

BRUEGHEL'S WINTER

Introduction

This poem is about the painting *The Hunters in the snow* also known as *The Return of the Hunters* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. The Hunters in the snow and the series to which it belongs were made for a merchant in Antwerp that had asked Brueghel to make paintings which were study of the Labours of the months: they are *The Winter*, *The Hay Harvest*, *The Gloomy Day*, *The Return Of The Herd*, *The Harvesters*, *And The Hunters in The Snow*.

Facts about the painting

The painting is full of activities of winter. This painting was made during renaissance. 1516s was the time of religious revolution in the Netherlands. It is more different from Northern painting. There is no such landscape in Netherlands. This painting is a reminder that Brueghel had actually made his way from Northern Europe across the Alps to Italy. So this painting is not an actual view but a composed, partially imagined, composite landscape activated by human figures.

Interpretation of the images

We start from left hand side of the painting.

I. The hunters in the snow

- The painting shows a wintry scene.
- The hunters are in the foregrounds taking up a large portion and they are returning from a voyage accompanied by their dogs.
- The hunters appear to trudge tiredly and the dogs appear downtrodden and miserable.
- One man carries the 'corpse of a fox' illustrating the paucity of the hunt.
- We can also see the footprints of a rabbit. Probably, it must have been escaped from the hunters.
- There are also several adults and a child preparing food at an inn.

II. Peasants enjoying the wintry scene

- We see a woman pulling somebody else on a little sleigh.
- There is a woman over the bridge probably carrying some firewood.
- We can also see people pulling each other on the ice. And children playing and chasing each other.
- There is also a man about to hit a ball with a stick on the ice playing ice hockey.
- We also see snow covered roofs of the houses and numerous trees that are bare of leaves
- There are some birds that soar through the space even into the very distant hills

About the poet

Sir Walter de la Mare born on 25th April 1873 was an English poet. He was educated in London at St. Paul's Cathedral Choir School, which he left at the age of 16. His career as writer started from about 1895. He was a short story teller and novelist. A lot of poems were written for children along with many fairy-tale like mystery stories. *The Listeners* is one of his most famous poems.

Explanation of the poem

We begin from

“Jagg’d mountain peaks and sliding go.”

Here, the poet starts from the background of the painting. He begins with jagged and peaks of the mountains stand like the wall in the snowy valley. They stand adjacent to a snowy town. And what catches his eyes are of churches, farms, thick forest which have shed their leaves. Added to these in the snowy field we can see figures in black shapes occupied in various activities like skating and sliding.

Now we will proceed with next part of the poem

“To left..... into space a crow.”

In these lines the poet takes us to the left side of the painting. Here, we can see an inn with gables. And outside the inn some peasants are working with fire and a child is watching everything. And now poet calls our attention to something surprising. Under the naked trees, hunters are marching in row with sinister spear. This indicates that the hunters are walking with heavy steps. Hunters are followed by their dogs in the snow, breathing noisily while sniffing. At the end, poet brings our attention to a lean crow swooping like an arrow across the air or the sky.

Exercises (exercises that are given below should be done in the note book)

Difficult words and their meanings

Jagged	with rough, sharp points
Blaze	fire
Peasants	farmers
Trudge	march
Huntsmen	persons who hunt
Sinister	making us feel that something worse might happen
Lean	bend
Swoop	dive, leap
Copse	a small dense forest
Gabled tavern	an inn with gables

In sharp perspective
Snuffing
Athwart

noticeably looking bigger
breathing noisily while sniffing something
across

Answer the questions

1. What do these phrases refer to?
 - a. Wall in the wild
Ans. The mountains in the valley are like a wall.
 - b. Bare copse
Ans. It is winter and all the trees have shed their leaves.
 - c. Ink black shapes
Ans. Silhouettes or the dark black outlines of the people in the distance.
 - d. Fields in flood
Ans. Fields filled with snow – the land and lake are frozen.
2. *Beneath naked trees – in sharp perspective set a-row – trudge huntsmen*
 - a. Where are the hunters?
Ans. The hunters are walking under the trees in the valley.
 - b. What does set *a-row* mean?
Ans. Set a-row means arranged in a line.
 - c. Why are they walking in a row?
Ans. They are walking one behind the other because they are walking back home after a tiring and unsuccessful hunt.
3. *Lo* is used to call attention, usually to something sudden or surprising.
 - a. What is surprising about the hunters?
Ans. The overall description is happy but the hunters are sad in contrast.
 - b. Have the hunters had a successful hunt?
Ans. No, the hunters have not had a successful hunt.
 - c. When do you trudge – when you are cheerful or sad?
Ans. You trudge when you are sad.

Appreciate the poem

1. When the poet describes the painting which way does his eye move? What does he describe first – image from far background to images in the foreground or the other round?
Ans. The poet describes the images from the background to those in the foreground.
2. The poet describes some of the landscape and fallen activities in the painting in short, quick phrases. Can you spot the images he has not included?

Ans. The images the poet has not included are fallen branches, woman walking in the snow, snow covered roofs, two birds sitting on the tree, a bridge and a person walking across it carrying firewood and a horse cart.

Poem lines to learn (first 6 lines)

“Jagg’d mountain peaks and skies ice-green..... curling, skating, and sliding go”.