

A Study on How a Poet Sees

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Abstract

This article tries to present how a poet sees the things differently from ordinary people. Lanborn (1964) defines a poet as a person who is 'more sensitive with a wider range of feeling; and better able to express what they feel, and move others to share his feeling.' Based on this definition, a study was made on the poem *Showflakes* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882). It was found that, in the poem, a simple thing in the nature is picked out and presented in a way not an ordinary person has ever thought of. In doing so, the poet's feeling toward that particular thing is also revealed. So it can be concluded that this poem is the proof for H. W. Longfellow to be in line with the definition of a poet by Lanborn (1964).

Introduction

Various scholars define 'poem', 'poetry' and 'poet' in many different ways. Among them, one definition is given for 'poet' by Lamborn (1964). He says that poets are those who 'are at once more sensitive, with a wider range of feeling; and better able to express what they feel, and move others to share their feelings.'

When he sees a thing, a poet's view is rather different from a layman. He sees it from a point of view that is different from that of us, ordinary people, and he sees it with a feeling that has never come into our non-poet heart. However, when we read a poem where the poet shares his views and feelings on that particular thing, we are also moved through his presentation.

For the support of this idea, it is advisable to look into a poem by a Victorian poet William Wards worth Longfellow (1807-1882) that is given the title of *Snowflakes*.

Aim and Objectives

This article is presented with the aim of finding out how a poet sees the things differently from ordinary people. So it tries to discover the point

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of view a poet adopts when he sees the things around him and to find out how he shares his ideas and feelings to the readers.

The Study of the Poem

Snowflakes by Longfellow is a short poem that consists of three stanzas only and each stanza is made up of six lines varying in length. In this poem, the poet expresses his view on an ordinary occurrence in nature: the falling of the snow in winter. Everyone knows that the snow falls in winter and sees it as a natural phenomenon of the weather. Water on the ground or in a lake or stream or river or sea or ocean, wherever it is on the earth, evaporates and goes up into the sky. Then the water vapour condenses as the temperature falls and comes down again onto the earth in the form of snow or rain. However, in the eyes of the poet, the sky appears to be a sorrow-stricken person lonely and desperate and the snow to be his tears.

First, the poet expresses his idea of seeing the sky as if it were animate by giving it the bosom, a part of human body where the human feelings are supposed to occur. The loneliness of sky becomes more vivid when the tears of snow falls on such deserted places as ‘brown and bare’ forest after shedding its leaves and the field which has been harvested and neglected. The sorrow that strikes the sky into ‘crying’ is also seen through the choice of such words as “silent”, “soft” and “slow”.

Next, Longfellow creates a comparison to make his idea of animating the sky firmer. He says that falling of snow is the act of revealing the sorrowful and desperate feelings that are troubling the sky to the forest and field that are the sole listeners of its whispers. This revealing act is placed side by side with a human nature of praying to God and making confession to the priests when people feel desperate or sinful.

Finally, an explanation is offered why the human beings miss to observe the crying and revealing of the sky’s secret sorrow. The poet explains that the words that the sky ‘utters’ can only be perceived by the forest and the field because they are so soft in tone that they seem to be inaudible to the human ears.

In presenting his unusual view, the poet also tries to persuade the readers to adopt his point of view by making use of various poetic devices. The most prominent device is personification: an inanimate sky is described

as if it had life. The words and expressions, “bosom”, “her garments”, “the troubled sky revealed” and “the grief it feels” makes the readers think of the sky as a human being. The two similes comparing the falling of snow with human behaviour in the second stanza makes the sky more human-like. The choice of words also bends the readers’ mind to come to accept the poet’s unusual idea. For instance, the words, “silent”, “soft” and “slow” are placed together so as to produce not only a repetition of / s / sound but also the meaning of ‘gentleness’ in the falling of snow. Moreover, the oxymoronic expression “silent syllable” attracts the readers’ attention through the combination of contradicting words.

Conclusion

After reading the poem *Snowflakes* by H. W. Longfellow, the readers realize the similarities in the usual happenings in nature and the behaviour of human beings. The readers are also impressed with the poet’s unusual idea or point of view of ‘animate sky’ and cannot possess any reason to decline the idea.

In conclusion, the poem *Snowflakes* by H. W. Longfellow is the proof that the definition of poet by Lamborn (1964) is the down-to-earth truth.

References

Lamborn, E. A. (1964) *Poetry Criticism*. Oxford: OUP

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<http://www.michiganquarterlyreview.com/2011/01/come-a-little-bit-closer-now-baby-longfellows-snow-flakes/>

Poetry Foundation (2013) <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173915>

Appendix

Snowflakes (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – 1807-1882)

Out of the bosom of the Air,
 Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the woodlands brown and bare,
 Over the harvest-fields forsaken,
 Silent, and soft, and slow
 Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take
 Suddenly shape in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
 In the white countenance confession,
 The troubled sky reveals
 The grief it feels.

This is the poem of the air,
 Slowly in silent syllables recorded;
This is the secret of despair,
 Long in its cloudy bosom hoarded,
 Now whispered and revealed
 To wood and field.