**An Analysis of the Poem "Homecoming"**

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The following analysis is based on the poem "Homecoming," by Laverne Filth, reprinted

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**Homecoming**

And now I am back in Oklahoma in the days
they dredged out the canal near our house
that let the waters flow back to the Arkansas
River, before the streets subsided, too heavy
with water.

As you might guess, these were stormy days,
lightning brightened the skies like errant
lamps cast to the heavens, behaving like
fireflies. And mother's voice, a deep resonant
balm that came following the waves of thunder.

"Yes, I'm alright, alright," I would tell her.
"Yes, I will sleep," though I knew how high the
waters always rose. How high they did and how
high they could.

And dad, he was so trusting, the way he jumped
into his delivery truck and left us. Dad, and God,
the thunder and lightning and the insistent rains,
they all trusted mother. Sing mother, sing us again
through the storm. Give us those soft whispers
in the night.

Tell us about the plan. Bring dad
back before the night lights fall on the high water,
before he has to wade himself home.

The interpretation of poetry is a cherished activity. Those who know the benefits of the critical thinking involved as well as the pleasure of discovering new and deeper meanings within the lines of each poem appreciate this art form. This form of literature "attempts to communicate unspeakable aspects of the human experience through the still evolving traditions of an ancient and passionate art" ("Poetry"). The tools readers use to interpret a poem helps them to see the poem in the round, like a sculpture, exposing meanings and implications which are difficult to see from just a glance at the words. The poem "Homecoming" by Laverne Frith reveals the significance of the subject through persona, tone, metaphor, and simile to establish the overall theme.

The persona, or speaker, of a poem is the voice of the poet or created characters of the poet that articulate the poem (Preminger 900). In "Homecoming," the speaker is an adult reflecting on a flood that occurred during his childhood. His adulthood is evident by his observations: "I knew how high the / waters always rose. How high they did and how / high they could" (lines 12-14). He also recounts the loving comfort and assurance from his mother: "And mother's voice, a deep resonant / balm that came following the waves of thunder" (9-10). In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker not only addresses what happened, but also recounts what he actually said: "Yes, I'm alright, alright" (11). However, he never tells us what his mother actually says beyond mentioning in the third stanza that she sings and whispers comfort to them (19-20). The mindset with which the speaker describes the flood and the events surrounding it give us a better idea of how he actually felt. The attitude of the persona is reflected in his tone throughout.

Tone is defined as the "author's identifiable attitude toward his subject matter and/or audience" (Meyers and Simms 320). In "Homecoming," the speaker's tone changes as the poem

progresses. At first, his tone is rather candid, introducing the second stanza with: "as you might guess" (6). However, in a couple of lines the tone also becomes pensive as the speaker meditates on his father's actions; "he was so trusting" (15). Then in the third stanza, the speaker changes tone and tense as he talks directly to his mother, pleading with her to "sing us again / through the storm" (18-19). The speaker becomes emotionally drawn in as the poem develops. His obvious trust in his mother as well as the fact he still desires her comfort is conveyed through the tone.

The speaker uses simile and metaphor to express complex feelings and ideas with the minimum number of words. These must be analyzed to ensure we fully understand what he means. Simile is "a figure of speech [...] defined as an explicit comparison using 'like' or 'as'" (Preminger 1149). A metaphor is "a figurative expression, in which a word or phrase is shifted from its normal uses" (760). Simile is used in the second stanza when lightning is compared to "errant / lamps cast to the heavens, behaving like / fireflies" (7-9). The speaker uses the word errant, meaning "moving about aimlessly or irregularly," to describe the random flashes of lightning in the sky ("Errant"). He uses metaphor to describe his mother's comforting. He calls her voice "a deep resonant / balm" (9-10). He is remembering her voice as soothing and echoing with reassurance. Depicting lightning and his mother's voice with simile and metaphor provide a more vivid understanding of the speaker's memories, allowing us to become more involved with the poem.

The subject of a poem is termed as "the referential substance" and "what or who is being discussed" in the poem (Myers and Simms 292). The events of "Homecoming" center on the flood, which may be related to a historical event. Although no dates are given, the poem mentions the flood takes place in Oklahoma on the Arkansas River (1-3). This is a flood prone area of the country that has had many floods throughout the years; however, the speaker implies

that his family had gone through other floods: "though I knew how high the / waters always rose" (12-13). In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the banks of the Arkansas River overflowed multiple times in Oklahoma, and one area even flooded three times within the span of six months ("The Regulatory"). These facts give us a context in which to view the poem so deeper meaning may be understood. The flood may also be interpreted as figurative, or symbolic, perhaps representing some burden or recurring dilemma in the family other than a natural disaster.

The ultimate purpose in interpreting a poem is to find a meaning that is personally applicable to ourselves. To get meaning, we must find the theme, which is "the paraphrasable main ideas of a piece of literature, [...] what the work is about" (Meyers and Simms 308). Several interpretations can be deduced from a poem depending on the view of the reader. My interpretation is that the poem is about the importance of loved ones in the midst of a crisis. Throughout the poem, the speaker relies on his mother for comfort and reassurance. He even states "Dad, and God, / the thunder and lightning and insistent rains" looked to his mother for strength (16-17). When his father has to leave for an unspoken reason, the speaker looks to his mother to somehow bring him back home (20-22). Thus, the title "Homecoming" tells of this moment.

This poem can have many interpretations. Some may see a dark or ominous ending, while others find hope that there will be a favorable resolution. Poems are meant to be revisited to reinterpret their meanings. This brings pleasure to the activity of reading poetry. As poems are revisited, new and more profound meanings may be discovered. We find universal truths that are relevant to our everyday lives, permitting us to seek out the deeper meanings of the commonplace. Poems, like all pieces of fine literature, broaden and develop our critical thinking skills, providing us with the ability to approach life's challenges with a renewed perspective.

Works Cited

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