

Reading response to poem

Literature



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Running head: Reading response to poem: " Not Waving but Drowning" by Stevie Smith In the literary world, authenticity of poetry inheres in its dense meaning. In most cases, the meaning of a poem depends on its use of literary elements. These literary elements attract different interpretations from different readers. This paper analyzes the elements of analogy, language tone, and imagery in Stevie Smith's poem Not Waving but Drowning, and shows how these elements affect the response to the entire poem.

The poet used the analogy of a swimmer right from its title, Not Waving but Drowning, (Smith, 1972). In this title, the reader is given a picture of a swimmer who is drowning, requiring help from the onlookers, but he is not waving nor soliciting to be rescued. When we read the first two lines, a sense of despair and distress is rife. The supposedly complacent drowning swimmer, in the poem's title is dead. This seems to be a death he was too willing to meet because he never waved for help (Thaddeus, 1978). The analogy is the drowning swimmer captures our attention through out the poem as we try to understand his unrelenting love for death, but we understand that he had been calling for help until he plunged into desperation, panic and melancholia (Gillian, 1996). This is seen when the speaker seems to celebrate the death of the man in lines, 3, 5 and 6. This analogy leads the reader to a conclusion that the dead man deserved his death because he never waved for help. This way the reader can dig deep for the cause of his hopelessness, despair and self neglect.

The language tone of the poems is humorous, but it is recounting a serious episode of death and distress. While the speaker mourns, in the first line, he persuades the reader to discount the distress by stating that dead man "...

always loved larking” (line, 5). He even takes the matter more lightly by immediately noting, “ And now hes dead” (line, 6). The speaker laughs off the dead man when he says, “ It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way” (lines, 7), but immediately exonerates himself by insinuating that, “ They said” (lines, 8). In the last paragraph, the speaker tries to correct what he had said before, and there is a shift of tone. The despair and the distress of the dead man are compounded when the speaker concluded in lines 9 and 11 that, “...it was too cold always/ I was much too far out all my life” (Smith, 1972, p. 1). By this unstable tone, the reader concludes that the entire poem is not what it says superficially but what its metaphors would mean to different readers.

The poem uses the image of death and coldness to show the distress and desperation bedeviling the man. The reader gets to realize that this is not death per se but death of his emotions, intellect and spirit (Gillian, 1996). The fact that no one cares to hear his pleas for help, pain grief, hurt, and misery determine the response of the reader.

In conclusion, the elements of analogy, language tone, and imagery make the reader of the poem focus on a single aspect of the poem. They, therefore, determine the response and the perspective a reader is going to give the poem when interpreting it.

Reference list

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