

Piano and Drums Essay

Introduction

In the poem "Piano and Drums" by Gabriel Okara, Okara shows the contrasts between the past life and the modern world. Some aspects in his poem date back before the beginning of civilization and other aspects are of the current day and age.

Theme

The theme of the poem is the effect that the music has on the poet. The first stanza is the poet's response to hearing the jungle drums. So we can say that he thinks of them as a primitive instrument and he believes that there is a certain amount of violence in the rapid beating of the drums.

Then in the third stanza, when he hears the piano, the poet is telling us the effect that this piano has on him. We can see that he thinks of the piano as a complex instrument. The poet also sees the piano as a different culture from the drums. He sees the complexities in the piano. He uses technical words to show this complexity "coaxing diminuendo".

Structure

The poem consists of four stanzas. The first three stanzas are telling us the story and the last is a conclusion. It seems that the stanzas represent the evolution of music or life.

The first stanza being of the primal age where there were only drums. "Primal youth and the beginning". Here the word primal youth has been used and this means primitive. This shows that the first stanza could be the early, primitive life.

The second stanza shows us growth of the ages in comparison to a baby. "In my mother's lap a suckling; at once I'm walking simple paths with no innovations". Here a baby is out of the lap of his/her mother and has started walking. This shows growth.

Then in the third stanza we hear the piano from "far-away lands". This shows a different culture or a new age taking over. The piano, a much more complex instrument than the drum has been introduced and this means that a step towards modern times has been taken.

The last stanza is the conclusion where the primal drums and complex piano are brought together. As it is now in the modern age where both exist. However the conclusion does not conclude everything, as the poem ends with the man still having conflicts with himself. This shows that life is not over and that it will continue.

Tone

In the first stanza the tone is violent and aggressive, “bleeding flesh”. The second stanza starts in the same tone of violence but midway through changes to a very calm state, “flowers pulsing”. Then in the third stanza the tone is stays quite tranquil. The last stanza is still calm, with no sort of violent image that we saw in the beginning of the poem. Though I feel this stanza has a mystic feeling.

The change of tone is in the second stanza when it goes from a violent tone to a state of peace and calmness. This affects the theme because the tone change makes us look at the rest of the poem in a different way. At the beginning of the poem we look at everything in a violent form but after the second stanza we think of the piano in a peaceful way.

Imagery

The poet has used his words very carefully. He chose to use certain words and to place particular words next to each other. This creates images in our head and helps us to understand the poem more.

“Raw like bleeding flesh”. This is a simile used and this creates a violent image in our minds. The effect of this simile on the first stanza is that it puts a violent image in our mind and therefore while reading the rest of the stanza we vision it in a violent way. “Panther ready to pounce” and “Hunter crouch with spears poised”. These can be seen as violent as they are ready to fight as they are expecting a disturbance.

The poet used juxtaposition a few times in the poem. “Jungle drums and the concerto”. The jungle drums are very primitive and simplistic, while the concerto is a planned piece of music which is complex. “My blood ripples, turns torrent, topples the years at once I’m in my mothers lap a suckling”. Juxtaposition is used here also because first we have the violent image of blood rippling and then we have a calm image of a baby in a mothers lap. By placing the words together, the poet has attracted us to notice specific things like the growth/aging in the poem.

The diction that the poet has used is good because it helps us to create mental images of the poem. He uses words like ‘primal’, ‘complexities’ and ‘concerto’ which help us to understand the poem further. Primal helps us to understand the primitive life while, complexities and concerto shows us a new age of more modern items.

Rhythm

The poet has made the first stanza a long run-on line without much punctuation. This represents the rhythm of the poem. The run-on line could symbolize the flow of life/music. He could be trying to symbolize the way that life/music goes on and doesn’t stop. The third stanza also has a run-on line which again, represents the same thing.

There is a lot of alliteration used in the poem and this has an effect on the rhythm of the poem. "Coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint, crescendo" is an example of alliteration in the third stanza. This alliteration may represent the flow of notes in the piano and how it can be smooth. The use of the technique attracts our attention to the importance of the line. As the technical words used represent the piano's complexity in a new era of life.

Response