

Reading Literature Assessment

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It is common knowledge that literature is a sort of a societal mirror, given that the literary writers thrive from a society that has values, virtues and vices alike. It is therefore necessary to look at the society through the eyes of these writers, as this can give a clear picture of what actually happens between and among people of different walks of life. Poetry is one genre of literature. This genre is somehow complicated especially because the language used is never too direct and the style is also not very easy to understand. A good poem requires a sharp mind to internalize and interpret comprehensively. The style and the themes in poetic works may be hidden from the layman's understanding. Furthermore, the poets try to communicate in a figurative language which calls for a critical mind to interpret, however, it is also worth noting that reading and interpreting poems can be quite exciting and interesting. Mastering the art of poetry can therefore be a good pass time activity besides being an academic venture. In this light, this essay aims at interpreting two poems written by celebrated writers, giving a commentary on each of them. The essay will further dissect the structures of the poems, with an aim of bringing a clearer understanding of what the authors intended to communicate to the community. The analysis will focus on the beginning, the middle sections and the ending of the poems to gauge how well they fit into the confines of proper poetry. These commentaries are aimed at showing the mastery in poetic works and bringing a clearer understanding of the poets' ideas.

Poem A: William Wordsworth, 'The Solitary Reaper'

The poem basically focuses around the idea of poetry itself. This is because it is set in a situation where the poet is on a voyage in the highlands of Scotland. While on his journey, he encounters a beautiful woman in who is reaping in the fields. The woman also sings in a beautiful voice that really attracts the poet, and he opts not to disrupt her.¹ In the second stanza, the poet tries to compare the goodness of the woman's voice to some natural sounds, such as the ones produced by a Nightingale or a Cuckoo-bird. However, the music is so good that the

1. ¹ W. Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper", 1805.

persona just can't compare it with anything else.² in the third stanza, the reader gets to understand that the persona does not actually understand what the woman is saying as she is singing in a language that he does not understand. He therefore tries to deduce what she could be talking about, whether it is a joy or sorrow and pain that make her sing. He does not understand why she sings in such a melancholic tone. As he walks away, the music lingers in his mind.³ He does not understand what it meant but all the same there is that connection that he established with it. He feels that the woman was so much connected with nature, that she and nature had a sort of sympathy and understanding of each other. It is therefore not a wonder that he compares her to the two birds as mentioned above, in an attempt to show how she and nature had intertwined.⁴

The structure of the poem is in such a manner that it has four stanzas, each with four lines, totaling to thirty two lines for the entire poem. There is also an element of rhyme in the poem. For instance, in the stanzas except the first one, the first and the third lines have a similar ending. Secondly, the second and the fourth lines end in a given voice. The same applies for the fifth and the sixth lines with a similar ending but different from the others. The last two lines fall under the same category, ending with a given syllable that is different from the others. This pattern is repeated throughout the poem, creating a pattern that is both interesting to read and appeals to the ears. This pattern gives the poem a characteristic aspect of the works of poetry, which create a synchrony in words.⁵

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. Gradesaver, 'Wordsworth's Poetic Works Summary and Analysis: The Solitary Reaper, 2011, viewed on 28th Dec. 2011, <http://www.gradesaver.com/wordsworths-poetical-works/study-guide/section10/>

Another interesting factor in the poem is its solitary nature. The woman is singing all alone, and she seems to be so comfortable in it even as she works alone. Another intriguing factor is that even the persona who hears her sing does not understand a word she says. Wordsworth uses this aspect to reinforce the aspect of nature or things being in their natural setting. In as much as they may not be understood by many, yet there is such an element of fullness and wholeness. It shows the beauty of nature and how well it can be accommodating and soothing to a stranger.⁶

Generally, the poem is not difficult to understand. The imagery used is easy to understand. For instance, when the beautiful voice of the lone reaper is compared to the Nightingale and the Cuckoo-bird, it is clear that the persona is trying to show how natural the singing was, and how the woman blended with nature. The wordings in the poem are also not hard to grasp. The word selection is in such manners that even a person who is not that good in poetry can interpret and understand the meaning of the poem. The poem also takes the conventional narration format. That is, there is an introduction where the persona narrates what he was doing when he saw the beautiful woman. He also explains what the woman was doing and what drew his attention to her; Singing. This sets the theme of the poem. He then goes on to describe the singing; how it was done, the tone and why it captured his mind. He then describes how he internalized the music, and this is where we learn that he does not understand what the woman is saying but still identifies with her music. In conclusion, he gives his reaction and perception of the music; though he didn't understand it, it found a place in his heart. In this context, the reader can replay the scene in his mind in a vivid manner.

