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An Explication of Lorna Crozier's "Mother and I, Walking"

David Penner, April 28, 2005

Lorna Crozier's "Mother and I, Walking" (Geddes, 681) is a free verse, non-metrical poem of four unequal stanzas. Literally, it is about an unnamed little girl walking home with her mother at night in the cold. Linear analysis reveals deeper meaning. This poem considers the value of a parent's love.

The first stanza of the poem illustrates how the little girl perceives the world without her father. Whether "[f]ather is gone again" (l. 1) because of work or because he is involved in debauchery is unclear. From the child's point of view, it does not matter. As the "streets [are] empty" and "everyone is inside" in "the warm glow of their stoves," (ll. 2, 3, 5), feelings of loneliness, separateness and want pervade the girl.

The second stanza associates the child's cold with disparity. The poem's only alliteration is reserved to emphasize the girl's bitter cold: "The cold cries" and "We wade through wind" (ll. 6, 7).¹ The cold "pushes" snow under her "scarf" and "collar" and up her "sleeves." All of the coldness is directed to her heart. How might her feeling change if she felt the love of a parent? The third stanza reveals an abundance of clausal parallelism. The contrast of "Mother" (l. 10) with "Father" (l. 1) shows the girl's shift in perception from feeling the absence of her father to embracing the presence of her mother. Being "push[ed]" (l. 7) and "pull[ed]" (l. 9) shows how helpless the girl is to control her situation. Luckily, being "pull[ed] inside" her mother's coat allays her feelings felt in the first stanza. Without father, others enjoy the "warm glow of their stoves" (l. 5); with mother, the little girl enjoys "the warm rise of her belly" (l. 14).

The last stanza shows how she is able to reflect positively on the world because of her mother's love. Looking down at their tracks, the little girl notices the oneness of her and her mother. She is following in her footsteps. What had previously been "cries under their boots" are now the solid "tracks of one animal" (l. 17). A view of animalification

helps simply her problems. What was once viewed with disparity becomes the "open, / strange and nocturnal" (ll. 9-10). As they are together, the girl is not bothered.

"Mother and I, Walking" forces us to recognize the value of a loving parent. Crozier's equation of the bitter cold with a lack of love is not a surprise as "the extremes of the natural world in Saskatchewan," she says, "have given rise to [her] sense of the fragility of happiness, love and life" (qtd. in Geddes 674). Even though the poem propagates a "woman: good; man: bad" mentality, it would be unfair to recognize this as part of the theme. A negligent parent could be father or mother. Time spent between a parent and a child cannot be overestimated.

1 If partly autobiographical, Crozier is referring to the Saskatchewan winter: a place where -30°C is not uncommon. "I've tried to thread the wind and sky into my poems" (Crozier, qtd. in Geddes 674).

Works Cited

Crozier, Lorna. "Mother and I, Walking." *Angels of Flesh, Angels of Silence* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988. Rpt. in 20th- Century Poetry and Poetics. 4th ed. Ed. Gary Geddes. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1996. 681.

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