Poetry Workbook

FOR YEARS 11 & 12

by

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FIVE SENSES SKILLBUILDERS No. 35

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First Published 1999

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Grumley, Larry, and Sinclair, Jeff
Five Senses Skillbuilder 35
Poetry Workbook for Years 11 & 12
ISBN: 978-1-876028-77-0

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Poetry Workbook

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JUXTAPOSITION

JUXTAPOSITION – a device where one element, idea or object is thrown into opposition to another for the purpose of emphasis or clearness.

The effect of the device is to make both contrasted ideas clearer than either would have been if described by itself.

It is useful as skillfully used the writer, like colours to the painter or chords to the musician, a means of arousing emotional impressions of deep artistic significance.

Often in literature we have the contrast or juxtaposition of elements such as;

Hero vs villain
Youth and experience
Love and hate
Chastity and promiscuity
Naivity and understanding

Depending On the usage this may be referred to as contrast.

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The Domesticity of Giraffes

She languorously swings her tongue
like a black leather strap as she chews
and endlessly licks the wire for salt
blown in from the harbour.
bruised-apple eyed she ruminates
towards the tall buildings
she mistakes for a herd:
her gaze has the loneliness of smoke.

I think of her graceful on the plain –
one long-legged mile after another.
I see her head framed in a leafy bonnet
Or balloon-bobbing in trees.
Her hide's a paved garden of orange
against wild bush. In the distance, running
she could be a big slim bird just before flight.

Here, a wire-cripple –
legs stark as telegraph poles
miles from anywhere.
She circles the pen, licks the wire,
Mimics a gum-chewing audience
in the stained underwear of her hide.
This shy Miss Marigold rolls out her tongue

like the neck of a dying bird.
I offer her the fresh salt of my hand
and her tongue rolls over it
in sensual agony, as it must
over the wire, hour after bitter hour.
Now, the bull indolently
lets down his penis like a pink gladiolus
drenching the concrete.

She thrusts her tongue under his rich stream
to get moisture for her thousandth chew.

Judith Beveridge

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What is being juxtaposed in this poem?

The life of the giraffe 'on the plain' with the life 'Here, a wire-cripple" or in the captivity of the zoo.

In the second stanza about her life 'on the plain' the images used are;

graceful
leafy bonnet
balloon-bobbing
paved garden
orange against wide bush
big slim bird
before flight

In the rest of the poem, these are juxtaposed with

wire-cripple
bruised apple-eye
lonliness
legs stark
miles from anywhere
like the neck of a dying bird
hour and after bitter hour
sensual agony

Note how each of the positive aspects of the giraffe that is contained in the second stanza is not in any of the stanza's about the zoo. This emphasises how much the captivity has destroyed the natural grace and beauty of this wild animal.

The shock of the last image is understood when we understand the degradation of the giraffe that has been clarified by the juxtaposition.

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Other techniques used in the poem

Simile

'like a black leather strap'
'as telegraph poles'
'like the neck of a dying bird'
'like a pink gladiolus'

In each of these the contrast is used for the same reason the juxtapositioning is, to create a clear picture of the giraffe in captivity – note all of these are referring to her in the zoo, not free.

Metaphor

'Her hide's a paved garden of orange against wild bush..."

The beauty of this image and the inclusion of the 'wild bush' is an indication of the natural environment the giraffe should be a part of. The link between the hide and the garden is the same link or connection that the giraffe should have with the natural environment.

Irony

'the tall buildings she mistakes for a herd'
'She thrusts her tongue under his rich stream...'

In both cases the irony of the mistake and the taking of moisture both add to the pathos of the plight of the giraffe. The fact that she mistakes tall buildings for life animals of her own kind is tragic and helps us to feel the pain of the animal. As with taking moisture from the urination of the of the male giraffe again adds to the tragedy.
The irony is brutal as the captivity is a type of brutality for the animal.

Symbolism

Use of a giraffe

The pleasant and placid nature of the giraffe helps the sense of loss and tragedy. Think if we would feel the same if the animal were a lion.

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What are the central ideas/themes/concerns in the poem?

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Explain the importance of TWO technical aspects of Judith Beveridge's poem "Domesticity of Giraffes".

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