Half-Past Two – A Selection Of Commentary

Genre:

* Nostalgic, narrative poem
* Free verse
* Timeless in tone

Audience:

* Evokes memories of childhood

Subject:

* Child admonished
* Then forgotten
* Child’s experiences of non-numerical time compared against his compartmentalized view of the world

Purpose:

* To respect the childhood experience?

'Half Past Two' is a poem in which Fanthorpe describes how a young child is given a detention for an unspecified misdemeanour and is forgotten by his teacher. Fanthorpe draws on her experience as a teacher to describe the scene as seen through the child's eyes.

The Title of the poem tells me a lot of information even before I read the poem. The information it puts across is that: A boy is told to stay behind until 'Half Past Two' but this has no-meaning to him because he has no concept of 'time'. The boy can’t tell the time but yet he divides the day up into familiar, recognisable units, as in 'schooltime', 'lunchtime', 'hometime'.

Tone: "Half Past Two" uses a lot of different tones, tones such as: Nostalgic/Innocent/Dream Like!

Stanza One: In this stanza Fanthorpe includes the first of his markers of the day which the boy recognizes as a time in the day.

This is set out as a 'compound word': 'Schooltime'. Fanthorpe uses capital letters at the beginning of the words "Something Very Wrong", he does this to show us how significant and important the incident was to the teacher, Whereas the words "(I forgot what it was)" and the use of parenthesis (brackets) show that it wasn't all that important to the boy.

Stanza Two: Again in this stanza, Fanthorpe uses the use of capital letters to give the teacher a God- Like status "She" in the boys eyes. Also the use of repetition, of 'Something Very Wrong' shows the 'serious' nature of his wrongdoing. In this stanza the words 'Half Past Two' shall come across to us for the first time (except for the title). These words are used to tell the boy, what time he has to stay in the school- room till.

Stanza Three: Human nature; She's cross, He's scared...... Result? .... He is abandoned! Note the use of again of a capital for "Time" to show the importance of this mysterious entity.

Stanza Four: In this stanza the boy describes his version and understanding of a 'clock', the boy tells the time of day by dividing the day up into recognisable units that he understands these are written as 'compound words' in the poem e.g. 'Gettinguptime'. I acknowledged the use of enjambment to lead us into Stanza five.

Stanza Five: In my mind I think this stanza tells us a lot about the poems contexts. Here the boy shows that he can recognise that significant, repeated events occur at the same time each day. 'But not Half Past Two' reinforces the fact that he cannot tell the time, although he is familiar with the clock face.

Stanza Six: The boy uses the language employed by adults teaching the time to small children. "He couldn't click its Language". This one quote tells us that the boy does not understand the clock and the time on the clock, he does not know how to read off the clock, it is like it speaks a different language to you and what the boy speaks. In this stanza there is use of ambiguity in the word "Click", this has two meanings here, one of them is the understanding of the clock and the other meaning is the sound the clock makes as it moves round and points towards the time, so we are able to read off the clock face accurately with the use of the hands. The boy recognises the 'hands' as "Two legs for walking" presenting to us that he knows what a clock face looks like.

Stanza Seven: In this stanza the boy is not confined by time or restricted by deadlines. He is able to escape through sublimation into physical sensations, which are explained in stanza eight.

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“Half-Past Two” is one of the cutest poems about the innocent part of our lives written by U. A. Fanthorpe. The title is young Fanthorpe’s way of disapproving of the detention his teacher gave him without telling him what is the “Very Wrong” thing he did, therefore not teaching him anything. The only thing that mattered to her was relieving her own anger that she forgot that the little boy has no idea about the time as he hasn’t been taught it yet. The poem opens with an attractive opening “Once upon a schooltime”, which serves to attract our attention and is, indeed, the way any child opens a story. As the other two poems, this poet has his childhood engraved in his mind and he recounts everything about this incident with minutely details. He remembers how he did “Something Very Wrong” and put his teacher in a “cross” mood which got him stuck into “staying in the school-room till half-past two”. The usage of capital letters in “Something Very Wrong” conveys the way the teacher talked cruelly and sternly to him. However, ironically the wrong he did was devalued with saying “I forget what it was” as he only remembers the fear being accused of the “Wrong”, but not what it is. This shows how the teacher failed to teach him anything and only scared the little boy. While being “cross” she expressed her anger by giving him a punishment which he didn’t understand and he yearned to tell her that “she hadn’t taught him Time” but “was too scared” of getting into more trouble for being “wicked”. The poet’s choices of the words “cross” and “wicked” and his personified visual image of the clock with its “little eyes” and “two long legs for walking” are indeed the typical vocabulary heard in primary schools. Upon hearing the words “Half-Past Two” he went over “all the important times he knew” but it wasn’t in any of them and that shows how it was of no importance 2 him since he doesn’t value the teacher who scared him. In contrast with his “timeformykisstime”, which was the time his grandparents showered him with all the love and care he needed, it’s of no wonder that he doesn’t value “Half-Past Two” time much. The poet takes us with him to the timeless world were he couldn’t “click” or speak the “language” of time. The onomatopoeia in the word “click” engages our sense of hearing to the utmost level. The loneliness and boredom are successfully conveyed with the repetition of the word “into” in the 8th stanza as he had no choice but to wait till the end of this predicament. The oxymoron he uses in saying “the silence noise his hangnail made” enables me to imagine the silence in the “school-room”. He depersonalizes the teacher using the word “scuttling”, which is an animal-like term, and doesn’t even name her and refers to her in 3rd person. The poet uses italics to express the teacher’s direct speech “my goodness, I forgot all about you”, which shows how the whole matter meant nothing to her. The poor boy’s torture was of no value to her. When dismissed he felt like a prisoner who is free at last, as he got back to the world of time he knew and understood. “He never forgot” this experience in which minutes seemed like “ever”. Fanthorpe portrays himself as a person who is lost in a “clockless land” “where time hides tick-less waiting to be born”.

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