

# Poem commentary "before summer rain"

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Poem Commentary: Before Summer Rain A storm can provoke many emotions in a person. Rainer Maria Rilke in his poetry cleverly insinuates themes of nature, religion, and childhood, from a personal aspect to a collective one. The poem, Before Summer Rain, describes the narrator's experience of the encroaching storm, as he/she stares out of a window. Rilke, in his poem, Before Summer Rain, evokes emotions associated with witnessing a storm and how these feelings compel him to recollect his childhood. The structure of the poem is intuitively assembled to follow a mood of anticipation and then to a feeling of nostalgia. At the beginning of the poem, the reader is presented with the title, " Before Summer Rain"; this phrase has a positive connotation to it, implying a sunny summer's day with a soft rain shower. However, as one reads the first line of the poem there is an immediate juxtaposition, " suddenly, from all the green around you". Just from the title to the first line there is a shift in tempo, the pleasant title opposed to the fast first line, not only surprises the reader, but immediately grasps their attention. The poem is four stanzas long, with four verses in the first two stanzas and then only three verses in the third and fourth stanzas. The one less verse in the third and fourth stanzas provides further meaning to the theme. For instance in the first and second stanza the reader is forced into the poem with a fast tempo, " feel it creeping closer", showing the anxiety building up and up while the storm encroaches. However, in the third stanza there is a shift in tempo, due to the start of the rain. Once the storm starts at the end of stanza two, " requests the downpour", the narrator talks about the past, " ancient portraits". The poem does not feel quite as immediate and fast as it did in the first two stanzas, it slows down, and the

reader can almost sense this fading recollection of the past, and because of this, the last two stanzas have one less verse, showing this washed out memory. The punctuation of the poem reinforces the worry and anxiety the narrator shows. In the first two stanzas there is very little comma usage to exhibit the swiftness of the storm and the worrying behaviour of the narrator, " Something-you don't know what-has disappeared". However as one reaches the last two stanzas the comma usage becomes much more evident, and aids in slowing the pace of the poem, " glide away from us, cautiously, as though". The use of no commas in the first stanza rushes the reader's pace, and it grows and grows until you reach this crescendo and then the usage of commas implies a relieved tone in the narrator. Describing the coming rain, Rilke builds anticipation in the reader through the use of diction. The speed of the poem in the first two stanzas has a very swift speed, " suddenly, from all the green", the use of the word " suddenly" suggests everything is happening quickly and instantly there is little time to think both for the reader and narrator. The rushing tempo continues into the second stanza, " urgent whistling of a plover". The word " urgent" strengthens the hurried tone of the poem, and by alluding to the bird " plover"; it resembles this last cry before the storm, warning everybody and everything. Throughout the poem, there is a general subject of loneliness, " in total silence", the author's use of " total silence" hints, the narrator is alone, and the mood is dreary. In the second stanza Rilke puts dissimilar words together, " so much solitude and passion". The word " solitude" again follows the idea of being alone, but then there is so much activity and movement going on around the narrator, it feels like there is this " passion"

or eagerness surrounding the narrator. The sense of hearing occurs in the second stanza as well, and the words help this theme. Through the use of "passion" the double "s" letters, sound like a rustling, and during a storm you often hear the leaves in nearby trees, and the raindrops often make similar noises upon impact with nature. Again the sense of hearing is referred to in the next verse, "whose fierce request", the author's use of "fierce" again shows this "s" sound occurring, the "s" has a harsh tone to it implying the storm is loud, and aggressive. In the poem there is a shift in mood, from the first two stanzas to the last two. The feeling of something "suddenly" being taken away from us characterizes one of those unique moments during one's day in which a person's emotional state shifts very rapidly, almost instantaneously, but in a subtle enough way to where no words can properly describe the transformation. Rilke shows the narrator's growing worry in the first stanzas, "Something-you don't know what", in the first stanza there is an eeriness that the author describes making an uncomfortable feeling in the reader. Again this eerie tone continues in the second stanza, "you hear the urgent whistling", the author's use of "hear" shows this strange feeling arising because the narrator only "hears" what is coming but cannot see. As you reach the third stanza, there is a change in mood. Once the rain has begun, there is a loud noise in the house, "they weren't suppose to hear what we are saying", the reader can imagine the loud rain rattling the roof, while this narrator feels alone and no one can "hear" each other. Although there is a loud noise, the narrator is transported almost in to a daydream, remembering the past, "reflected on the faded tapestries", this memory is coming back to the narrator, as he/she sees and hears the rain. Although the

narrator can still see what is happening around him/her, " the chill" shows the physical touch of the cold weather and the " uncertain sunlight" could be a reference to lightning. The narrator is perhaps in a flashback of " those long childhood hours when you were so afraid". The last line evokes emotion in the reader and suggests that it is a childhood memory similar to everyone, and yet tells the poet's sorrowful memories. The poem reads as a powerful expression of a common experience to many people, which fully succeeds in having the reader recall those tender childhood moments of fear, uncertainty, and recollection that accompany the arrival of a summer storm.