

ON THE USE OF IRONY IN POEMS BY WILFRED OWEN, ROBERT FROST AND WOLE SOYINKA

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APOLOGIA PRO POEMATE MEO BY WILFRED OWEN

There are many images of redemption amidst the hell of war-“Saw God through the mud”, “merry to laugh” “Dropped off fear” “Faces that curse are seraphic” “Perceived much beauty”

Through these images we are falsely led to believe that war is initially redemptive. For instance the poet thinks he experiences divine experiences such as witnessing God through the mud, and the sharing merry companionship and camaraderie with his fellow soldiers, and overcoming fear through the companionship.

Even the faces that curse are seraphic, suggesting that there are angels during wartime and even though the experience is hellish these soldiers are raised to angelic status. Also the poet states there is beauty even amidst the suffering as he perceived much beauty.

However there is a twist- the common end is hell. For allies and enemies the common destination is hell. Heaven is only the destination ‘for a shell’. The poet is condemning war- men are worth your tears- your pity and sympathy. You are not worth their merriment- you do deserve to laugh at their suffering and live off it. The poet hears music during war, and sees illusions of beauty, but argues that all these are illusions as war is a damning experience.

Hence all the fellowships and beauty experienced during war is an illusion because the common destination of all is hell. The friendships that are forged mean nothing because war is an accursed and damning experience in which one’s destination is hell because of the moral wretchedness of the unholy killing that goes on.

The poet is trying to say all the images of redemption in war are an illusion and that there is nothing redemptive, holy or divine about war despite what all political leaders say to the contrary. All the joy and peace experienced during war is an illusion as war is a damning experience in which one is headed not for redemption, but damnation as the common end of those who kill is hell.

Hence the poet condemns war and thinks there is no good end to it. All the images of beauty and fellowship during war and divine justification are mere illusions. War is a damning experience because it is ultimately unholy- killing is a sin, and hence the experience of war is likened to damnation.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN BY ROBERT FROST

The road not taken is about taking the less commonly travelled path and emerging the better for it- choosing the less travelled path- about choices in life and choosing the less well travelled path and emerging a winner. There is an allusion to Frost's choice of being a poet and artist- which has made all the difference because he has left a legacy behind of art and poetry.

The poet uses the metaphor of the road to liken life choices to a journey in the woods. The poet says that the paths looked equivalent except for the fact that one wanted wear and was less well trodden. The poet argues that by choosing this path, it has made all the difference to his life as he has emerged an individual who has had the courage to be different and to stand up for his own beliefs.

I believe that the metaphor of the road as a journey for life paths used is effective. It is true that life resembles a journey and that different choices resemble taking different paths in a road at a juncture. The poet's use of metaphor to suggest that being an individual and choosing the less travelled road is effective because life is a journey, in which you make different choices that lead to different paths. For instance, I could choose to be an engineer, which is what most people do, or a poet like Frost, which is the less profitable but what Frost argues is the more enriching and rewarding experience.

In the poem Frost argues that choosing a different path and daring to be different as well as choosing the more lonely path has proved more rewarding than taking the path that everybody else chooses. It is true that by choosing the less well trodden path, Frost has emerged as an individual and unique and better for the choice he chooses because he has emerged different and unique.

Yet Frost does not highlight the dangers of choosing the road less travelled. While it is true that one emerges an individual and unique, it is also true that there are greater dangers. One could be unique, but not acknowledged for the value of one's difference. So while the metaphor for life as a journey is apt, I feel that he has only outlined the positive rewards of being different without acknowledging the dangers of taking such a route.

EVER READY BANK ACCOUNTS BY WOLE SOYINKA

Ever ready bank accounts are about African poverty. Will God dispense spiritual wealth to Africans even when they are poor on earth? It is also about slavery and exploitation. Will God be just to Africans and balance the injustice done to them on earth in heaven?

The poet describes the ever ready bank accounts as red, highlighting the fact that blacks live in a constant state of poverty. The reference to bread and Jesus dividing the loaves into plenty is a reference to charity and aid given to the Africans and how it can never be enough for the African population- stacked too full of loaves cannot embrace mankind. So while there is aid for the African population, it is not enough as the African continent is too large to feed completely.

The poet highlights the wretchedness of the African situation, where children slay a cockroach for a meal. Children are reduced to eating insects and pests because they cannot find proper food. Their fathers are foragers, referring to the fact that because of their poverty, Africans are reduced to eating trash and rubbish left over by rich people. They eat houseflies and beetles and cockroaches because they are too poor for normal meals.

The poet highlights the inequality of the African situation saying that charity is a one way street. The Africans are at the mercy of richer countries who deign to give them aid, their situation of extreme poverty puts them at a disadvantaged position of being reduced to beggars

and being vulnerable to the mercies and kindnesses of richer countries who acknowledged their plight.

The poet that says that while justice and charity on this earth is a one way street, God's charity and justice is infinite. While charity is calculated on earth and limited, God's charity knows no limits. Everything is calculated and put on a balance sheet in this life and claimed in terms of debt that the African population owes the world, but the poet suggests that God's justice is not earthly justice because God's justice does not calculate.

The poet thus highlights the plight of African poverty and how they are victims of debt placed at the mercy of charity. The poet says that all this charity is calculated in terms of debt on earth, but in heaven, God's justice will exceed this sense of calculation and lack of charity. God's benevolence is far greater than earthly charity.