

# ASM TUITION ACADEMY

## STORM IN A N ISLAND

Storm on the Island We are prepared: we build our houses squat,

Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.

The wizened earth had never troubled us

With hay, so as you can see, there are no stacks

Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees

This might prove the company when it blows full

Blast: you know what I mean - leaves and branches

Can raise a chorus in a gale

So that you can listen to the thing you fear

Forgetting that it pummels your house too.

But there are no trees, no natural shelter.

You might think that the sea is the company,

Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs

But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits

The very windows spits like a tame cat

Turned savage.

We just sit tight while the wind dives

And strafes invisibly.

Space is a salvo.

We are bombarded by the empty air.

Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

### Context:

- **Historical and Political Context:** “*Storm on the Island*” was written by Seamus Heaney, a Northern Irish poet, and published in his 1966 collection *Death of a Naturalist*. The poem can be read both literally and metaphorically. While it describes the experience of living on an isolated island exposed to a fierce storm, it also serves as a metaphor for political conflict, particularly relating to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The poem reflects the fear and tension of living in a place constantly battered by external forces, which can be seen as a parallel to the unpredictable and violent political climate in Ireland.
- **Social Context:** Heaney’s poetry often focuses on rural life, nature, and the experiences of ordinary people. “*Storm on the Island*” highlights the community’s

resilience and adaptability in the face of natural forces. It also explores themes of isolation, fear, and human vulnerability.

- **Literary Context:** The poem is written in free verse, without a regular rhyme scheme or meter, reflecting the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the storm. Heaney's use of conversational language and imagery rooted in the rural landscape connects the reader to the harsh reality of life in an isolated place.
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### **Poetic Devices:**

#### **1. Imagery:**

- Heaney uses vivid and sensory imagery to bring the storm to life:
  - Visual imagery: "Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate," "flung spray hits the very windows."
  - Auditory imagery: "Leaves and branches can raise a tragic chorus in a gale."
  - Tactile imagery: "Spits like a tame cat turned savage."

#### **2. Simile:**

- Heaney uses similes to compare natural elements to more familiar, human concepts:
  - "Spits like a tame cat turned savage" compares the sea spray to a domestic animal that has turned wild, emphasizing the unpredictability of nature.

#### **3. Personification:**

- Heaney personifies the storm and elements of nature to give them human-like qualities:
  - "The wind dives and strafes invisibly" personifies the wind as a military aircraft attacking the island.
  - "Space is a salvo" suggests that the open space around the island is attacking the inhabitants.

#### **4. Metaphor:**

- The entire poem can be seen as a metaphor for political violence and conflict. The "storm" represents the political troubles, and the inhabitants' preparation for the storm symbolizes the readiness of people to withstand difficult circumstances.

#### **5. Alliteration:**

- Heaney uses alliteration to create a rhythmic effect and reinforce the harshness of the storm:
  - "Sink walls in rock," "tragic chorus in a gale," "spits like a tame cat turned savage."

#### **6. Enjambment:**

- Heaney frequently uses enjambment (continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line) to mimic the flow of the storm and create a sense of unpredictability and movement:
  - "But there are no trees, no natural shelter. / You might think that the sea is company..."

#### **7. Oxymoron:**

- The phrase “exploding comfortably” is an oxymoron that captures the deceptive nature of the storm. The sea appears to be comforting, yet its violent nature is ultimately destructive.
8. **Juxtaposition:**
    - Heaney juxtaposes the calmness and comfort of the island’s inhabitants with the violent nature of the storm. This contrast highlights human resilience and the ability to confront uncontrollable forces.
  9. **Assonance:**
    - Heaney uses assonance (repetition of vowel sounds) to add musicality to the poem:
      - “Blows full / Blast” (repetition of the ‘o’ sound).
  10. **Caesura:**
    - Heaney uses caesura (a pause in the middle of a line) to create a moment of tension and reflection, enhancing the impact of certain ideas:
      - “Forgetting that it pummels your house too.”
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### Literary Techniques:

