

Sample Student

June 18, 2009

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Rilke poem summary

“The Neighbor” is one of the more famous poems from *The Book of Images*, a collection originally published in 1902 by Rainer Maria Rilke and rereleased in a new German-English translation by Edward Snow in 1991. It is a short lyric poem consisting of three four-line stanzas, or quatrains. The poem is told from a distant first-person point of view in which the unnamed speaker has an imagined conversation with a singing violin, perhaps his or her own, as he/she travels from city to city. The speaker talks to the presence of the violin and repeatedly questions why the strange violin music keeps following him, and why others seem to recognize the redemptive power of the music as well. The original German version of the poem has a regular end-rhyme pattern in each couplet, although the pattern is not repeated in the English version which is written in blank verse. The lines are clipped and foreshortened, and many of them are in the form of plaintive rhetorical questions the speaker poses to the absent violin. The language of the poem is spare and monochromatic, containing few images other than the speaker and the violin, neither of which is described in any detail. The poem ends with yet another unanswered question, that of the speaker expressing annoyance and wonder that he or she is always nearby as the violin continues to express the “weightiness” and “heaviness” of a sorrowful life.

Comment: This first sentence gives us full introductory information (note that the *translator* is mentioned along with the poet, as are *both* publishing dates). Note that the verb tense is kept in **present** throughout the summary.

Comment: Description of the form of the poem, using vocabulary terms from “**Rilke Notes**” on the website, is introduced in this second sentence.

Comment: These next two sentences briefly introduce the speaker, the poem’s setting, and the story it seems to tell.

Comment: This sentence deals specifically with the rhyme pattern, something we usually need to address when discussing poems. It also notes the apparent differences between the English & German versions.

Comment: These next two sentences describe the language of the poem – the look of the lines, the kinds of words used, and the tone they set.

Comment: This last sentence closes the summary by referencing the end of the poem, describing both the form of the poem’s last lines *and* the meaning of the story.