

Powerful, not
beautiful: nature as
presented in "winter
swans," "hill fort," and
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While Sheers presents nature as outlasting man in his poetry, nature does not appear beautiful, as seen in the 'flint sky' of 'Border Country'. Instead, nature is powerful and strong in comparison to the people present in his poetry. The imagery of bad weather is also used to symbolise difficulties in relationships, as can be seen in 'Winter Swans', a further example of Sheers's ability to conjure nature's brutal strength and its ability to reflect the human condition.

Sheers uses the imagery of water in 'Winter Swans' to suggest that bad weather is a reflection of their stormy relationship. In particular, the lines 'the waterlogged earth gulping for breath' creates the image of drowning, perhaps suggesting that their relationship is literally drowning, which is reflected by the onomatopoeia of 'gulping'. The personification of the earth here gives the couple a passivity, again suggesting an unease in the relationship which is mirrored by the drowning earth. This provides support for Sara Crowne's critique that the 'ruptured terrain reflects the collection's fractured emotional landscape', seen here in 'Winter Swans' through the drowning earth. A progression in their relationship can be seen later through the description of the swans, 'porcelain over the stilling water'. The 'stilling water', as opposed to the stormy weather earlier, could suggest a reconciliation, which is reflected by the tranquillity of the image. The imagery of 'porcelain' suggests an ideal of love; whilst pure, fragile, and easily broken, there is also a connotation of worth, as the swans have stimulated conversation between the couple again.

In comparison, Sheers uses bad weather in 'The Wake' as an extended metaphor for the approach of death. Instead of storms signifying troubles in

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relationships, Sheers uses the imagery of storms, of 'squalls and depressions', to suggest oncoming illness. The inevitability of death seems to give the old man a stubbornness, which is revealing of his character, as the narrator's comforts are 'spoken into a coastal wind long after the ship has sailed', effectively blown away by the strength of the 'coastal wind', allying the old man nature, with a sense of his strength of opinion. The final stanza indicates the man's acceptance of his illness, through the alliteration of 'strangely settled', which suggests a smoothness in his acceptance of death. The final two lines of the poem suggest an eternal image, of the 'first sea there ever was or that ever will be', which is suggestive of nature continuing beyond man – a theme which is continued throughout many of Sheers' poems.

Sheers presents nature as outlasting man in poems such as 'Y Gaer' and 'The Hill Fort'. The shift in titles from the Welsh to the English translation both signifies a change in the content of the poetry, from poems about Sheers' Welsh background to poems about other subjects, whilst referencing his Welsh and English heritage. Nature is seen to outlast man in 'Y Gaer' through the contrast of the man-made hill fort and the vivid description of the horse. The hill fort's 'only defences now, a ring of gorse' shows how nature has taken over the area now, as the 'ring of gorse' is all that is left of the fort, suggesting a power of nature. In comparison to the 'mossy gums' of the stone, the horse is described as 'jittery', 'twitching' and 'threatens beneath' the rider – all words to suggest an energy and life in the horse. The use of the word 'threatens' in particular highlights the power of the horse, and thus the power of nature.

However, nature is not presented as overly beautiful in 'Y Gaer', particularly as the man takes 'the rains beating' and 'the hail's pepper-shot' – these short, blunt words of 'beating' and 'pepper-shot' portrays nature to be harsh, and Sheers uses pathetic fallacy in a reflection of the anger of the man at the loss of his son, which is based on a true story. The reminder of death from the context is another example of how nature outlasts man. This idea is repeated in 'The Hill Fort', the second poem of the pair, that Sheers says is "when the man is feeling very positive about his son", and this is reflected in the structure of the second poem in contrast to the first; 'The Hill Fort' is longer, with fewer endstops, which gives it a flowing quality, in comparison to 'Y Gaer', where the short, abrupt lines give the poem a sense of the man's anger at this son's death. The father's acceptance of his son's death can be seen in the act of tipping 'these ashes onto the tongue of the wind', making 'the circle complete'. The personification of nature in 'the tongue of the wind' and the lack of personification for the man's son in 'these ashes' is another reminder of the longevity of nature, as it continues to live on, whilst the son is dead. Making 'the circle complete', in a sense, 'the "circle of life"', portrays the man's acceptance of the son's death, and of returning him to nature.

Although nature is seen to live on past the deaths of others, Sheers does not present it as particularly beautiful. Rather, nature is powerful, capable of 'beating'. Sheers does use nature, in particular weather, to explore relationships, and especially difficulties in relationships.