

Unit 13: Blow, Blow, Though Winter Wind

~William Shakespeare

Paraphrasing:

Stanza 1:

Winter wind, blow as harshly as you want; you aren't as cruel as the ingratitude of people. Your bite isn't as painful because you are invisible, even though your breath is rough. We should sing a song to the evergreen holly because most friendships are fake and most love is foolish. Despite this, we pretend life is cheerful.

Stanza 2:

Freeze, bitter sky! Though you are cold, you're not as painful as when people forget the good things done for them. While you may freeze the water, your sting isn't as sharp as being forgotten by a friend. Again, let's sing to the evergreen holly, for most friendships are false and most love is just folly. But still, life goes on, and we pretend it is joyful.

Line Wise Explanation

Stanza 1:

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind"

The speaker calls upon the winter wind, asking it to blow freely.

"Thou art not so unkind"

The winter wind, though harsh, is not as cruel as human beings.

"As man's ingratitude;"

Human ingratitude is worse than the coldness of the winter wind.

"Thy tooth is not so keen,"

The cold wind may bite, but it's not as sharp or painful as human ungratefulness.

"Because thou art not seen,"

The wind's bite is less hurtful because it's an invisible force, unlike human betrayal which is direct and personal.

"Although thy breath be rude."

Even though the wind is rough and unpleasant, it's still more tolerable than human cruelty.

"Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:"

The speaker suggests singing about the holly tree, which stays green in winter, symbolizing endurance and strength.

"Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:"

The speaker believes that most friendships are false and most love is foolish, implying that human relationships are often insincere.

"Then heigh-ho, the holly!"

Stanza 2:

1. "Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,"

The speaker calls upon the sky to freeze, emphasizing the cold and harshness of winter. The phrase "bitter sky" suggests an atmosphere filled with sharp, unpleasant cold.

2. "That does not bite so nigh"

The coldness of the sky, although uncomfortable, does not "bite" as close or as deeply as the emotional pain caused by human behavior. The "bite" refers to the sting of the cold, but the speaker is comparing it to something more painful.

3. "As benefits forgot:"

Here, the speaker compares the "bite" of the cold to the pain of being forgotten or neglected after doing good deeds. Being unappreciated, or having one's kindnesses forgotten, is described as more painful than the coldest winter.

4. "Though thou the waters warp,"

Even though the cold is strong enough to "warp" or freeze the waters (changing them from their natural liquid state), it still doesn't cause as much pain as human ingratitude or forgetfulness.

5. "Thy sting is not so sharp"

The sting of the cold is not as sharp or painful as the emotional wound of being forgotten by a friend or loved one.

6. "As a friend remembered not."

The pain of a forgotten friendship is far worse than the sting of the bitter cold. The speaker implies that human emotional hurt runs deeper than any physical discomfort caused by nature.

Figures of Speech/Poetic Devices

1. Personification

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind"

The winter wind is personified, as it is addressed as though it were a person capable of action. This gives the wind human characteristics.

"Thy tooth is not so keen"

The wind is given the human trait of having a "tooth" that bites.

"Thy breath be rude"

The wind is described as having breath, which makes it seem more human.

2. Simile

"Thou art not so unkind / As man's ingratitude;"

This is a direct comparison using "as" to show that the winter wind is not as cruel as human ungratefulness.

"That does not bite so nigh / As benefits forgot"

The coldness of the sky is compared to the pain of people forgetting good deeds done for them.

3. Metaphor

"Thy tooth is not so keen"

The metaphor here is that the wind has a "tooth" that bites, comparing the cold wind to a biting, painful force.

"Thy sting is not so sharp / As a friend remembered not"

Forgetting a friend is metaphorically described as having a "sting," a painful sensation.

4. Repetition

"Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:"

The phrase "heigh-ho" is repeated, creating a musical rhythm and emphasizing the idea of singing to endure the pain of life.

"Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:"

The repetition of "most" emphasizes the speaker's belief that the majority of friendships and love are insincere or foolish.

5. Alliteration

"Thy tooth is not so keen"

The repetition of the "t" sound creates a harsh auditory effect, mimicking the biting cold of the wind.

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky"

The repeated "f" sound mirrors the chill of the freezing sky.

6. Irony

"This life is most jolly"

This phrase is ironic, as the rest of the poem highlights the bitterness of human ingratitude and false relationships, suggesting that life is not as jolly as it seems.

These figures of speech work together to contrast the physical harshness of nature with the emotional coldness of human relationship.

Comprehension

Comprehension:

1. Why does the poet urge the wind to blow?

The poet urges the winter wind to blow because, although it is cold and harsh, it is not as cruel or painful as human ingratitude. The speaker feels that the natural elements, like the wind, are more bearable compared to the emotional hurt caused by ungratefulness and betrayal from people. The wind's coldness can be faced, but human cruelty is more difficult to endure.

2. Comment on the mood of the poet when he says "Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly." What is the significance of the Green Holly and how does it relate to the poem?

When the poet says "Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly," his mood seems resigned but somewhat accepting. The "green holly" is a symbol of resilience and endurance because it remains green during the winter. The poet uses it as a metaphor for how one must endure the harshness of life, just as the holly endures the cold. The holly tree, staying vibrant despite the harshness of winter, represents stability in the face of life's challenges, contrasting with the insincerity of human relationships.

3. Why does the poet regard the wind's "tooth... not so keen"? What does the poem suggest about the harshness of nature compared to the pain of human relationships?

