

Comparison of Two Pre Twentieth Century Poems: Four Years and Funeral Blues

I shall be looking at the poems Four Years, written by Pamela Gillilan, and Funeral Blues, written by W. H. Auden, and comparing how alike they are. They are both poems about death and the loss of a loved one, and I shall look at even though their subject is the same, how alike have the poets written them.

The characters in the two poems are at different stages of mourning and so their emotions are different. As the person in Funeral Blues had just died, the character was angered and upset, whereas the person in Four Years had died four years ago and so the character is very calm. The woman created by Pamela Gillilan is very sad and slow at responding as if she's very weak. This is different to the character in W. H. Auden's poem, as they are very sharp and wants action taken. Auden gets across this sharp anger with action words such as "stop", "cut off", "prevent" and "silence". These are all very strong verbs and are very different to the calming feel that Gillilan brings out in her poem. She creates this calm atmosphere by making the importance of little things to this woman huge. You can see how small things matter a lot to this woman such as "an eyelash" or "a hard crescent cut from a fingernail". All these objects are things that she wants to cling on to. In Auden's poem, the character is ready to "dispose" of the partner, and wants it confirmed to the world that it is over:

"Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead".

This finality makes the poem seem somewhat bitter, and is different to the character in Four Years. Here, the character does not want to dispose of anything, or for it to be confirmed that the man is dead, and instead clings on to anything possibly left of him.

The poems are similar as the characters in both poems feel as if they cannot go on without the person they have lost. In Funeral Blues, the character is trying to make the world stop and see that life cannot be the same without his loved one. Auden shows

how the lost man was the entirety of his partner's life. This is shown particularly in the third verse:

"He was my North, my South, my East and West. My working week and my Sunday rest."

This sense of loss is also experienced in Four Years, but in the poems the characters handle it differently. Although they both obviously have suffered great bereavement, they deal with it in different ways. In Four Years, instead of mourning and giving up like the character in Funeral Blues, the character clings to the hope that there is still a possible presence of the lost one left: "But I want to believe that in the shifting house dust minute presences still drift".

The title, "Four Years", suggests that it has been four years since the death of the man, and so the fact that the character is still clinging on shows how important the partner's life was to the narrator.

In both poems the authors end with the characters as feeble and both seem in some ways quite pathetic. In Four Years, the character is in a state of desperation, looking for something and as meaningless to anyone else as "a flake of skin", while in Funeral Blues the character is just hopeless:

"Nothing now can ever come to any good."

Ending the poems in this way leaves you feeling empty, and as if the end of the poem is just like the end for their worlds. When reading the poem you get to experience the character's emptiness and ending it in a sad mood leaves you too feeling lost in the busy world like them.

Funeral Blues rhymes and is sharp, and he feels like giving up and disgusted with the world carrying on their normal lives. Four Years is more flowing and doesn't rhyme as the character is so upset and comes across as weak. This flowing un-rhyming poem may have been used to bring out the calmness as if this is something they have been doing for a very long time and is normality. However the free verse also brings out the hard-hitting depression in the poem. The rhyme in Funeral Blues is important as it makes each line stand out and connects every pair of lines. The rhythm of the poem is also very important as it allows the reader to continuously pause, and the silence amounts to the melancholy mood of the poem.

The structure of the poems organise the theme of each paragraph. Funeral Blues is broken up into four different paragraphs, the first one which is gaining silence from everyone, and letting all time stop: "stop all the clocks" as he does not understand how the world can carrying on. Despite this disaster, he then wants everyone to be aware what has happened as he feels everyone should care. Then he wants to get across how close they were, and think to himself about how important he was in his life, and then finally he wants to pack up everything. Pack up everything in the world as if it is not worth being there without his friend. Four Years is in just two paragraphs as it does not go over many different thoughts, but just shows how clingy this woman is to her husband. The emotions throughout Four Years generally remain the same, and as it isn't as long as Funeral Blues, it does not have to be broken up so much.

The two poems, Four Years and Funeral Blues, both successfully leave a moving impression with the reader. I think Funeral Blues makes it easier to empathize with the character, as it is more descriptive; however Four Years still leaves the reader with great sympathy. Although they are both good poems, I feel that Funeral Blues has left a longer lasting impression with me as each individual line struck out due to the rhythm and rhyme.