

[W6] IN THE DESERT [Stephen Crane]

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QUESTION

ANSWER

What is the speaker?

• The narrator
• The creature

What happens?

• The narrator sees a creature
• The creature held his heart in his hands and ate it (if we take it literally)
• The narrator asked if it was good
• The creature said that it was bitter but he likes it because it is bitter
• And also because it is his own heart

Where is this happening?

• In the desert

When is this happening?

• Sometime in the past "I saw", "held", "ate"

Who is speaking?

• The narrator - "I"

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

QUESTION

ANSWER

What is the speaker?

• Someone who oral communicates to the creature
• Possibly a creature too

Why is he going into the desert?

• Somewhere where we can find creatures

Where exactly is this desert?

• Somewhere where we can find creatures

Who, or what, is this creature?

• The speaker recognizes the creature

Why does the speaker call him heart?

• There is nothing alive to eat in the desert
• Death: barren, no vegetation
• He has learnt to accept the bitterness of his heart and has grown to like it

ANALYSIS

LINE #

QUOTE/EVIDENCE

TECHNIQUE

ANALYSIS

1

In the desert

Metaphor
Symbol

• Creature figure
Ground: could be people who are inflicting self-harm or having self-destructive behaviour (examples: children self-harming, suicide bombers, drug addicts etc.)

3

Who, squatting upon the ground

• Squatting is animal-like behaviour
Shows difference in height between creature and narrator

4

Held his heart in his hands

• Hands: human feature (imb not a possession)

7

I said: "Is it good, friend?"

• Tone of character: relatively calm, confident, curious
• Tone of poem: the narrator is compassionate to the creature
• Tone of writer: horrifying! Sombre, miserable feelings, gloomy, yet realistic
• Friend: implying that the creature is not harmful or threatening

8

"It is bitter - bitter," he answered "But I like it"

• They enjoy self-harm
Because they are tired of life
• Therefore, social policies which punish these people aren't work because they need more love, not more hate

9

Because it is bitter,

10

And because it is my heart

• Not much direct information
It evokes feelings/emotions and ideas

11

"It is bitter - bitter," he answered "But I like it"

Repetition

12

"I saw a creature, naked, bestial,

Attention

13

"It is bitter - bitter," he answered "But I like it"

14

Because it is bitter,

15

And because it is my heart

2 TYPES OF TONE

1. Tone of character/narrator/voice

2. Tone of writer/author

SOME FURTHER QUESTIONS

There is very little specific information in this poem, and so we are invited to use our imagination

What kind of feelings and thoughts might the following words in the poem be evoking, through their connotations? Start with the crude question: 'Is the word positive or negative?' and then try to produce more precise descriptions. Don't forget that a word may have both positive and negative connotations, and the specific context will influence the way the you interpret it, along with your own particular perspective and interpretation of the poem (but you must be able to give literary evidence and explanation)

Word

Connotation

desert

• Negative
• Barren/warish landscape
• Boredom
• Loneliness/isolation
• Treasure - Ancient Egypt
• Bare

naked

• Negative connotation
• The idea of being naked is very primitive
• Vulnerability
• When you are naked, nothing is protecting your body and every part of your body can be seen by everyone
• Positive connotation
• Human touch is necessary in human life
• People are usually in some state of naked when they are having sexual intercourse
• And since some weird comes
• So it can connect back to the very core of humanity and the core of life

heart

• Positive connotation
• Connotations of love
• Literal meaning: heart is a vital organ that pumps blood around your body

eat

• Positive
• Eating is necessary for survival
• Some people find a lot of pleasure in eating
• Negative
• Cannibism eating involves taking a life
• Something that once was living and breathing becomes meat, blood and bones
• Cannibism and other living being's lives to become food
• Food: characterise the consumption of living beings - eating

good

• Positive connotation
• Synonym for great, pleasant

friend

• Positive connotation
• An ally, someone you know - someone you recognise - someone you trust
• Not harmful or threatening

bitter

• Negative connotation
• A negative taste that nobody likes

The eating of his own heart in the desert can be interpreted as the having his own unmet emotional needs which are leading him to the new world, and depicting the absurdity of his own place and his own surroundings, which is the state of mind in the desert. And as long as he becomes naked, he begins to appear primitive, as one of the early humans before civilization, when they were forced to face the wild. What this creature is doing is, as an act of self-defense, to show us that we are not alone.

from <https://www.studocu.com/row/document/university-of-south-alberta/english-101/stephen-crane-the-first-born-essay/100000000>

IN THE DESERT [Stephen Crane]

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.

