

# Commentary: moon tiger, 1987, by penelope lively

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Commentary: Moon Tiger, 1987, by Penelope Lively This monologue depicts the thoughts of an elderly woman who is dying in a hospital. She gives us a her views and description of language which shows us the importance it holds in her life. She talks about the history of language saying ' we open our mouths and out flow words whose ancestries we do not even know. ' This shows that she cares greatly about words and their origin and it is important to her that more people care about it as well.

The rhyming of ' flow' and ' know', may also have a humorous effect as it suggests that she is playing with the words. She also uses imagery to describe what words are like saying they ' blow with the wind, hibernate, reawaken, shelter parasitic on the most unlikely hosts, survive and survive and survive'. She personifies language, comparing it to an animal or a plant that does not die but rejuvenates. This indicates how strongly she feels about language. She describes it as being immortal as it will never end. This might give an insight as to how she may feel about dying.

She may want to survive her illness, hence the repetition of ' survive'. The repetition of this word draws emphasis to it. She may hope to live on through her words. She continues to compare language, using metaphors, to other aspects of nature such as when she says ' it was like grains of sand on the shore, the leaves on the great ash outside my bedroom window, immeasurable and unconquerable'. The use of the similies gives us an image of how vast and large language is as the decription depicts how timeless and endless words are.

She also makes use of the strong adjectives, 'immeasurable' and 'unconquerable' and how much power language holds to her and maybe how she feels when she uses it. She depicts people as 'walking lexicons', objectifying them. This may indicate that she cares more about language than people and suggests that she believes that words have a significant effect on people's lives and shows the importance of it to her. Through this we get a good sense of her character. We see that she is quite a proud person. We get flashbacks of her life as a child when she is 'gloating over Gordon who could not spell ANTIDISESTABLISHMENTARIANISM, the longest word in the dictionary'. This shows how proud she is of her knowledge of language as she holds it over others. She also puts emphasis on the word which tells us more about how confident she is on the subject. She collected names of stars and plants such as 'Arcturus', 'Betelgeuse' and 'toadflax'. These words are not very common to come across and may also suggest how smug she is about how much she knows on language. Similarly, it may show how superior she feels knowing this information. It is her hobby to collect words which shows the importance of it in her life.

Another flashback we get of her is when she is taking care of her daughter as a child. These flashbacks give us a sense of her backstory and her character. She admits to herself that she is not a good mother and uses the word 'repellent' to describe her feelings towards children. This is quite a strong negative word to use towards children as most people love children and wouldn't describe them this way. It is also a great contrast to the way she talks about words and language. She talks about 'the excitement of language' and how it is 'immeasurable' and 'inconquerable'.

She clearly doesn't feel the same way about children as she describes them as 'boring' and 'distracting'. She gets impatient with her young daughter, correcting 'the inanities', who is barely able to pronounce words correctly. She uses plosives, saying, 'There are no such things as bow-wows and gee-gees'. This shows that she is getting irked by a minor problem with language and shows her intolerance. It also shows that she is a stern person. We are made to feel sympathetic for her at the beginning of the extract as she says, 'Today language abandoned me'.

This shows how stranded she feels without being able to recall as much about language as she used to. She refers to it how she would refer to a friend that had left her. She continues on 'staring into a void', which emphasises how empty and lonely she feels without it. She starts to list words, 'vase, cupboard, window, curtain', which also highlights the panic she feels when she is not able to remember simple words. Language has been her strong suit through life, her hobby and her friend and now it has 'abandoned' her, she feels helpless.