

Dislocation

by Sheila Templeton

Scottish poet Sheila Templeton wrote this poem at the time of the refugee crisis in Bosnia.

Read the poem and answer the questions.

Dislocation

Somewhere in my mind, at my shoulder
he's still there; that pause he takes
on the edge of a rocky path
forcing itself up the grim slap
of a wintry mountain.

His jacket's too big, woollen,
twenty years out of fashion
a man's jacket – bleached grey
like the sky and the low clouds.
He's going to be tall, but his body
still has that soft outline
that tender plumpness
boys have – just before they grow.

His mother climbs ahead of him
holding tight to a little one.
It's sleeting on their bundled lives.

He stops, looks back at what's below
whatever is left. Even from this distance,
of camera lens – and the miles between –
I can see, more clearly than I'd choose,
he hates that he is crying.

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Questions

- 1) Before you read the poem, think about what the title suggests the poem will be about.
- 2) Read Stanza 1. Select 3 words/phrases which you think suggest the journey being made is difficult. For each word/phrase selected, say why it suggests difficulty.
- 3) Read Stanza 2. Which words/phrases arouse your sympathy for the person being described? Why is this?
- 4) Does the fact that he is wearing "a man's jacket" suggest anything about his situation?
- 5) What atmosphere is created by the references to the sky and clouds in Stanza 2?
- 6) Read Stanza 3. What suggests that the mother is protective of her family?
- 7) Think about the phrase "their bundled lives". What does it make you imagine about their situation before and on the journey?
- 8) In the final stanza, what do you think "whatever is left" suggests about where they have come from?
- 9) Why do you think the boy "hates that he is crying"?
- 10) From your reading of the final stanza, who do think the speaker/narrator is in this poem?
- 11) Look again at Stanzas 1 and 4. What words/phrases tell you that witnessing this experience has left a lasting impression on the speaker/narrator? What does "more clearly than I'd choose" suggest about his or her feelings now?
- 12) Think again about the title of the poem. Say whether you think it is appropriate and why.
- 13) What do you think is the purpose of this poem? Who is the intended reader?

Please note that the following answers are suggestions only! These may not all be offered, and other replies should be expected which will be worthy of discussion.

- 1) Connections will probably be made to literal meaning, e.g. being displaced from normal position, being shifted out of place-normally refers to bones.
- 2) Any of: "pause"; "on the edge" (could suggest literal danger but also tension or life about to change); "rocky"; "forcing itself"; "grim slap"; "wintry"; "mountain".
- 3) Any of: "too big"; "twenty years out of fashion"; "a man's jacket"; "bleached grey"; "soft outline"; "tender plumpness"; "before they grow".
- 4) Possibly wearing someone older's (his father's?) clothes. Connotations of needing to do a task normally done by someone older. Perhaps flagging up idea that father is missing from scene described.
- 5) "grey like the sky" and "low clouds" suggest weather is threatening and dismal, therefore creating a depressing/frightening atmosphere.
- 6) Possibly "climbs ahead of him" (leading the way/testing the ground); and she is "holding tight to a little one" to protect the child.
- 7) Before the journey - they have had to hastily pack what they can carry. On the journey – all they have now are in these bundles.
- 8) Possible references to destruction/ damage to their homes/ violent attack/war /unlikelihood of return there etc.
- 9) Possibly he does not want to seem weak/wants to be strong for his family/ wishes he felt more grown-up/ resents what situation is doing to him.
- 10) Could be someone looking at a photo of this event OR (more likely) a reporter/photographer/war correspondent/other person who witnessed it when it happened.
- 11) Stanza 1 - "Somewhere in my mind"; "at my shoulder"; "he's still there".
Stanza 4 – "Even from this distance (of camera lens-and the miles between) I can see".
"more clearly than I'd choose" possibly suggests s/he finds it painful.
- 12) Possible connotations might be suggested with family having to flee their homes and/or usual surroundings/ being displaced/painful situation/trauma/harm; therefore likely to seem appropriate.
- 13) Possible purposes – to describe a scene/ to raise awareness of the difficulties of people in such situations/ to arouse emotions.

Intended reader – someone previously unaware/interested people etc.