

Storm on the Island – Seamus Heaney



Using on-line analyses

On-line (and other resources) will direct attention to all the usual suspects: internal rhyme, metaphor, assonance, alliteration, enjambment...

I would encourage students to critique some of the analyses we come across. They all mean to be helpful, but are they true?

For example, from one such site:

Note the assonance too, vowels sounding similar in close words: raise/gale...listen/thing....

Suggest to students that they ask of that statement, 'Is that actually the case?' Or would we find a similar degree of assonance in many a random text? This is not to say that the analysis is wrong, but that it should be tested.

Again:

Alliteration

When two or more words beginning with the same consonant are close together in a line they are said to be alliterative. This brings added texture and phonetic interest:

rock and roof...so, as you see...think that the...while wind....Space is also a salvo.

There is no denying that there are some fine examples of alliteration but are they representative of the whole poem? If not, where do they occur and why? (And to write that they bring 'added texture and phonetic interest' is meaningless.)

The little words

Seemingly insignificant words are often worth exploring. Ask students to look for repetition and they should notice all the negative words: no x 5, together with a never and a nothing. They tell us what isn't there. How much do we know about what is there on the island?

The conversational tone

A cursory reading will be enough to draw attention to 'as you see', 'you know what I mean' and 'you might think' and that is worth noting. But how well does it sit with the rest of the poem? Would a person in conversation with you, come out with those last 6 or 7 lines? Not to mention the ruminative semi-philosophical last statement. So, is this a defect in the poem – or can it be viewed as a strength?

If you can get students to discuss these kinds of questions, they are well on the way to becoming discerning readers – and it will aid them enormously when encountering unseen poetry.