

Whitlams poem to a stranger essay sample

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



In his poem “ To a Stranger”, Walt Whitman delivers an impeccable piece of literary work that exalts the body, concepts of attachment, sexual love, romantic friendship and the comprehensive theme of homosexuality. “ To a Stranger” signifies traditional ideologies of love at first sight as the subject of the poem speaks of his love for the stranger. This paper will examine the element of romantic friendship in the poem, discussing Montaigne’s idea of dialectical friendship.

The poem highlights the implication of the possibility of new friendships or bonds formed between strangers who suddenly realize they have instantly fallen in love. These strangers are drawn to each other in spite of the reality that there is no dialogue between them. In this scenario, Whitman gives a rough idea of the possibility that the strangers in the poem develop a physical and affectionate relationship. The narrator imagines a scenario in which he sits joyfully creating treasured moments with the passing stranger as the narrator pictures he and the stranger happily together in an affectionate, as well as exceptional bond.

“ I ate with you and slept with you, your body has become not yours only nor left my body mine only” (103). With regard to Montaigne’s idea of dialectical friendship, “ To a Stranger” clearly reflects the concept of a romantic friendship. This is primarily notable through the relationship between the narrator and the stranger. While Whitman provides the audience with the opportunity to deduce whether the passing stranger being referred to is a man or woman, the narrator’s assertion that the stranger could be a man is sufficient evidence of a highly plausible romantic friendship. Through the excerpt, “ You must be he, I was seeking or she I was seeking”, Whitman

divulges that regardless of which sex one is attracted to, either the same sex or opposite sex, the power of love and friendship remains undisputed (Whitman 103).

Montaigne the French philosopher speaks to the element of romantic friendship that is quite apparent in Whitman's poem To a Stranger as the narrator talks of the joy he felt with the stranger. The narrator talks of his affection with the stranger as one that is chaste and mature. The purity of this love is in line with Montaigne's description of romantic friendship, which is devoid of the negative connotations of homosexual relationships. This is assertive of the element of conceptual dialectical friendships that are subjected to societal prejudices and conceptions. Contextual dialectics encompasses dialectics of private and public and ideal and actual occurrences. With regard to the poem, the dialectics of ideal and real occurrences entail the ideal notion that romantic friendships that involve physical contact should be between a man and woman. However, actual occurrences indicate that romantic friendships of a physical nature also exist between persons of the same gender; particularly men who society deems should solely have relationships with women.

Interactional dialectics, on the other hand, characterizes the dialectics of dependency, which is perhaps the focal point of romantic friendships. Any relationship either platonic or romantic involves elements of dependency. This is because partners depend on each other for fulfillment and happiness. In the poem, the narrator's happiness seems dependent on the stranger's closeness or proximity. The narrator derives pleasure from the stranger's eyes, flesh and face. The stranger, on the other hand, gains pleasure taking

the narrator's breasts, beard and hands. Interactional dialectics in the poem relate to the unique, physical relationship between the narrator and the stranger.

Montaigne and other like minded philosophers hold that there is a significant difference between homosexuality and romantic friendship. According to Montaigne, romantic friendship refers to an extremely close yet non-sexual relationship between friends whether it is of the same or opposite sex. This romantic friendship is evident in Whitman's poem, especially in terms of the physical closeness between the narrator and stranger. The narrator talks of sharing his body with the stranger and vice versa (Whitman 103). The fact that the narrator talks of gaining pleasure from the stranger's eyes, flesh and face as they pass each other is implicit of the physical closeness, which is common place in all modern western societies. Such physical closeness according to Montaigne entails among others, cuddling, holding hands and kissing or even sharing a bed.

The society disparages homosexuality and physical closeness such as cuddling, kissing and sharing a bed, which are beyond the norm in Western societies. However, as evidenced by Montaigne, romantic friendships are quite different from homosexuality. Romantic friendships allow persons of the same sex the freedom to express affection through physical closeness like cuddling. Montaigne holds that men have the capacity to have affectionate friendships and platonic emotions towards other men. This paper has considered Montaigne's idea of dialectical friendship, discussing the close relationship between the narrator and the stranger.

Work Cited

Whitman, W. Leaves of Grass. Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1897.

Print.