

The narrator, nature, and discord: how poetic technique shapes meaning in "the st...

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



In 'The Storm', Mansfield suggests that the bonds between humanity and nature have the potential to be both destructive and unifying. The adjective 'breathless' and past participle 'half sobbing' when paired on the second line dramatise the narrator's loss of human physicality, and the latter action 'I put my arms round a tree' might be read as an appeal to nature to fulfil her incomplete identity, with the encasement of the phrase with pronoun 'I' and noun 'tree' reinforcing the interconnection between the individual and the natural world.

The poet's constant fluctuation between description of humanity and the environment further depicts the identity of the speaker as inseparable from her surroundings, and the increasing personification of the weather ('sprang', 'lashed', 'pulled') draws attention to nature's adoption of human traits, which is advanced through the closing description of trees that 'swung' and 'laughed'- verbs which pinpoint a departure from the human control evident in the opening active voice 'I ran'. Indeed, Mansfield's decision to open with the personal pronoun 'I' yet close through natural imagery further amplifies the link between the poet and her respective surroundings, and whilst the repetition of the personal pronoun 'I' throughout the stanza might suggest human triumph over natural disaster, the amount of imagery surrounding the storm hugely outweighs that concerning the speaker, which warns of the futility of human will against immense natural force. Even the sensory experiences of the speaker are regulated by the storm: 'I felt that the earth was drowning' comments the poet, implying a direct correlation between her physical state and that of the outside world, as is the case in the phrase 'I was blushing' in which the

poet's altered description from natural destruction to a recovered landscape mirrors the speaker's physical rejuvenation, suggesting that the narrator's 'prayer' for physical protection has ultimately been answered.

Ultimate focus is placed on the narrator's state of isolation through monologue form. The narrator's feelings of emptiness are doubly emphasised through the estrangement of personal pronoun 'I' at the end of a line, then subsequent isolation of the adjective 'alone—' as a singular line—the colon further reinforcing the speaker's distance from civilisation, working to establish a sense of alienation reinforced through the pronoun 'together' used to depict even 'trees' as less lonely than she. The slant rhyme between words 'I', 'fly', 'alive', and 'terrified' creates the impression of a speaker trapped in a state of nihilism, with the increasing syllables of each word emphasising the increasing alarm felt by reader and speaker alike. Indeed, the insect simile likens the poet to a 'fly', thus underlines the insignificance of her narrator against 'huge' natural force, an adjective which juxtaposes characterisation of the speaker as 'smaller' then superlative 'smallest', warning of correlation between nature's increasing vigour and the narrator's increasing loss of identity, which is made particularly harrowing through past tense, which further isolates the narrator in past memories of trauma: the shift into present tense through direct speech, 'I am a lost child', summarises the speaker's feelings of isolation and inability of escaping them, and the rich sensory imagery surrounding 'the storm' ('swamped', 'bubbling cavern', 'showered') positions the readers' sympathises with the

character through suggesting that memories of her trauma are clear and distinct.

Through the structure of the poem, Mansfield portrays nature as a self-ruinous force. The enjambment 'rivers tore up the ground/ and swamped the bushes' portrays nature as a self-corrupting force whilst furthers a sense of ongoing devastation, again reflected in the speaker's assertion that 'a frenzy possessed the earth:'. The lexical choice 'frenzy' suggests an dominating force separate from the world, and the ending colon classifies any future crisis as a direct result of this 'possession'. The noun 'earth' is repeated throughout the poem to suggest a universe under control of higher power, one particularly interesting example being the assertion that 'a wind sprang up from the ends of the/ earth'- the linear segregation of the noun 'earth' privileging the idea that even the universe itself is subject to nature's antagonism.

Whilst the uneven lineation of the poem promotes a sense of uncontrollable chaos, the use of a singular stanza implies that the 'frenzy' is somewhat controlled, suggesting the ultimate authority of natural force over the universe, and yet through the pronoun in the phrase 'it lashed the forest together', nature's brute control is portrayed as an intensely unifying force, reflected in the phrase: 'the storm ceased: the sun spread his wings.' Here, the personification of the sun as a symbol of freedom implies a liberation from previous destruction, whilst the assonance connecting antagonistic 'storm' and 'sun' suggests a successful restoration of natural harmony.