Poem C: Ted Hughes, 'The Thought-Fox'

Similar to the poem discussed above on the Solitary Reaper, Hughes also rotates around the theme of poems. He tries to show how much time and commitment that a poet must employ in order to come up with a good poem. The poem is set in the study room of the poet, in a dark

6. Ibid

night. As the poem opens, the persona describes the setting in which the reader gets to know that it is on a dark night with no star in the sky.⁷

There is such a stillness and calmness, though the persona can sense that there is another being that is very close. The reader also learns that the persona is in the middle of composing a poem and is therefore in deep thought. He wants no disturbance and that is why even the slightest idea that something else might be nearby draws his attention.

In the third stanza, the reader gets to know that the disturbance is emanating from a fox, which is nosing around in the snow. This is also where the reader realizes that the title of the poem is in itself imagery, as later discussed in this essay. In the subsequent stanzas, the persona describes the movement of the fox and its behavior. It seems quite unsure of what to do as it slowly emerges from the snow, noses around, breaks into a run before stopping again. Lastly, it trots off again only to fall into a snare. There, the stillness is restored again and everything flows back to normalcy, with the clock still ticking in the loneliness of the night. It is also in this last stanza that the reader learns that while all this was happening, the poet had already finished writing the poem.⁸ It is therefore upon the reader to try and unravel the meaning of the poem and give a rationale to it.

The poem is structured in a way that it has six stanzas, each with four lines. Therefore, the entire poem has 24 lines. There is also the aspect of pattern as witnessed in any work of poetry. However, this pattern is occasionally broken so as to accentuate the uneasy steps as taken by the fox. This goes in to making the structure of the poem more complex.

Unless one is well versed in the art of poetry, it might be hard to understand such a complex set up. However, the style used in the poem is not as complex. It takes a narrative

7. ⁷ Hughes, T., 'The Thought Fox', 1984

⁸ R. Webster, 'The Thought Fox and the Poetry of Ted Hughes', 2002, viewed on 28th Dec. 2011,

<http://www.richardwebster.net/tedhughes.html>

format, explaining the occurrences as if they were occurring in a scene and therefore the reader can easily follow the thought process. In the introduction, the persona is seen sitting in his study, busy putting down the final touches of the poem. Then comes the disruption from the fox, which takes the reader away from the poet. The reader wanders of in pursuit of the interesting manner in which the fox's activities are explained. By the time the poet brings the reader back to the persona, the poem is already done and the whole setting is over. From this conclusion, the reader therefore understands that the fox and its behavior have a key role to play in understanding the poem.

There is a lot of imagery and symbolism employed in this poem. First of all, there is the dark night. This is used as a symbol of the poet's mind. The poet is in such a deep thought, wondering what to put in the poem and in which manner. It is this confusion that is depicted as the dark night, as the persona struggles to get the right words to put down in the poem.⁹ the fox is also used as a symbol. It is common knowledge that a fox is one of the most elusive creatures on earth, being both witty and cunning. The fox in this poem symbolizes the ideas of the poem as harbored deep within the persona's mind. The thoughts are not very clear; they are far fetched and this is why the persona is in such a deep thought. He needs maximum concentration so as to come up with a solid idea and put it down in the poem.¹⁰

The movements of the fox are also a form of imagery. They signify how gradually the idea forms in the persona's mind and becomes clearer. In the act where the fox fully emerges from the snow, runs for a while and stops before running again signifies how the ideas gradually take form in the persona's mind to the time when they are fully clear to him. When the fox is finally caught in the snare and there is restoration of calmness and stillness is imagery as well. This indicates how the persona finally grasps the idea and puts it down. The reader realizes that

⁹ R. Webster, 'The Thought Fox and the Poetry of Ted Hughes', 2002, viewed on 28th Dec. 2011,

<http://www.richardwebster.net/tedhughes.html>

¹⁰ Ibid

with the death of the fox comes the conclusion of the poem; as in, with the idea fully put down, the poem is complete.¹¹

Besides the extensive use of imagery, the poem is not that complex. The wording is not as difficult and therefore the poem can be easily read by anyone. The only issue would be the interpretation of the poem, which needs a mind that is quite sharp in the art of poetry. The poem is also not gender biased. The reader cannot tell whether the persona is male or female and neither does the poem has a theme or a quote that has any inclination towards gender issues. In general, the poem is interesting to read and quite witty. It is worth reading in order to hone one's skills in literature.

¹¹ R. Webster, 'The Thought Fox and the Poetry of Ted Hughes', 2002, viewed on 28th Dec. 2011,

<http://www.richardwebster.net/tedhughes.html>

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