

Formation of self-identity essay

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Self-identity composes of a multi-dimensional construct which incorporates the individual's perception of the self, in close relation to a vast number of points. The concept does not include only the present self, but rather what the self used to be, how it evolved into what it is now and the future possibilities of further augmentation. Thus, in this pursuit of formation and development of self-identity, there exist numerous incentives on a personal as well as the social level. In J. Peter Meinke's poem, entitled "Advice to My Son," the poet endeavors to help set good foundations of self-identity and personal growth for his son, by offering words of wisdom on what it means to lead a quality life.

Many people would say that the best lessons are those one learns on his own and not trying to learn vicariously through another person's experiences. In this endeavor to try to retain their children's independence when it comes to making decisions and making their own mistakes, parents face a difficult conundrum in trying to pass down the knowledge gathered over the years. Family is a vital element in the formation of the child's self-identity, because the way a child perceives the world is through its parents. It is up to them to buttress the child's mind and body with valuable information, so that the child is able to react properly in a given situation. In this manner, Meinke is offering his son some words of wisdom which he hopes, will help him lead a rich and happy life. He commences with "the trick is," because that is in essence what life really is: a magic trick which will be over before we even know it, so we better enjoy the show while it lasts (Madden 9). He continues with "live your days/ as if each one may be your last," reminiscing of the Latin phrase "Carpe Diem," meaning seize the day, in the sense of taking

full advantage of it. At the end of the poem, he advises his son to always serve wine with his bread, thus evoking the image of a Dionysian atmosphere, the wine and winemaking being one of the most potent symbols of the Greek god Dionysus. The characteristics of this particular god are perfectly aligned with the first few lines of the poem: life is short and one should seize it firmly. But, simultaneously, the poet is not disregarding the importance of planning ahead, and is even juxtaposing the relative passage of time: when life is good, it passes insanely fast, but on the other hand, when there are troubles and obstacles, days keep lagging on and on, almost with no end in sight. Though he emphasizes a life of pleasure, he urges his son to plan his future out carefully, because only that will save him from the harsh blows that life has in store for him. Basically, the poet wishes his son to be successful, but not to forget what he is working for: not the money, but the comfort and satisfaction it can bring him. Because so many people nowadays are trapped in their nine to five jobs, perpetually rushing from one place to the other, all in order to make money, and they do not even realize that eventually they become slaves to the thing that was supposed to provide the very opposite: liberation; because money should be a means of obtaining things, not the final destination.

The second, equally relevant advice he offers his son is the one regarding married life. He urges him not to be blinded by superficial characteristics of a rose and other flowers, because their external charm is enchanting, but to plant fruits of sustenance, such as squash, spinach, turnips and tomatoes, because they provide true nourishment for the body, thus advising him to look beyond the superficial image of things and to look for the essence. It

also refers to the concept of the man being the family's provider and it is his obligation to endow his family with everything they require. In this respect, the father conveys "old school" ideas of chivalry and good manners. This means that he expects the man to be the head of the household who makes certain that his family does not lack any necessities. He also expects his son to share in his belief, that if he chooses a good wife, he will choose a cherished companion for the rest of his life. Hence, he urges him not to make the final choice of his future wife based on mere good looks, but to, as he says "marry a pretty girl/ after seeing her mother," alluding to the fact that in the mother, he will be able to see the future development of his own wife (Madden 9). Consequently, if the mother is a person possessing inner qualities which make her a good mother, good wife and a good person, that is most certainly the right choice.

The poet continues his advice with a very thoughtful one: "Show your soul to one man," thus referring to the idea of true and false friendships (Madden 9). One should always carefully choose the people he will strip his soul bare in front of, because the mistake of doing this before the wrong person might cost him dearly. He should work with another man, any other man, also alluding to the idea of never mixing business with pleasure, because in such a contract, numerous things can go wrong, despite the fact that both parties are close friends. And, after such an endeavor, no friendship can remain the same.

The author's simplistic language truly portrays a crucial conversation between a father and a son; a conversation not led astray by "fancy" words and phrases, but being straight to the point advice. Despite this simplicity of

language, the guidance does not lose its fortitude, it actually gains from it. Now, it is up to the son to gather the words of wisdom and apply them to his own life, thus forming and shaping his self-identity.

References:

Madden, Frank. Exploring Literature: Writing and Thinking About Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essay. 4th ed. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008. Print.