

War is Kind – Stephen Crane

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind. 5

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,
Little souls who thirst for fight,
These men were born to drill and die.
The unexplained glory flies above them,
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom— 10
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,
Do not weep. 15
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
Eagle with crest of red and gold,
These men were born to drill and die.
Point for them the virtue of slaughter, 20
Make plain to them the excellence of killing
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep. 25
War is kind.

Style Analysis of Poetry

“War is Kind” - Stephen Crane

Style Analysis is another way of saying that you are going to read a poem very closely and examine the elements of the poem that are important as well as the way the poet uses rhetorical devices in the poem. The following questions will help you to focus on some of the important elements of the poem. Detailed explanations of the terms used in Style Analysis can be found in the “Style/Rhetorical Analysis” handout.

The following are key elements of style analysis or a close reading of a poem:

1. Tone or Attitude
2. Diction or Language (figurative language or figures of speech)
3. Detail or Imagery
4. Point of View or Speaker
5. Organization
6. Syntax or Sentence Structure

“War is Kind”

1. There are five stanzas in the poem. What do stanzas 1, 3, and 5 have in common? What phrases are repeated? Are there any images that are similar in these three stanzas?
2. What do stanzas 2 and 4 have in common? How do stanzas 2 and 4 differ from stanzas 1, 3 and 5? Be as specific as possible.
3. Who is the speaker or speakers in the poem? To whom is the speaker speaking (in other words who is the audience?). Is the audience the same in each stanza?
4. In stanzas 2 and 4, what imagery is present (imagery appeals to any of the five senses: smell, sight, sound, taste, touch)? What color imagery is present? What is the significance of these colors? Are they appropriate to war?
5. Describe the death of the soldier in chronological order (i.e. where is he when he is shot, how does he react, where does he fall?). Be as detailed as possible.
6. What is the tone of the poem? In other words, what is the attitude of the speaker towards war? (refer to the list of tone words on the Style Analysis handout)
7. In stanza 2, who are “little souls who thirst for fight”? Why are they called “little” souls? What is Crane saying about the participants of war?
8. Also in stanza 2, what is your interpretation of the phrase “These men were born to drill and die”? What might this phrase suggest about the value of human life in warfare?
9. What do you make of the sentence structure of the sentence: “These men were born to drill and die”? (note the number of syllables – does the staccato rhythm remind you of any sound soldiers may make?)
10. In stanza 2, what is the “unexplained glory” that flies about them? Who are “them” and why is the glory “unexplained”?
11. In stanza 2, what is the significance of the dash after the word “kingdom”? What function does the dash in the sentence serve?
12. In stanza 4, what is the tone of the 4th and 5th lines of the stanza? How would you characterize the phrases “virtue of slaughter” and “excellence of killing”?
13. In a complete sentence, state what you think the THEME of this poem is. What insight or truth is Crane attempting to communicate to his reader?
14. What is the significance of the title of the poem? What do you think Crane is saying about war with this title? Explain how the title of the poem is ironic. Is the title an oxymoron?