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English II

Poetry and Structure

Poetry. You know, a lot of people would say that a poem is, well, a poem. It's not a book. It's not an essay. It's simply a poem. But what makes a poem you ask? (you're probably not asking that question, but just go with it) Structure. It all ties back to the structure. In every poem, even the seemingly meaningless poems, tell us a story; for example Amanda Gormans "The Hill We Climb ", has a structure that clearly expresses the writer's thoughts, and the message of the piece. The poem titled "The Hill We Climb", if you remember, was the poem told at the President's Inauguration in 2020, a time of fear, loss, but also hope. Not only did the title imply a theme of perseverance and togetherness, but the structure of the poem itself overall implies an idea of how we must persevere together.

But I'm sure you're getting tired of me talking about the poem and what it shows. Let's get started on *how* its structure represents the theme of it entirely.

Just as with any poem, Amanda Gormans poem could be split into shifts, or places where the ideas shift in a poem based on its structure and transition phrases. Speaking of the "Hill We Climb" specifically, it has 1 major shift, where the writer goes from describing our unfinished nation, to demonstrating how we will unite to build a better one.

Now, we can use these differences before and after the main shift to clearly demonstrate the meaning of the poem. Before the previously mentioned major shift, Gorman writes, "We, the successors of a country and a time where a/ skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised/ by a single mother can dream of becoming/ president, only to find herself reciting for one." Here, she demonstrates that in this nation, time has progressed from the 1700's where there was slavery, racism, and segregation. While

these factors still limit colored individuals today, equity has progressed in a way that people such as Black individuals can be able to have opportunities that they didn't have before. This conveys the idea of progression, though an imperfect nation, where marginalized groups still cannot do what a regular white male can do, such as become president. So to sum it up, in contrast to the second part of the shift, the first part of the shift demonstrates an idea of an imperfect nation.

In the second part of the poem, Amanda Gorman demonstrates how we can make a better nation with more equity and equality through unity. In this part of the shift, she writes, “We will rise from the golden hills of the West./We will rise from the windswept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution./We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states.” Through the usage of “we” she demonstrates this idea of unity and not the idea of isolation or segregation which was common in the 1700’s. Unity between cultures, races, and people. Through this unity, she demonstrates the idea that we will persevere through racially motivated barriers mentioned previously and progress to create a nation that is finished, and overall gives more rights and freedoms to everyone.

Now, going back to the near present, where racism, segregation, and discrimination still rules this nation, this poem made the important point of unity. By the usage of “we”, and the idea of progression through trial overall, it helps convey this message of unity despite the challenges and hardships that we experience, in order to overcome those challenges.

Therefore, to go back to the question of “What makes a poem a poem?”. Structure. It's all structure. Structure is something that is unique to poems, and clearly demonstrates the writer's ideas, and overall creates the theme of it entirely.

Especially in “The Hill we Climb” by Amanda Gorman, structure is important in clearly expressing the theme and message of the poem-that unity could help us persevere through hardships, and

create a nation that prioritizes equality and equity. In a time such as 2020, and beyond, where there are still racially motivated barriers that divide us, still sickness, and still hardships, the message that this structure creates is essential in giving the nation a message:

A message that we must unite.

For a better nation.

For a better world.

For a better life.

For all.

Who knew structure was so important.