

Evaluation of walt whitman's poems: a noiseless, patient spider, when i heard the...

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Poetry Packet 4

The title of Walt Whitman's poem, "A Noiseless, Patient Spider", implies that the poem will be about a spider that is most likely working on its web since this is the most common representation of spiders. The poem does turn out to be about a spider working on its web, more specifically the spider is trying to get the web started. It is shooting its web in many directions trying to get it to stick to something. The second half of the poem is Whitman comparing the spider to his own lonely soul trying to find its way.

This whole poem is an extended metaphor that compares the spider and the soul of Whitman. They are both lonely and searching for the way to go and something to connect with. Whitman uses his description of the spider as, "a noiseless, patient spider" (1), as personification of the spider. People are normally described as noiseless and patient, not spiders, making the spider seem more like a person. He does this to add to the effect of the metaphor that he uses in the poem. He also uses alliteration in describing the spider when he says, "vacant, vast surrounding" (3). The purpose of this is to emphasize that the spider is lonely and isolated. Using alliteration again, Whitman then says, "it launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself" (4). He uses this alliteration to add to the image of the spider repeatedly launching its webs trying to find something to connect to. Next, Whitman uses an apostrophe when he says, "O my Soul" (6). He addresses his soul in order to introduce the other half of his metaphor and to introduce it as a living thing by addressing it directly. He also makes his soul seem living by personifying it when he says, "ceaselessly musing, venturing,

throwing" (8). The personification of both the spider and his soul together help connect the two in the metaphor.

The tone of this poem is lonely and helpless as the narrator is searching for something his soul can connect with. The descriptions of the spider and his soul both include words that show this tone like isolated and surrounded. There is a big shift in the poem from line 5 to line 6. The first half of the poem is describing the spider and its struggles to find something to attach its web to. In the second half, Whitman never mentions the spider again but shifts to describing his soul which is the other half of a metaphor comparing the spider and his soul. The title of the poem, "A Noiseless, Patient Spider", actually means that the poem is about a spider searching for a start to its web and how this connects to the lonely soul of Walt Whitman. The theme of this poem is that Whitman feels that his soul is isolated from the real world. The purpose of the extended metaphor in the poem was to bring to the attention of the reader this theme. The spider and the soul are both isolated and can't find something to grasp onto.

The title of Walt Whitman's poem, "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer", implies that the poem will be about Whitman's experience listening to an astronomer talk about space. The poem is actually about being at a lecture from a famous astronomer who is talking about, "the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me" (2). The astronomer is talking about the stars in a mathematical way and it is making the speaker bored so he leaves and goes outside. He sees the stars in the sky and is much more satisfied with actually seeing them then hearing the astronomer talk about numbers.

This poem is an anecdote told by the speaker about him attending a lecture about the astronomy. At the beginning of the poem, Whitman uses anaphora with the repetition of “ when” at the start of each line. He uses this to give the effect that the astronomer is rambling on in his lecture. Whitman also lists off many mathematical terms like proofs, figures, diagrams, and dividing to create an image for the reader of math and to associate the astronomer and the lecture with math. He wants to make this connection to contrast with the way he wants you to see the outside world. Once the speaker is outside, it is described as mystical, moist, and perfectly silent in order to create an image of nature and to make outside seem superior to the lecture. Whitman uses juxtaposition for this effect as the position of the descriptions of the lecture and the outside world emphasizes their differences. Another way Whitman emphasizes this comparison is with the alliteration when he says, “ in the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time, look’d up in perfect silence at the stars” (7-8). There are three cases of alliteration in these last two lines of the poem, really bringing light to the point that the natural view of the stars is better than hearing about the mathematical view. Finally, Whitman uses a hyperbole when he says that he glided out of the room. This is an exaggeration since he couldn’t have actually glided but he says that he did to show how easy it was for him to leave the lecture since he didn’t want to be there. It was natural and it took no effort to get himself to go outside where he belongs.

The tone of the poem is negative toward the astronomer, positive toward nature, and it is also lonely. The description of the astronomer’s view of

space makes it seem inferior to the speaker's natural view which shows that the tone favors nature. The tone is also lonely which can be seen as the speaker seems to be the only one with these feeling and he says, " I wander'd off by myself" (6). The poem has a shift when the speaker leaves the lecture in line 6. The beginning of the poem describes the speaker listening to the lecture and he is not satisfied with the way the astronomer talks about space. When the speaker goes outside into nature, the mood of the poem becomes much happier and peaceful and the speaker is much more satisfied with looking at the stars themselves. The title of the poem, " When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer", actually means that the poem is about the speaker's feelings that the learn'd astronomer has it all wrong and that nature is superior. This is the theme of the poem, that nature is superior to education. Whitman is trying to convey a transcendental message that he feels that people should go outside and look at the stars and experience them instead of calculating things and learning about astronomy.

I have a connection with this poem in particular because I agree with Whitman's feelings that nature is superior to education. I feel that I get a lot more out of going outside and actually looking at the way nature works instead of learning about it in biology or actually observing things happening instead of calculating what would happen in physics. I feel that sometimes that the things we learn in school are useless like the way Whitman heard the astronomer's lecture as a bunch of rambling. In a slightly unrelated note, I hated gym class in ninth grade because of the lack of actual physical activity. We spent so much time doing worksheets and watching powerpoints

talking about exercising and never actually took the time to exercise. I feel like I could have gotten a lot more value out of going outside and playing sports instead of learning about it in a classroom setting. This is similar to Whitman's view of learning about nature through mathematics because he would much rather just go and experience nature first hand.

