

Tam o`shanter essay



Robert Burns creates a joyous mood in his poem "Tam O`Shanter". The poem deals with a drunken man's journey to a church, where he finds a dance of witches and warlocks, his emotional involvement with one of the witches and his escape from them. Although the moral of the story deals with the serious effects of alcohol, Burns treats the topic humorously and so creates a joyful mood. The poem is split into five sections. We first hear about Tam's wife's prophecy, "O Tam, had'st but been sae wise, As taen thy wife Kate's advice!" We are then told about his journey through various places associated with evil, in the foulest weather. This sets the scene for us, "Loud, deep, and lang the thunder bellow'd: That night, a child must understand, The Deil had business on his hand."

"We then reach the church where Tam sees the witches and warlocks in a dance," "Nae cotillion, brent new frae France, But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels, Put life and mettle in their heels." Then the chase takes place, where the witches and warlocks run after Tam and his horse, "So Maggie runs, the witches follow, Wi` mony an eldritch screech and hollow." Finally, Burns finishes with the moral of the story, where he warns farmers, not to drink, stay out too late or look at girls with short skirts. The reason why this poem is light hearted is because of Burns' humour throughout. One way he achieved this humour was by using an anti-climax when Tam reaches the church.

Burns builds up the tension by listing sinister places, by using a speedy rhyme scheme, a fast metre, alliteration and onomatopoeia when describing Tam's journey towards the church. When all these features are put together speed and tension is created. Whenever Tam reaches the church, this

tension is deflated as we expect something really frightening and evil to be inside, but instead there is a party where strange creatures are dancing. This party in itself gives a very happy atmosphere and therefore relates back to the joyous mood that Burns has created.

The devil, in the poem, is portrayed differently than the stereotypical character we would expect; he is a large Scots Terrier. This is amusing, as we have to imagine this Terrier playing the bagpipes. Tam, under the influence of alcohol, also becomes besotted by, "ae winsome wench and walie." We then come to realise that this girl is not beautiful, but instead she is old and unsightly.

The fact that she is wearing a short skirt should be revolting to Tam, but instead Tam jumps in excitement and shouts out, "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" Burns also lists bizarre material, which could never have been found in Scotland of the day. "Five tomahawks wi' bluid red-rusted Five scimitars wi' murder crusted." Examples like this show that Burns did not mean this evil scene to be taken seriously. The atmosphere created in the poem is fun, entertaining and exciting, rather than sombre and that's what gives the poem its cheery, comical, joyful mood. Yet another technique used when bringing humour into the poem was when Burns used a mock-moralising tone.

"But pleasures are like poppies spread: You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;...amid the storm." At this point, Burns uses standard English as opposed to Scots as he is pretending to be serious. The English is so

pompous compared to the Scots that we can't take it seriously, and therefore the humour of the whole poem is emphasised.

Even the moral at the end is a joke. Although the topics and themes of Tam O'Shanter are very grave, it is hard not to read this poem and see the funny side. Burns` clever techniques emphasize this and rather than creating a depressing mood, a joyful, happy mood is formed.