Analysis of West Hill by Matthew Dickman

Posted on September 28, 2018

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Paraphrase: My brother is happy in heaven. He is living a luxurious life, living in a big house and swimming in the swimming pool. The house is strong with pillars so that it does not crash. The purpose of building the house with that design is to ensure that the house does not decide on its own but has anchors to control its decisions. It will not decide when it is over. My brother is lying on his back, and he is high on cocaine and Heineken.

He, the sun, the sky, and the stars look similar, and it is difficult to tell them apart. My brother has become part of nature. Whenever I come here, I wonder what attracted him so much that he took his life and traveled to nature to become part of it. I wonder what the place looked like and what attracted him so much that he left the world without thinking twice. I wonder if it was a woman or a lack of pain. A woman who pulled him toward her when he was bleeding and suffering due to the sufferings of the world, and a woman who pulled him when he was full of chemicals. I wonder what it was that soothed his pain and suffering so much that he willingly took his life to be there.

Speaker:

Matthew Dickman (a brother)

Audience:

A friend or self

Tone:

Thoughtful, compassionate, apologetic

Imagery:

Visual: a big house built on the side of a hill on stilts, evergreen trees, his back up at the sky, soft skin of his ways, she pulled him soaking, past the leather furniture, wet body
Organic: the sky, the sun, shining stars, West Hills
Kinesthetic: jump, knelt

Sound Qualities:

Onomatopoeia: jump, big, crashing
Alliteration: boulevard below it; build that way; the sun or the sky or the shining stars

Figurative Language:

Simile: like closet

Symbol:

Archetypal: razor

- The aspect where the poem refers to the stilted house, sky, and swimming draws on the vastness of the world and the death and depression of his brother. I would like to read more about the poet's brother.
- Biographical, cultural, and critical sources will help me understand the situation. As it is about depression and suicide, it would be helpful to study the culture and biography of the author but not forget the importance of the critical aspect of the sources. The sources must build on knowledge of the ways that literature focuses on issues of depression and suicide in order to understand and respond to them.
- What aspect of depression does the author focus on while writing the poem *West Hill*?

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West Hill by Matthew Dickman is a poem that describes his apologetic reaction to the death by suicide of his brother. He starts the poem by announcing his death: "My older brother is in heaven," and he is happy there. He describes his life as comfortable there so that "the house will not Jump and decide it is over." As the poet's brother has given up on life due to darkness and depression, life in heaven does not allow such depression. Depression and hopelessness cause a person to become addicted to cocaine and alcohol. His brother was also using them, but now his brother is part of nature, enjoying swimming in the swimming pool. His death has helped him become a part of nature. In *West Hill*, the poet wonders what it was that helped him decide in the end. He wonders if it was the pain or the woman that convinced him to take his life and become part of nature. The poem discusses the sensitive and difficult subject of death. Although the meaning and language of the poem are clear, the compound sentences sometimes make it difficult to comprehend the meaning. Moreover, the lack of rhyme and proper structure presents the thoughts of family members who are trying to comprehend the suicide of their loved one and find a reason for it. The strong imagery and nostalgic tone help the readers to see the lack of immortality and the reality of death (Dickman).

The poet discusses depression and suicide in simple language, painting pictures of the afterlife without a proper structure. It is a free-verse poem that refers to death and his grief. It discusses the family members who are left behind and who are trying to find a reason for the death of their loved one, wondering why and what happened. The poem shows his restlessness and continuous search for "the house" that became "the vacation" for him. It talks about the speaker or mourner: "I wonder." The free verse and lack of traditional poetic structure help the readers connect with the thoughts of the mourner. It shows the flow of thoughts that neither rhyme nor require proper structure to express the feelings. The technique of free verse assists him in presenting the theme of death properly. The writing and patterns of thought in the poem are crucial for finding its form and structure. The lack of conventional structure and poetic style provides the right structure for the topic of death and grief to manifest itself.

Moreover, the lack of excessive use of literary devices, combined with visual words, helps the readers understand suicide, death, and the role of control in a person's life. However, the person is not detached from the speaker or the reader, as the poet, through the nostalgic and grieving tone, engrosses the reader. The poet does not use simile, allegory, or any other device excessively to represent the thoughts of a family member after the death of a loved one. But he shows the temporariness of the world. It shows that life is not permanent and will end soon through phrases such as "crashing down," "won't decide it's over," and "nothing left." Also, these phrases generate a sense of hopelessness and a sense of time constraint in the reader, but contrasting life on the planet with the eternity of the afterlife maintains a smooth balance. He generates a sense of sympathy toward the person who commits suicide, showing his suffering: "he is full of cocaine and Heineken." Then, he changes the concept of the person from pain to eternity as he becomes part of "the sun and the sky."

The poem, although nostalgic and mournful, somewhat celebrates death and eternal life, or the idea of life being eternal. The visual imagery of him "swimming in the swimming pool, behind the big house," as if he is part of nature, makes death look less painful. It soothes the readers as it refers to eternity and peace in the afterlife in the "New Kingdom." It changes the imagery of "cocaine," "alcohol," and "razors" to a more peaceful "New Kingdom." He considers whether it was a woman or the prospects of luxury and peace in the next life that helped him plan his death successfully. Toward the end, he also presents the lack of connection that depressed people feel, showing a need to be "listened to." He helps the reader visualize the concept of death as well as peace in the afterlife. The visualization of the events and lack of permanence, although they make the reader uncomfortable, present realistic and positive prospects for the afterlife.

Lastly, the nostalgic and sometimes apologetic tone of the speaker assists the reader in feeling sympathy for the mourner and the dead. It makes the reader empathetic toward the speaker and apologetic about the death, as the speaker of the poem feels, because the speaker was unable to assist and "listen" to the person who took his life due to constant suffering. However, it does not put the blame on anyone. The tone is nostalgic most of the time, generating sympathy for the mourner as well as their relationship without making death undesirable.

To conclude, the free-verse style of the poem, with strong visual imagery and a nostalgic tone, engrosses the reader, generating empathy in readers, but it does not make death undesirable. By showing some continuity of eternal and peaceful life, the poet has painted a beautiful picture of death and shows worldly suffering. The poem starts and ends with strong imagery that portrays a beautiful life that continues from worldly life to life in heaven. Thus, it achieves its purpose of presenting the thoughts of the mourner and the nostalgia with a positive perspective for the dead person.

Works Cited

Dickman, Matthew. *Mayakovsky's Revolver*. 2014. Print.