The poet says the wind's "tooth is not so keen" because, though the cold wind bites, it does not cause the deep emotional pain that comes from human ingratitude or betrayal. The poem suggests that the physical harshness of nature, like the biting cold wind, is easier to endure than the emotional wounds caused by false friendships and forgotten kindness. Nature is impersonal and unintentional in its harshness, whereas human relationships can be intentionally hurtful, making them more painful.

4. What is the meaning of the word 'warp' in the second stanza?

In the second stanza, "warp" means to distort or bend. The poet says, "Though thou the waters warp," referring to how the cold wind causes the water to freeze and change its natural state. The word emphasizes the effect of the cold wind on nature, but even this physical transformation caused by freezing is considered less painful than human emotional harm.

5. Discuss the speaker's mood in the poem.

The speaker's mood in the poem is a mix of resignation, cynicism, and acceptance. He acknowledges the harshness of the natural world but accepts it as a part of life. However, the deeper emotion comes from his disappointment in human relationships, particularly the falseness of friendship and love. Despite this cynicism, the speaker chooses to sing to the "green holly," symbolizing a stoic acceptance of life's difficulties and the recognition that life, with all its flaws, must go on.

6. Comment on the line "Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly."

This line reflects the speaker's deep disillusionment with human relationships. He believes that most friendships are insincere ("feigning"), and that most romantic love is foolish or pointless ("mere folly"). The statement suggests that people often pretend to be friends and lovers out of self-interest or for appearances, rather than out of genuine feeling. The poet is expressing a sense of betrayal and distrust in human connections, portraying them as shallow and deceptive.

Themes

The poem "Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind" by William Shakespeare explores several deep and universal themes. Here are the possible themes of the poem:

1. Ingratitude and Betrayal

The poem contrasts the coldness of the winter wind with the colder nature of human ingratitude. The speaker emphasizes that the emotional pain of being forgotten or betrayed by others is much sharper than the physical discomfort caused by nature's elements. This suggests a theme of human cruelty and betrayal.

2. Nature vs. Human Relationships

A significant theme is the contrast between nature and human relationships. While nature, represented by the winter wind, is harsh and unpleasant, it is predictable and less painful compared to the inconsistency and falsehood of human connections. Nature's harshness is seen as less hurtful than the emotional wounds inflicted by others.

3. Disillusionment with Friendship and Love

The lines "Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly" express a cynical view of human relationships, suggesting that friendship is often insincere, and love is foolish. This conveys the speaker's disillusionment with friendship and love, portraying them as unreliable and shallow.

4. Resilience and Endurance

The refrain “Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly” reflects a theme of endurance and resilience. Despite the speaker’s acknowledgment of human flaws, there is a sense of acceptance and resilience symbolized by the evergreen holly, which endures the harsh winter. This suggests the theme of surviving life’s challenges and disappointments.

5. The Harshness of Life

The poem acknowledges the unavoidable difficulties of life, such as bitter weather and human ingratitude. The speaker seems to accept these hardships with a somewhat resigned attitude, recognizing that life, in general, is full of harshness, both from nature and from people.

6. Melancholy and Resignation

There is an undercurrent of melancholy throughout the poem. The speaker is not bitterly angry, but rather resigned to the idea that human relationships will inevitably involve betrayal and disappointment. Despite this, the repeated refrain and the reference to the holly suggest that the speaker continues on with a certain degree of acceptance.

These themes reflect the poet’s view of the complexity of human nature, the inevitability of pain in relationships, and the importance of resilience in the face of life’s harsh realities.

Analyze the perspective of the poet as the feelings of an afflicted man.

In "Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind," Shakespeare expresses the perspective of a poet who embodies the feelings of an afflicted man grappling with the harsh realities of life, particularly the pain of human ingratitude and betrayal. Here’s an analysis of this perspective:

1. Emotional Pain and Suffering:

The speaker reflects on the emotional turmoil caused by the ingratitude of others. The comparison of the bitter winter wind to human relationships highlights the depth of his suffering. The poet's feelings echo the inner conflict of someone who feels deeply wounded, revealing a profound sense of disappointment in humanity.

2. Isolation:

The imagery of the "bitter sky" and "freeze, freeze" conveys a sense of isolation and desolation. The afflicted man feels alone in his struggles, as if the coldness of nature mirrors the emotional distance between him and those he once considered friends. This isolation enhances the theme of feeling unloved or forgotten.

3. Cynicism Towards Relationships:

The line "Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly" reveals a cynical view of relationships. The poet portrays the idea that many friendships are superficial, lacking true depth or sincerity. This perspective reflects the disillusionment of an afflicted man who has experienced betrayal or disappointment, leading to a jaded view of love and companionship.

4. Resilience Amidst Hardship:

Despite the speaker's evident pain, there is a sense of resilience. The repeated refrain "Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly" suggests an acceptance of life's difficulties. The green holly symbolizes endurance and strength, indicating that even in the face of betrayal and harsh realities, the speaker recognizes the necessity of moving forward and finding a way to cope.

5. Acceptance of Life's Harshness:

The poet reflects an understanding that life is filled with hardships. By comparing the emotional pain of ingratitude to the harshness of nature, the speaker acknowledges the inevitability of suffering. This acceptance, while tinged with melancholy, suggests a mature understanding of life's complexities, illustrating the perspective of someone who has faced affliction but seeks to find meaning within it.

Conclusion:

Shakespeare's perspective in the poem resonates with the feelings of an afflicted man—someone grappling with emotional pain, disillusionment, and the harsh realities of relationships. Through vivid imagery and poignant language, the poet captures the complexities of human emotions, showcasing both the depths of despair and the resilience required to navigate life's challenges.