1. **Tone:**
  - The tone of “*Storm on the Island*” is conversational and reflective. It begins with a sense of calm and preparedness, but as the storm approaches, the tone becomes more intense and foreboding, conveying fear and uncertainty.
2. **Structure:**
  - The poem is written in a single stanza of 19 lines, which creates a sense of continuity and unity. The lack of stanzas reflects the unbroken, overwhelming force of the storm. The free verse form mirrors the unpredictability and uncontrollable nature of the storm.
3. **Narrative Voice:**
  - The poem is narrated in the first person plural (“We are prepared”), suggesting a collective experience. The use of “we” indicates a sense of community and shared resilience among the inhabitants of the island.
4. **Juxtaposition and Contrast:**
  - Heaney contrasts the calm and practical preparation for the storm with the ferocity of the storm itself. This contrast highlights the tension between human efforts to control nature and nature’s ultimate power.
5. **Metaphorical Layering:**
  - Heaney’s poem can be read on multiple levels: a literal description of a storm and a metaphorical commentary on human struggle against external forces, be they natural or political. The island becomes a microcosm of any community facing threat and adversity.
6. **Symbolism:**
  - The “storm” symbolizes uncontrollable forces, whether they are natural disasters or political turmoil. The “island” represents isolation and vulnerability, but also strength and resilience.
7. **Use of Conversational Language:**
  - Heaney’s language is simple and direct, with phrases like “you know what I mean.” This conversational style creates an intimacy between the speaker and the reader, making the experience more personal and relatable.

## 8. Rhyme and Rhythm:

- The poem does not follow a regular rhyme scheme or meter, reflecting the chaotic nature of the storm. The irregular rhythm mimics the gusts of wind and crashing waves, enhancing the sense of unpredictability.

# COMPARISON WITH PRELUDE

Seamus Heaney's "*Storm on the Island*" and William Wordsworth's "*The Prelude*" (specifically the extract that focuses on the power of nature) are two poems that delve into the theme of nature's power and its effect on human beings. While Heaney's poem presents a direct confrontation with a storm, Wordsworth's "*The Prelude*" portrays a more reflective and personal encounter with nature. Here is a detailed comparison of the two poems, focusing on their context, themes, poetic devices, and literary techniques:

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## 1. Contextual Comparison:

- **"Storm on the Island" by Seamus Heaney:**
  - "*Storm on the Island*" was written by Heaney, an Irish poet, and published in his 1966 collection *Death of a Naturalist*. It reflects the harsh realities of living on an exposed, isolated island that is frequently battered by violent storms. The poem can be interpreted literally as a depiction of a storm and metaphorically as a commentary on political unrest in Ireland.
- **"The Prelude" (Extract) by William Wordsworth:**
  - "*The Prelude*" is an autobiographical poem by Wordsworth, first published in 1850. The extract commonly studied in schools focuses on Wordsworth's experience of stealing a boat and being overwhelmed by the grandeur and power of nature. This moment of epiphany leads Wordsworth to understand the sublime force of nature and its influence on human perception and emotion. The poem is set in the Lake District, where Wordsworth spent much of his childhood.

## 2. Themes:

- **Power of Nature:**
  - In "*Storm on the Island*", nature's power is portrayed as relentless, violent, and threatening. The islanders are exposed to the full force of the storm, and the poem captures the fear and awe that the storm inspires.
  - In "*The Prelude*", nature's power is presented as both beautiful and terrifying. The speaker's encounter with the "huge peak" reveals a sense of nature's sublime, uncontrollable power that humbles and changes him.
- **Human Vulnerability:**
  - Heaney's poem shows how humans are vulnerable in the face of nature's fury. Despite their preparations, the inhabitants of the island can only endure the storm; they cannot control or escape it.
  - Wordsworth's poem depicts the vulnerability of the human mind when confronted with the immensity of nature. The speaker's initial confidence

while rowing the boat is shattered by the overwhelming presence of the peak, leading to a sense of powerlessness and insignificance.

