

Night of the Scorpion

-by Nissim Ezekiel

Message

The most striking feature of this poem is the contrast between the superstitious view of the villagers and the rationalistic attitude of narrator's father. The scorpion becomes a symbol of evil.

It also demonstrates the selfless dedication of the villagers who spend their time praying over the woman who has been stung by a scorpion.

The poem also reveals that mothers, all across the world are so caring, protective about their children that they don't hesitate even risking their own lives for the sake of their children and family members. ... Here the mother was thankful to God for sparing her children from the scorpion's bite.

Figures of speech in the poem:

1. Alliteration –

My mother

Stung by a scorpion

Parting with his poison

He risked the rain again

May he sit still, they said

Be burned away tonight

May the poison purify

through and through

herb and hybrid

flame feeding

2. Metaphor –

The Evil One

(Scorpion is compared to an Evil one)

3. Simile –

Like swarms of flies

4. Personification-

He risked the rain again (Scorpion is said to risk the rain)

Flame feeding (flame is said to feed)

Diabolic tail (tail is said to be devilish)

5. Imagery –

Buzzed – sound imagery

Shadows –visual imagery

Clicked their tongues – sound imagery

More candles and lanterns – smell imagery

6. Hyperbole –

A hundred times

II ERC :

1. I remember the night my mother

Was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours

Of steady rain had driven him

To crawl beneath a sack of rice.

a) Name the poem and the poet.

b) The poet recollects _____.

c) Whom does 'him' refer to ?

d) Why did 'he' crawl beneath a sack of rice?

(heavy rain, came inside the house, hide, shelter, warmth, safety)

2. With every movement that the scorpion made, his

Poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.

May he sit still, they said

May the sins of your previous birth

Be burned away tonight, they said.

a) Whom does 'they' refer to?

b) Why did 'they' wish that he remained still?

c) What else did 'they' wish for the poet's mother?

d) What characteristics of 'they' does the poet highlight in the above lines?

(they- innocent, not well informed, simple, primitive belief, superstitious, philosophical, had blind faith, showed fellow-feeling, sympathy ,cooperation)

III Answer the following questions:

1. Explain "throwing giant scorpion shadows".

A- "Throwing giant scorpion shadows" is an expression of extreme contempt(hatred) that the villagers had on their faces. The villagers were looking for the scorpion with candles and lanterns in their hands. This created shadows on the walls. Though these were the shadows of the neighbours, the poet's young mind criticized them as giant scorpion shadows.

2. Describe the poet's father.

A- The poet's father was logical and scientific in his thinking. He didn't believe in superstitions like his fellow villagers did. Yet, when his wife was stung by a scorpion, he tried every mean to save her. He even poured paraffin on the bitten toe for he couldn't see his wife groaning in pain.

3. What was the mother's reaction to the scorpion bite?

A- Though the poet's mother bore the pain of the scorpion bite for long, she was happy. The mother was thankful to God for sparing her children from the scorpion's bite. She did not blame God for letting the scorpion bite her. This shows the mother's selfless, pure and unconditional love for her children.