The title of the poem, " Song of Myself", gives the reader the impression that the poem will be about Walt Whitman himself and will describe what makes him who he is as a person. The poem is really about how Whitman sees himself and the world, what he believes, and his personality. The given section is the first part of the poem. He begins by saying that the poem will be celebrating himself. He then talks about how he loves nature and he is a part of nature. He says that people should not take things from others but should rely on themselves. Finally, he observes himself and says that he is beautiful in every way.

Whitman uses personification of his soul when he says, " I loafe and invite my soul, I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass" (4-5). This is personification since he makes his soul seem like a person that he can invite to come watch grass with him. He does this to create an effect in the poem that his personality has different parts and his soul is one of these. Making these parts seem like people makes it easier for the reader to grasp the point. He also uses a hyperbole when he says, " every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (3). Obviously the reader does not actually own every atom of Whitman but he exaggerates in order to connect with the reader, enabling them to understand the poem better. As another method to

connect with the reader, Whitman uses rhetorical questions to the reader. For example, he says “ Have you reckon’d a thousand acres much? Have you reckon’d the earth much?” (31). He also uses the repetition of “ you shall” at the beginnings of lines 35-38 to emphasize that people need to rely on themselves instead of other people in society. This is also an allusion to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendental essay, “ Self-Reliance”.

The tone of this poem is optimistic, happy, and self-loving. Whitman shows that he appreciates himself as a beautiful person and loves life. He also loves nature and the way the world works and how he is a part of it. He shifts topics many times in the poem from talking about himself to talking about nature, society, and himself again. The title of the poem really does mean that the poem will be celebrating Whitman and describing who he is. The theme that Whitman is trying to convey in this poem is to be self-reliant and love yourself for who you are. The whole poem is about how Whitman loves himself and he directly states that, “ you shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self” (38), meaning that you should decide things for yourself instead of letting other people do it for you.

These three works by Walt Whitman all share similar concepts related to transcendentalism. Traditionally, Transcendentalists believe in four basic premises which are the power of the individual, the universe duplicates the self, nature is symbolic, and self realization as push and pull. These four premises can be seen in the three poems through their themes and literary devices.

In the poem, "A Noiseless, Patient Spider", transcendentalist principles can be seen in the themes and language. The second, third, and fourth premises of transcendentalism can both be found in this poem. The second premise, the universe duplicates the self, is shown by the extended metaphor that Whitman uses. This metaphor comparing the spider to Whitman's soul shows a connection between the way the human soul works to the way that nature works in the spider making its web. The third premise, nature is symbolic, can be seen in the personification of the spider. Whitman describes the spider as, "A noiseless, patient spider" (1), giving it human characteristics. This personification shows that Whitman sees the spider as symbolic for the way his soul is lost and trying to grasp onto something as well. The fourth premise, self realization as push and pull, is shown in the theme of the poem that Whitman's soul is isolated from the real world. This relates to the push and pull felt by transcendentalists to withdraw from society or stay part of society.

The poem, "When I Heard The Learn'd Astronomer", includes transcendental elements as well. It includes the first and fourth premises of transcendentalism. The first premise, the power of the individual, is shown when the speaker leaves the lecture to be alone. He relies on himself instead of relying on what the astronomer tells him is true. He sees more value in seeing the stars for himself instead of hearing someone else talk about them, showing the power of the individual. The fourth premise, self realization as push and pull, is also shown in this poem and the speaker leaves the lecture. He feels the push portion of this as he feels the need to

be by himself in the outdoors and get away from society, which is the lecture. This poem also shows the transcendentalist belief that a connection with nature is superior. This is shown in the theme which is that nature is superior to education. The speaker gets more from experiencing nature than he gets from education. This is also shown as Whitman uses alliteration to describe the outdoors as, "mystical moist night-air" (7). Whitman uses this to emphasize that the speaker sees nature as perfect and magical while he sees the lecture as boring and useless. This is also contributed to by the anaphora of the word "when" at the beginning of the poem. This repetition makes the astronomer's lecture seem useless and like he is just rambling on and on.

Transcendentalism is also shown in the poem, "Song of Myself", by Walt Whitman. This poem includes the first and second premises of transcendentalism. The first premise, the power of the individual, is shown as Whitman says, "you shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me, you shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self" (37-38). He stresses that the reader needs to rely on their self. This is also an allusion to Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance", in which he discussed the need for relying on yourself instead of others. The second premise of transcendentalism, the universe duplicates the self, is shown as Whitman talks about his love and connection with nature. For example, he says, "the atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless, it is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it" (18-19). This shows his

connection with nature, similar to the connection that transcendentalists strive for.

All three poems exhibit characteristics of transcendentalism including the four premises. They all share a similar theme that nature is superior and a relationship with nature is necessary. The connection between nature and humans is shown in "A Noiseless, Patient Spider" as Whitman uses a metaphor to connect the way that a spider makes a web to the way his soul searches for something to grasp onto. In "When I Heard The Learn'd Astronomer", this connection is shown as the speaker feels the power of experiencing nature first hand instead of listening to the astronomer. Finally, in "Song of Myself" the connection with nature is shown as Whitman describes his love for nature and the relationship he has with nature. He says that he is a part of nature and is in love with nature. These three poems all show the transcendentalist side of Walt Whitman through his language and themes.