- **Conflict:**
  - “*Storm on the Island*” can be interpreted as a metaphor for political conflict, particularly in Ireland. The storm represents external forces of conflict and tension, and the islanders’ readiness to face it reflects resilience and defiance.
  - In “*The Prelude*”, the conflict is internal and psychological. The speaker wrestles with his own emotions, transitioning from excitement and confidence to fear and awe as he confronts the power of nature.

### **3. Tone and Mood:**

- **“Storm on the Island”:**
  - The tone of the poem is tense and fearful, with a sense of impending danger. The mood shifts from initial preparedness and calm to an atmosphere of anxiety as the storm intensifies.
- **“The Prelude”:**
  - The tone in “*The Prelude*” is reflective and awe-struck. Wordsworth’s language conveys both admiration and fear as he describes his experience. The mood is one of wonder mixed with a deep sense of reverence for the natural world.

### **4. Poetic Devices:**

- **Imagery:**
  - “*Storm on the Island*” uses vivid imagery to depict the ferocity of the storm: “The flung spray hits the very windows, spits like a tame cat / Turned savage.” The imagery is stark and concrete, reflecting the physicality of the storm.
  - “*The Prelude*” uses contrasting imagery to convey the transition from tranquillity to fear: “Small circles glittering idly in the moon, / Until they melted all into one track.” Later, the imagery shifts to the “huge peak, black and huge,” which creates a sense of looming danger.
- **Personification:**
  - In “*Storm on the Island*”, the storm is personified as an attacking force: “strafes invisibly.” Nature is portrayed as an aggressive enemy.
  - In “*The Prelude*”, the peak is personified as a menacing figure that “upreared its head.” Nature appears to have a conscious presence that observes and dominates the speaker.
- **Simile and Metaphor:**
  - Heaney uses similes such as “spits like a tame cat turned savage” to emphasize the sudden and unpredictable violence of the storm.
  - Wordsworth uses metaphor to express the power of the peak, describing it as “a living thing” that “strode after me,” suggesting nature’s ability to instill fear and command respect.
- **Enjambment:**
  - In both poems, enjambment is used to create a sense of flow and continuity:
    - In “*Storm on the Island*”, enjambment mirrors the relentless movement of the storm.
    - In “*The Prelude*”, enjambment reflects the speaker’s continuous thoughts and emotions as he grapples with the power of the peak.

## **5. Literary Techniques:**

- **Tone and Diction:**
  - In “*Storm on the Island*”, Heaney’s diction is simple and direct, using words like “blast,” “hits,” and “dives” to convey the force of the storm. The tone is conversational, yet tense, adding to the realism of the poem.
  - In “*The Prelude*”, Wordsworth’s diction is elevated and poetic, using words like “huge,” “black,” and “upreared” to emphasize the magnitude of the peak. The tone is reflective and philosophical, highlighting the speaker’s inner turmoil.
- **Structure and Form:**
  - “*Storm on the Island*” is written in a single stanza, reflecting the unity and solidity of the islanders against the storm, but also the relentless nature of the storm itself.
  - “*The Prelude*” is written in blank verse, using unrhymed iambic pentameter. The long, flowing lines reflect the speaker’s ongoing emotional journey and the continuous, immersive experience of nature’s power.
- **Symbolism:**
  - In “*Storm on the Island*”, the storm symbolizes external conflict, whether natural or political, and the islanders’ isolation represents human resilience and defiance in the face of adversity.
  - In “*The Prelude*”, the peak symbolizes the overwhelming power of nature and the speaker’s realization of his own insignificance, leading to a deeper understanding of his place in the world.

## **6. Overall Message:**

- **“Storm on the Island” by Seamus Heaney:**
  - Heaney’s poem conveys the message that despite human efforts to prepare for and confront the forces of nature, there are certain elements that remain beyond human control. The poem also suggests that nature’s power can serve as a metaphor for political conflict, representing the unpredictable and overwhelming external forces that affect human life.
- **“The Prelude” (Extract) by William Wordsworth:**
  - Wordsworth’s poem suggests that encounters with nature can lead to profound personal and spiritual growth. The experience of fear and awe when faced with nature’s sublime power serves to humble the speaker and change his perception of himself and the world.

**IT IS ALSO COMPARE WITH OZYMADIUS**