

Rain on the Roof

by Coates Kinney



Central Idea of the Poem

The poem describes the poet's thoughts when he hears the sound of rain falling on the tiled roof of his cottage. The sound produced by the rain reminds the poet of a memory of his mother. This memory stay in his mind and calm him.

Through rain, the poet highlights the healing power of nature. According to him, the music produced by the simple act of falling of rain holds the power to bring back some of our fondest memories. These memories, then, provides us with comfort and calm us.

Explanation of the Poem

Stanza 1

When the humid shadows hover
Over all the starry spheres,
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,
What a bliss to press the pillow
Of a cottage-chamber bed,
And lie listening to the patter
Of the soft rain overhead!

Word Meanings

Humid shadows – clouds, Hover – hang, Starry spheres – stars, Melancholy – sad, bliss – utmost joy, Cottage-chamber – room in a cottage, Patter – sound of rain falling on the roof, overhead – above

Explanation

In these lines, the poet describes a rainy night.

The poet says that the stars in the sky are not visible as they are covered by the dark rainy clouds. The sky looks sad and the rain looks as if tears are falling from human eyes. This weather represents the poet's sorrowful mood. In such a mood, the only thing that can bring joy in the poet's heart is to lay down on the pillow of his bed in his cottage and listen to the soft sound of the rain falling on the roof.

Stanza 2

Every tinkle on the shingles
Has an echo in the heart;
And a thousand dreamy fancies
Into busy being start,
And a thousand recollections
Weave their air-threads into woof,
As I listen to the patter
Of the rain upon the roof.

Word Meanings

Tinkle – ringing sound, Shingles – rectangular tiles used on sloping roofs, Echo – reverberation, Dreamy – fancies into busy being imaginary stories in my mind, Recollections – memories/ remembrances, Into woof – weaved into woven picture.

Explanation In these lines, the poet now describes how the raindrops make a tinkling sound as they fall on the tiled rooftop of his cottage. According to the poet, each sound made by the rain is echoed by the beatings of his heart (heart beat). In other words, the sound of the rain affects the poet deeply. As he is listening to the sound, many images (dreamy fancies) come into his mind. He starts recollecting many memories of his childhood. These memories appear to be interwoven together to form a beautiful picture.

Stanza 3

Now in memory comes my mother,
As she used in years ago,
To regard the darling dreamers,
Ere she left them till the dawn:
O! I feel her fond look on me
As I list to this refrain
Which is played upon the shingles
By the patter of the rain.

Word Meanings

Agone – gone by, Regard – observe, Darling dreamers – her sleeping children, Ere – before, Dawn – morning, List – listen, Refrain – part of song that is repeated, Played upon – the sound coming due to rain falling on.

Explanation In these lines, the poet says that out of the many memories the poet recollects, he identifies one fond memory of his mother. He remember how many years ago, his mother used to look at him and his siblings lovingly while they slept and used to dream.

She would look at her sleeping children every night because she knew she won't see them till the next morning. The poet can still feel the look of his mother while he lays on his bed and listens to the soft musical sound of the rain falling on the roof.

Poetic Devices Used in the Poem

- **Transferred Epithet** A figure of speech in which an epithet (or adjective) grammatically qualifies a noun other than the person or thing it is actually describing.

Stanza 1 In this stanza, the poet transfers his melancholic mood from himself to the darkness of the night in which the poem is set.

- **Personification** A figure of speech which is used for an inanimate object or animal/birds look or feel human.

Stanza 1 (Lines 3 - 4) And the melancholy darkness/ gently weeps in the form of rainy tears, (The poet personifies darkness by giving it the human ability to shed tears).

- **Refrain** A phrase, verse or group of verses repeated at intervals throughout a song or poem, especially at the end of each stanza. At the end of each stanza, the 'patter of the rain' is repeated.

- **Metaphor** A device which compares two things or qualities which are unlike.

Stanza 1 (Line 1) When the humid shadows hover (the word 'shadows' actually means 'clouds').

Stanza 2 (Lines 13 - 14) And a thousand recollections / weave their bright hues into woof. (The poet compares his memories to a fabric that is being woven with many coloured threads together).

Stanza 3 (Line 18): To survey her darling dreamers. ('Her darling dreamers' is a metaphor for her children who are asleep and probably dreaming).

- **Onomatopoeia** Using a word which suggests the meaning by its sound.

In each stanza, the word 'patter' is used that imitates the real sound of the rain falling.

In stanza 2, the word 'tinkle' is used that imitates the real sound of the rain falling on the shingles of the roof.

- **Alliteration** Repetition of initial consonant sounds in the same line.

Stanza 1 (Line 1) When the humid shadows hover. ('Humid' and 'hover' have the similar first syllable).

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

I Thinking about the Poem (Page 42)

- 1 What do the following phrases mean to you?
Discuss in class.
- (i) Humid shadows
 - (ii) Starry spheres
 - (iii) What a bliss
 - (iv) A thousand dreamy fancies into busy being start
 - (v) A thousand recollections weave their air-threads into woof

Ans. (i) Dark clouds laden with (full of) droplets of rainwater.
(ii) Stars in the sky.
(iii) Utmost joy experienced by the poet.
(iv) This refers to the various imaginary thoughts and fantasies that are aroused in the poet's mind.
(v) This means that the poet recollects numerous (many) memories that intermingle (connect together) to form a beautiful picture.

- 2 What does the poet like to do when it rains?

Ans. When it rains, the poet feels delighted to lie with his head pressed against the pillow of his bed in his cottage and listen to the patter (sound) of the soft rain on the tiles of the cottage roof.

- 3 What is the single major memory that comes to the poet? Who are the "darling dreamers" he refers to?

Ans. The single major memory that comes to the poet is that of his mother and her fond looks when she put the poet into the bed to sleep.

The 'darling dreamers' refer to the poet and his siblings in their childhood.

- 4 Is the poet now a child? Is his mother still alive?

Ans. No, the poet is not a child now. He is a grown up man.

His mother is probably not alive, as he says in lines 17–18 that she comes in his memories just like she used to put him in his bed to sleep as she used to in the past.

II Thinking about the Poem (Page 42)

- 1 When you were a young child, did your mother tuck you in, as the poet's did?

Ans. Yes, my mother used to tuck (put) me in when I was a young child, just like the poet's mother did. (answers may vary)

- 2 Do you like rain? What do you do when it rains steadily or heavily as described in the poem?

Ans. Yes, I like rain.

When it rains steadily I get into my house and enjoy the weather with family. It is a wonderful experience. I also enjoy eating some tasty snacks and sometimes love to drench myself in the rain. (answers may vary)

- 3 Does everybody have a cosy bed to lie in when it rains? Look around you and describe how different kinds of people or animals spend time, seek shelter etc, during rain.

Ans. No, everybody is not fortunate enough to have a cosy bed to lie in when it rains. Not everybody gets to enjoy the comfort of cosy homes during rain.

I have seen animals seeking shelter under trees and under the tin roofs of small roadside stalls.

The people passing by chase away these animals and try to fit themselves under the limited space of these shops. The poor animals are left to get drenched in the open. The shopkeepers of such stalls are delighted as the people waiting for the rain ask for tea and whatever snacks are available with them. (answers may vary)