

"winter syntax" commentary



The title of this poem tells that the story happens in winter when it is cold and desolate. Through the setting, the structure and the use of imagery, the poet suggests that writing is similar to travelling, after struggling, as if the traveler smiles at the end of the journey, the writer also complete the idea. In the poem Winter Syntax, by Billy Collins, the structure is organized into six stanzas. Each of them has a different view but sequentially describes the journey of a traveler which represents through the similar tough journey, how the writer completes the idea. " A sentence starts out like a lone traveler, heading into a blizzard at midnight."(Line 1-2) The writer uses " lone traveler" as himself, and when he starts the writing, he is like that traveler going into the blizzard; he had a hard time. Even he already started the sentence yet he does not sure where to go, because he cannot see clearly the direction that he is heading to. Next two sentences are details about how " frozen" the writer is when he is in the " blizzard". The next three stanzas describe several different views along the traveler's journey, but also could be seen as the writer's struggles. " There are easier ways of making senses..." (Line 5) It shows that the writer has many methods to start writing more easily, such as talk about " a gesture". There are gestures like " hold a girl's face like a vase" and " lift a gun from glove compartment and toss it out the window". They are both movements can be done by hands, but have very different strengths and emotions. It is obviously that the writer does not go to that way immediately, because " these cool moments are blazing with silence" (Line 10). " Blaze" is a potent verb here, because it can show the brightly burning or rapidly moves. It depicts intensely that there are something flashed in the writer's mind, but maybe it is too quick to catch, so that he still keeps silence. As it's described, this shows that the writer takes

a step forward to its end rather than walking along in the blizzard. Then after this stanza, the writer comes up with more examples and ideas, like " the full moon". " The full moon" always represents a sense of completion and perfecting, but when " a cloud crosses it", the round is broken and it becomes meaningless when the moon is under the cloud. So that the writer is being sarcastic when the author pictures it " as eloquent as a bicycle leaning outside a drug store" and " a dog who sleeps all afternoon in a corner of the couch". Both of these images do not have a special significance when it can happen at anytime anywhere, and the author is being sarcastic because he uses the word " eloquent". Eloquence should be powerful and touching, but both of the two images are ordinary. As the author starts next stanza, he eventually gets on the right track. " Unclothed body" refers to the " bare branches in winter". It is a form of writing, like autobiography. The end of this poem is also the end of the journey, while there is deeper and deeper snow falling; the traveler struggles but finally finish the journey. The second last stanza represents the darkest midnight before the dawn when the traveler struggles in the snow the whole night but still takes the journey. The words " white" and " snow" are used three times in this stanza. Snows are like papers, they characterize that the writer is persistent even though there are " snow" falling around him; he is still working hard on his " journey". Eventually in the last stanza, the traveler finishes his journey as the writer completes his thought. " Shivering", " sparkling frost" and " icicles" all show that the traveler is frozen by the snow and coldness. It is like a man who just comes from the North Pole, there are ice fragments on his coat and he is shaking. But a " smile will appear... and the man will express a complete thought." When one can go through a tough journey like this, one will have

the feeling of joy and satisfy. Overall the happy ending completes the thought and finishes the journey. To conclude, the poem suggests that after hard working, there will be a wonderful result as the traveler has a hard time staying in the snow and the writer blanks on the writing but they still achieve the goal.