

If i should learn, in some quite casual way response paper

Literature



“ If I should learn, in some quite casual way Response Journal. I confess that Edna St. Vincent Millay’s poem, “ If I should learn, in some quite casual way,” brought tears to my eyes at the very first reading. It is a sad love sonnet which will remain one of my favorite pieces of verse and will definitely be re-read many times over the years.

The poem is a great example of restrained language which has power. Millay deliberately uses restrained language which is more suitable to the reporting of an every-day happening than to the destructive event it describes: the news of the death of her lover. This casual language has the effect of highlighting the horror of the situation. I cannot but think that this was Millay’s purpose all along. Her cold language only pulls the reader more deeply into the tragedy it so unsentimentally describes.

The traditional rhyming pattern of the sonnet is particularly attractive to me: it somehow conveys to my mind the rhythmical motion of a train and I am carried along by the rhythm from the beginning to the end.

Millay’s poem vividly evokes the image of a crowded suburban train in which she is travelling. It is such a commonplace scene: in fact the poet is so bored that, for want of anything better to do, she glances at the newspaper which her neighboring commuter is reading. At first, this extremely ordinary setting makes me think that the words, “ you were gone, not to return again,” (Millay, 2) only refers to a parting of ways in the lives of two lovers. The fact that Millay is speaking of the finality of death only strikes me in the eighth line: the effect is all the more horrible because it is least expected. The absence of drama makes her unspoken grief stand out in clear contrast.

Although Millay reports her loss in a matter-of-fact tone that appears to be

indifference, she somehow achieves the effect of exposing her feelings in raw detail. She does not declare that she will not shed tears for her lover: she only intends to postpone her tears for now –

“ I should not cry aloud – could not cry/ Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place” (Millay, 9/10). She will not show her sorrow in a public place. This makes me feel that her love is too precious and intimate to be exposed to public view. She is only waiting to give expression to her grief in solitary privacy. This makes her grief more terrible in my view.

To my mind, Millay wishes to convey to the reader the essential loneliness of the individual. Even in a sea of humanity, such as the crowded subway, the poet is alone. The world goes about its daily routine and the inhabitants are busy with the ups and downs of their own lives. In the final analysis, every individual has to face the difficulties of life in her own way. It is right that the poet chooses to hide her grief from the world. If she exposes her sorrow it will be meaningless to her fellow commuters who do not share her world. Such a public exposure would only cause disrespect to her grief.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's refusal to indulge in self-pity only makes “ If I should learn, in some quite casual way,” a statement of great dignity. It increases my admiration for the poet. Her failure to describe her expression of grief serves to highlight the depth of her sorrow in the reader's imagination. The sonnet stands as proof that Millay's reputation as a ‘ love poet’ is definitely well-deserved.

Works Cited.

Millay, Edna St. Vincent. “ If I should learn, in some quite casual way.” Title

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