Lenfers,Dörte

Analysis of literary work

* Poem
* Soldier
* War

Bertold Brecht

**Der Fähnrich**

In jenen Tagen der großen Frühjahrsstürme schrieb er’s

nach Haus:

-Mutter…Mutter, ich halt’s nicht mehr länger aus…-

Schrieb es mit steilen, zittrigen Lettern neben der

flatternden Stallaterne.

Sah, bevor er es schrieb, in das Dunkel, seltsam

geschüttelt, hinaus

Wo ein Gespenst herschattete, grauenhaft, fremd und fern.

Lauschte dem harten

Klirren der Schaufeln, die seine toten Freunde

einscharrten.

Und schrieb es besinnungslos nieder, das „Mutter, ich

halt’s nicht mehr aus

Und drei Tage drauf, als seine Mutter über dem Brief

schon weinte

Riß er hinwegüber Blut und Leiberkrampf

Den zierlichen Degen gezückt, die Kompanie zum

Kampf

Schmal und blaß, doch mit Augen wie Opferflammen.

Stürmte und focht und erschlug, umnebelt von Blut und

Dampf

In trunkenem Rasen- *fünf* Feinde…

Dann brach er im Tod, mit irren, erschrockenen Augen,

aufschreiend zusammen.

Analysis

The poem “Der Fähnrich“is written by Bertold Brecht and is published 1915. This poem is about a young soldier who writes a letter home.

In this poem many adjectives are used so the situation and emotions are clearly described. The layout is also special because it is not strictly written in lines. Most of the sentences are written in two lines so that the reader notices the importance of the last words. In this poem Bertold Brecht used the simile “Augen wie Opferflammen” (l.18) (engl: eyes like sacrificial flames). With this simile the author underlines the emotions which are described. Bertold Brecht also uses a lot of emotive adjectives in his poem.

Another stylistic device to make the reader notice the soldier’s pain is word transformation (adjective into adverb: “herschattete” (l.8)). Further on, the reader understands how the soldier really thinks and that the lyrical persona is feeling miserable in the situation.

Besides the lyrical persona evokes the outer circumstances with phrases like “Frühjahrsstürme” (l.1) (engl.: Spring storms),”flatternden Stalllaterne” (l.5) (engl.: fluttering stable lantern) and “Dunkel” (l.6)(engl.: Darkly). All of these phrases underline the feelings evoked throughout this poem. It is equally important that the reader has to think about the situation the soldiers and of course their families were suffering.

The metaphor “Klirren der Schaufeln” (l.10) (eng.: Clink of the shovels) stands for the digging of the graves for the soldiers who are killed. It is at that place in the poem because the lyrical persona understands now that also his comrades are killed and that this could happen to him as well. Similarly, this metaphor also stands for death.

So the fact that the author mentions a “Gespenst” (l.8) (“ghost) shows that the soldier is afraid and does not feel comfortable in the situation he is in. In line 17 it is also clear that the soldier does not really fit into the war because the sword is described as dainty and this is paradox because a sword could kill a person. But the line “In trunkenem Rasen” (l.22) shows that the lyrical persona is not thinking about the things it does and the consequences.

The poem may reflect the changing attitude towards the war in Germany with people realising how soldiers were suffering. This is shown with the title “Der Fähnrich” because only the men who where already in the army before the war started, are qualified enough to be a “Fähnrich”. In this poem the young soldier writes a letter home and his mother cries when she reads this letter because she must have known that she is about to lose her son. Later on, the lyrical persona is successful at first, because he kills five enemies - but is killed along with them in the confrontation.

Another thing that is not described is the situation in Germany or in other parts of the world.

In this poem there is nothing described like place the soldier is at, other persons or the situation so the author concentrates on the feelings of the young person who is dead in the end. That causes that the reader’s attention is only at the emotions of the killed person, the outer circumstances and the situation this person is in.

There is only one sentence the reader knows from the letter to the mother and this sentence is very emotional. Especially for a mother it is hard to get a letter like this so the author may wrote this sentence in this poem because he wanted to show that the war is not only hard for all the soldiers. Families are at home and do not know what is happening to their sons, brothers and husbands.

All in all you can say that this poem concentrates on the person who writes the letter and dies at the end. There is nothing described like the situation in the Germany or the picture that the Germans had of their opponents. The author uses a lot of stylistic devices and adjectives to transport the feelings and emotions.

Source: Lyrik des Expressionismus (Philipp Reclam jun.;Stuttgart ; Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann with Sonja Hermann)

Tasks

1. With the help of a German teacher, translate the essential content oft he poem into English. (Read and infer)

2. Discuss the role of the lyrical persona and his experience. (Analyse and interpret)

3. Make a sketch illustrating the situation. (Synthesize)

4. Identify recurrent symbols used in the poem and their meaning. (Deduct, decode)

5. Find a similar poem in your native language and try a comparison. (Recover, find)