I said: "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter - bitter," he answered "But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart."

- Stephen Crane
THE FIRST-BORN [Jack Davis]
Where are my first-born, said the brown land, sighing:
They came out of my womb long, long ago
They were formed out of my dust - why, why are they crying
And the light of their being barely aglow?

I strain my ears for the sound of their laughter:
Where are the laws and the legends I gave?
Tell me what happened, you whom I bore after:
Now only their spirits dwell in the caves.

You are silent, you cringe from replying.
A question is there, like a blow in the face.
The answer is there when I look at the dying.
At the death and neglect of my dark proud race.

- Jack Davis
FROM "STORY ABOUT FEELING" [Bill Neidjia]
We'll tell you about this story
About story where you lie, laying down
Tree, grass, star...
Because star and tree working with you...
We got blood pressure
But same thing...spirit on your body.
But e working with you.
Even nice wind e blow...having a sleep...
Because that spirit e with you

Listen carefully this, you can hear me.
I'm telling you because earth just like mother
And father and brother of you.
That tree same thing.
Your body, my body I suppose
I'm same as you...anyone.

The working when you sleeping and dream.
...I'm telling you this because the land for us,
Never change road, never change.
Places for us, earth for us,
Star, moon, tree animal,
No matter what sort of a animal, bird or snake...
All that animal same us, Our friend that.

EZRA POUND'S PROPOSITION [Robert Hass]

Beauty is sensuality, and sensuality
is the fertility of the earth and the fertility
Of the earth is economics.

Though he is no recommendation
For poets on the subject of finance,
I thought of him in the thick heat
Of the Bangkok night.

Not more than fourteen,
she saunters up to you
Outside the Shangri-la Hotel
And says, in plausible English,
"How about a party, big guy?"

Here is more or less how it works:
The World Bank arranges the credit and the dam
Floods three hundred villages, and the villagers find their way
To the city where their daughters melt into the beaming streets,
And the dam's great turbine, beautifully toolied
In Lund or Dresden or Detroit, financed
By Lazard Freres in Paris or the Morgan Bank in New York,
Enabled by judicious gifts from Bechtel of San Francisco
Or Halliburton in Houston to the local political elite,
Spun by the force of rushing water,
Have become hives of shimmering silver
And, down river, they throw that bluish thrub of light
Across her cheekbones and her lovely skin,
- Robert Hass

THE SKETCH [Mike Heald]

Attenborough is shimmering as I enter,
their young stares intense, glistening,
as those who held in sight
a victim of dramatic irony.
Turning, I see a sketch
of my profile on the blackboard,
so accurate and alive it winds me.
Their laughter is released
and I let my breath go with
the benign, satisfied shrouding.

When they've gone,
I face the likeness again:
It fixes me so surely outside myself
that I feel untidely, robbed of my contours.
With three broad wipes
I make it vanish,
but as I step from the room notice
the dust cloud still hovering

- Mike Heald
KUALA LUMPUR [Eargus Ong]
Mythic place
to a Malaysian town-boy,
you born with all those icons,
symbolic of some National identity
Kl, let's be frank
Do you know of your international reputation
for smog
and oppressive federal government
famous for your Twin Towers.

famous for your parliament building,
infamous for Armar?
KL, you wondrous shopping mall,
you mighty conglomerate of business and finance
you stand so proud as the nation's
heart and lung.
You are first in the news
best in entertainment.
Earliest to receive the latest TV stations
and always the one with the topdug schools.
You're a hip hotspot, KL,
what is it about your presence
that has stolen so many Malay poems
about young and hopeful farmer's sons,
travelling to you in search of a job?
They don't have happy endings.
I know them, high school Malay poems.
They don't have happy endings.
And all of your people,
oh, you KL people.
You are so KL
for not knowing much about what's outside
your little Silicon Valley
Your handphone culture
Your Starbucks Coffee
Your theme parks
and Your world record flagpole.
You, cosmopolitan Metropolis
with all those nightclubs and exciting hang-out spots,
I'll always equate you with your ugly bus station.
Notorious little capital.
KL, you are cold and rich and hip
KL, you yuppie city wearing beepers.
KL, why the hell are you so big?

~ Fergus Ong (1989 -)