

This winter coming (Karen Press)

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The poet

- Karen Press is a South African poet. She was born in Cape Town and currently lives in Sea Point.
- She is a full-time writer and does freelancing.
- She is a qualified teacher (taught Maths and English).
- She is a co-founder of Buchu Books.
- She writes film scripts, children's stories, short stories, and educational material and textbooks in Science, Maths, English and Economics.
- She also translates Afrikaans poems into English.

Background to the poem

- The poem was published in 1986.
- The 1980s was a politically turbulent time in South Africa. There were frequent uprisings internally in the townships, and the security forces were 'hunting' the political activists who went into exile in neighbouring countries and overseas. Workers and pupils were organised and mobilised and there were frequent boycotts (of buses, stores and schools). Saboteurs bombed and burned down government buildings, trains, buses and stores. On the other hand, the state defended itself ruthlessly, often infiltrating the opposition movement. The economy bogged down as a result.

PLEASE NOTE

- The poem may be interpreted on two levels.
- The first, surface level, is simple (and literal). On the level, the poem is a description of a typical winter in Cape Town. The speaker describes the people's fear about the impending winter. There are vivid and graphic images typical of 'Cape of Storms.'
- The second, is a deeper and metaphoric level. On this level, the poem is an extended metaphor for the current and coming violence in the country.
- The poem, is therefore, protest poem. There are stark differences between the rich whites (line 21) and the impoverished blacks.

continue

- In the last stanza, the children take a stand and 'fight the winter' (line 26).
- The poem suggests that all these are just the beginning (line 2), much is yet to come, in fact, the 'winter', the tumultuous time, is already here (line 31), and it is frightening.



Summary

- 'Walking in the thick rain' (line 1), the speaker sees a storm hitting the city. 'The sea is swollen' (line 4), high, violent waves are hitting the rocks on the shore (line 4-5), 'the sand is shifting ('sinking away') (line 5) and the seagulls are cannot land (line 6). The sky is dark and looks like a shroud (suggesting the city is dead). Fatigued (and sad) women (housemaids) (line 9), get off buses from work. Dogs are barking in the street (line 10) and children are crying (line 11). Men who are unemployed (line 18), are standing in street corners like old stumps (line 18-19) and look like tombstones in a graveyard. Flashy cars of white people who are enjoying life (line 21-22) pass by. Malnourished and naked children run innocently in the rain (line 24). They collect wood (twigs) to go make fire to keep away the cold winter.

continue

- The frantic children are reminiscent to the children who died during the Soweto Uprisings (line 27). There is biting, cold wind coming from the mountain (line 29), a sign that winter has arrived (line 31).

Analysis

Line 1-3

1 walking in the thick rain
2 of this winter we have only just
entered,
3 who is not frightened?

What mood
is create
here?

Why does the
poet use this
word? Which
other word/s
would be most
appropriate?

Commentary



Stanza 2

Lines 4 - 5

4 the sea is swollen, churning in
broken waves (violent continual
motion)

5 around the rocks, the sand is
sinking away

How does diction
create a sense of
fear?

Commentary



Stanza 2 (continue)

Lines 6

6 the seagulls will not land

The sea has
become dangerous
for even the
seagulls!

Commentary



Stanza 2 (continue)

Lines 7 - 8

What is the
significance
of the
brackets?

What figure of
speech is used
here? How is
it significant?

7 under this sky, this shroud
falling (something that covers or
conceals)

8 who is not frightened?

Commentary

sky = shroud



Lines 9 - 12



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Stanza 3 (continue)

Lines 9 - 11

9 in every part of the city, sad
women climbing onto buses,
10 dogs barking in the street, and
the children
11 in every doorway crying,

Commentary

- Why are the women sad?
- What picture or sense do the barking dogs and crying children create?

Stanza 3 (continue)

Line 12

12 the world is hungry, madam's
house is clean



Commentary

* To what or whom does 'the world' refer?

- How is this image effective?
- How is the juxtaposition of 'the world' and 'madam's house' significant?

Stanza 3 (continue)

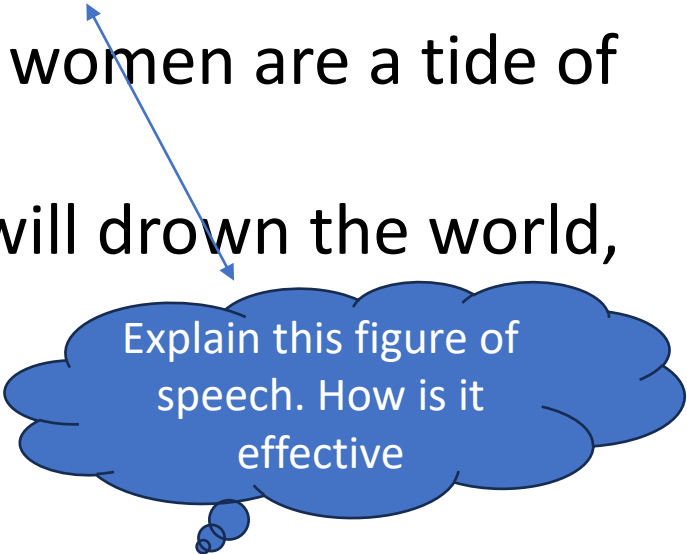
Lines 13 - 17

13 and the women return with
slow steps

14 to the children, the street, the
sky tolling like a black bell;

15 these women are a tide of
sadness

16 they will drown the world,



Explain this figure of
speech. How is it
effective

Commentary

- A cycle has been completed.
How do we know this? How is
this effective?
- How is line 13 effective?
- What figure of speech is used in
line 15?
- Is the meaning of 'the world' in
line 16 the same as in line 12?
Explain.

Stanza 4

Lines 18 - 20

18 on every corner men standing
19 old stumps in the rain,
tombstones,
20 engraved with open eyes

Commentary



Line 21

21 watching the bright cars full of sated faces (more than satisfied)



Stanza 5

Lines 24 - 25

24 into the rain the children are
running

25 thin as the barest twigs they
kindle a fire

26 to fight the winter, ...

What is the
deeper meaning
of lines 26 - 27?

What
impression is
created about
the children?

Commentary



Lines 26 - 27

26 ... the bare bodies

27 A raging fire of dead children

