

‘Revelation’ by Liz Lochhead (Scottish) poetry

The title means that the **persona** (the person speaking in the poem) has realised something significant. She realised from the experience of seeing the bull for the first time that evil exists in the world.

1.

‘They called him Bob – as though perhaps
you could reduce a monster
with the charm of a friendly name’.

The **connotations** of the name Bob are of someone jolly, gentle, calm and familiar but the persona feels the bull is the complete opposite and that Bob is not an appropriate name.

2.

The **word choice** of ‘monster’ indicates the persona’s feelings towards the bull. It has **connotations** of large, dark and scary.

3. ‘At the threshold of the outhouse’

‘threshold’ literally means at the entrance of a doorway but it **metaphorically** means the persona is moving from a stage of innocence to experience, that she is discovering that evil and sexuality are in the world she inhabits.

4. As she cannot see inside the outhouse until her eyes adjust to the dark she has to rely her other **senses**:

‘only black / and the hot reek of him’

The poet uses synaesthesia (sensory imagery) of ‘hot’ and ‘reek’ to show that she can only smell and feel his heat. ‘reek’ has connotations of a strong smell which hints at her discomfort.

5. The persona continues to rely on her other senses until she can see in the gloom:

‘--- and a roar to be really scared of’

The **alliteration** of the ‘r’ and the **onomatopoeia** of ‘roar’ emphasise the volume of the bull’s bellow, its scary sound. The poet repeats this technique in ‘He roared his rage.’

6. At first the girl can only vaguely see the bull’s outline:

‘his edges merging with the darkness’

The shape of the bull is hardly visible.

By the end of stanza 1 she has adjusted to the gloom of the barn:

‘His eyes swivelled in the great wedge of his tossed head.’

She sees his eyes rotating in their sockets and he jerks his head, all of which the girl finds frightening.

7. The scene changes to the yard outside. The girl **contrasts** the hens with herself:

‘oblivious hens’

She is envious of the hens who don’t know about this scary animal, unlike her. They only perceive the ‘clanking’ of the bull’s chains as a ‘faint and rather festive

tinkling'. This is the start of her revelation that there are frightening and dangerous things in the world.

8. She now sees the bull as a **symbol** of evil:

'Black Mass'

The pun refers to the huge size of the bull and also that it is a ceremony to worship evil and Satan.

She continues this idea with :

'this antidote and Anti-Christ

The bull represents the opposite ('anti' repeated) of goodness and Christian teaching in her eyes. We see how shocked the girl is by the bull.

9. Now that she has discovered for herself that evil exists in her world:

'threatening the eggs --- / and the placidity of milk'.

The eggs and the milk refer to her secure, safe world as they represent nurture and her mother's love. She believes the force of the bull threatens her safe world.

10. In stanza 3 the girl's response is to run away from the evil presence of the bull:

'I ran, my pigtails thumping— in fear'

11. Now that she has experienced this 'revelation' the girl is alert to danger all around her:

'who pulled the wings from butterflies'

The local boys are cruel to insects.

'Past thorned hedge'

The shrubs have barbs that scratch and hurt.

12. She realises she has very little defence against the danger and evil in the world:

'only my small and shaking hand on the jug's rim

in case the milk should spill.'

'small and shaking' use alliteration of the s to draw attention to the fact she feels vulnerable and weak and that she has few defences against these dangers the world poses:

'on the jug's rim/ in case the milk should spill.'

Evaluation

We can identify with the small child's acceptance that the world is a secure and good place and their parents and teachers warn them about potential danger eg. road safety, stranger danger.