

Storm on the island essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The extract I have in front of me is a poem by Seamus Heaney. Heaney is an Irish poet who grew up in rural Ireland. His poems often deal with childhood, farm life, politics and traditional culture in Northern Ireland. The poem I have is called Storm on the Island. Heaney's poem explores the power of nature and the effect it has on people's lives. This is conveyed through Heaney's use of vivid imagery, personification, caesura and enjambment. The poem is structured in nineteen lines and one stanza in blank verse, this gives the effect of the size of the storm.

In using one stanza the reader understands the nature of the storm as it is represented by the one stanza. Through the use of blank verse/iambic pentameter, Heaney gives the poem a conversational tone. Heaney uses second person present tense to include the reader, " we" as well as addressing the reader directly, " as you can see" and " you know what I mean". The use of inclusive pronouns make the poem more personal and the reader can relate to the Islanders. The poem begins with an affirmation " we are prepared", followed by a colon which emphasizes the islander's readiness for the inevitable.

They build their houses ' squat'. ' Squat' implies to cower or crouch, and therefore assumes a protective posture. The house is designed to function this way. The walls are set with solid rock, the house is roofed in ' slate' and the stage is set for the ideal life. The sibilance reinforces the way the houses are built to withstand the storm. There is personification of the earth on line 3 ' the wizened earth' to show the earth is also intelligent enough to know that hay will not grow or be able to stand up to the power of the wind, so it is not to be seen on the island.

The idea of it becoming wizened indicates that maybe they tried to grow, but this was soon put to an end by the brutality of the elements. Trees are also absent, emphasizing how powerful the winds must be. The image of the island is now of a very drab, barren landscape, with little growing, almost like a desert. The absence of trees gives a sense of a loss of ‘company’ (line 6) during the storms. This seems to be because the wind will cause the trees to make a lot of noise, which at least identifies the power of the storm. Here there is no sound, so the storm appears more eerie and unpleasant, as a result.

The trees are personified in terms of the noise they could make ‘raise a tragic chorus in a gale’ like a bad choir singing, warning of unhappy or unpleasant events. This could reflect the unhappiness of the people on the island as the storm rages around them. As the poem moves on, the sense of the storm coming is conveyed more strongly. The enjambment makes the poetry feel blustery and rough, as the lines run down from one to the next. He also uses vivid and stark images from nature. One may take the absence of trees for granted; and assume that the sea is for company.

Even the sea may turn against us, when we feel fathom that we have nothing to fear. We are content with the fact that the sea explodes “comfortably only on the cliffs. The sea is seen as violent ‘exploding comfortably’, an oxymoron which shows it is violent ‘exploding’ but happy or at home ‘comfortably’ in this environment. The violence is further exaggerated by the ‘flung spray’ and the violence of ‘hits the very windows’ is a powerful force, causing damage to the houses. Nevertheless, the sea has

its own wild moments, and may strike like a ‘tame’ cat. Note that the speaker uses the adjective ‘tame’ instead of ‘wild’.

What the poet intends through this usage is that with the ‘tame’ cat, an attack is unpredictable, and we take for granted the conditions to be safe and sound. The word ‘spit’ is utilized to denote savage action. The wind is personified as an intruder who ‘strafes’, that is, attacks with a machine gun or cannon from a low-flying aircraft. The Space itself is a Salvo, or a space for bombardments where anybody and everybody can get hit. All the people, living on the island ‘sit tight’ waiting for the storm to end and ‘while wind dives’ uses alliteration on the ‘w’ sound to emphasise the harsh qualities of the wind still further.

A metaphysical moment creeps in the mention of the invisibility of the forces of space and time that engulf us. ‘Space is a salvo. We are bombarded by the empty air’ Almost seems to make the wind a metaphor, suggesting it, like time, is a weapon. Seamus Heaney ends the poem by reflecting that in being afraid of the wind we are afraid of life in general, and of nothing. The wind cannot be seen, or heard, or smelt, or touched. It is only its effects that can be observed because it is so abstract, like fear itself.