordon (by Natalie Gordon)

In "The Charge of the Light Brigade" the purpose is to show how brave the soldiers are, faced with their looming deaths, against all odds, they charge into battle without question and glory is theirs. His diction is written to serve this purpose.

I agree with your observations about both poems, but I would probably say that Tennyson takes a much more neutral perspective with his work than it might initially seem. Words like "glory" and "hero" show up, but the poem emphasizes at the end of the fifth stanza that "They rode back, but not / Not the six hundred". Also, in the second stanza the possibilities of doubt are raised in the charge: "Not tho' the soldier knew / Someone had blunder'd:". It introduces the reality of the situation while also offering implications about the recklessness of the charge: that the soldiers were doing the only thing they could by simply following orders and those orders involved charging directly at a great deal of cannon fire.

It would probably be very considerate of the military to use this poem in a poster to hang in recruitment offices. Those that were smart enough to see both sides might think twice about enlisting while those that don't care much for poetry could end up as cannon fodder.

Re:

Quote

Response