

'the sick equation' – brian pattern essay



**ASSIGN
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The poem 'The Sick Equation', by Brian Pattern is one of the many poems which comes from the book 'Armada', which was published in 1996. The book is dedicated to his mother. This poem is in retrospect and is about his childhood. The poet uses enjambment in this poem. 'The Sick Equation' focuses on the effect his parents' marriage had on him. The poem has five stanzas, all of which are different lengths. This shows the different stages in his life and how different events affect him.

For example, in lines one, two and three he says 'In school I learnt that one and one made two, it could have been engraved in stone, an absolute I could not refute'. Here, he is saying that the rule of one and one becoming two was eternal and definite. However in lines five and six he has written 'In that raw cocoon of parental hate is where I learned that one and one stayed one and one.' This shows that the eternal law of one and one becoming two is contradicted by his parents' relationship. Two oxymorons are used in line five – 'raw cocoon' and 'parental hate'.

The cocoon is meant to be loving and nurturing and protective, however the 'cocoon' is raw which gives a good effect as it shows that he was not nurtured or cared for as he grew up. It also gives the reader the image of the cocoon being untreated and desolate. The 'parental hate' is also an oxymoron because two contradictory terms have been placed together. Parents are meant to be loving and caring and by using a negative word, such as hate, is very effective as the reader realises that there is a 'wedge' between him and his parents. In line six he refers back to the equation – 'I learned that one and one stayed one and one'.

This has a lot of effect because it refers back to the equation which is an extended metaphor. Also, line four is ironic and sarcastic – ' But at home, sweet home, that sum was open to dispute'. The well known phrase ' Home sweet home' gives the image of home as a blissful haven for people, however Pattern uses this phrase to show the irony of his home and how he was unhappy when he was there. Lines seven and eight show that the emotional pain in his life affected him a lot – ' What's more, because all that household's anger and its pain stung more than any teachers cane'.

This also shows that the anger and pain in the household and between his parents and himself hurt him more than a teacher's cane, which shows that at such a young age he has been hurt both mentally and emotionally more than he could ever be hurt physically. The unhappiness between him and his parents leads him to believe that if two people are together, one would suffer – ' For becoming two, one at least would suffer so. ' In this case he is suffering as a result of his parents being together. In stanza two Pattern is much older, possibly a teenager.

It shows that he has taken the decision to be separate from everyone else – ' Believing this I threw away many gifts- I never let love stay long enough to take root'. The gifts that he threw away were gifts of love and the metaphor , ' I never let love stay long enough to take root', shows that he doesn't want his love for someone, or from someone, to last a long time so he decides not to commit to a relationship. He then says in lines fourteen and fifteen that he doesn't feel as though he has any self worth and therefore rejects love – ' But by thinking myself of too little worth I crushed all its messengers'.

This shows us that his parents have not only affected the way he looks upon himself but his opinion of love. The 'messengers' were the people who showed him compassion, but he decided to reject their love towards him. This is also shown in stanzas three and four. To begin, Pattern talks about his desire to be released from his memories and his childhood – 'One among the many whose dreams of flight weighed down the soul' This shows his desperation of getting away from his memories and being free as well as showing that although he would like to be in love, he simply believes that, because of his parents relationship, he can't.

He is scared of what will happen in the future and this shows the reader how bad his current situation is – 'Because to the flightless the dream of flight's an anguish' Even though he would like to be free of his terrible memories he cannot. He describes himself as the flightless. He tries not to think about escaping his memories as he realises he cannot, so he does not think about it as it is too painful for him. Although he grew physically, he did not grow emotionally – 'I grew – or did not grow'. This shows that his feelings towards love have not changed and that he still chooses to reject it.

In stanza four he claims that he chooses to be alone – 'Claiming separateness was out of choice'. This suggests that this is not true, as he is constantly repeating, throughout the poem, that he chooses to be alone. Pattern then uses a metaphor in lines twenty seven and twenty eight to describe divorce – 'The shadow of that albatross – divorce – fall love the groom and bride'. An albatross is associated with carrying a burden of some sort for the rest of your life and is something that one cannot rid themselves of.

The albatross, in this case, symbolises divorce and Pattern says that he can see the burden of divorce around both the bride and groom and, even though their wedding day is a day to unite both of them, they will not be able to escape divorce. Pattern still sees them as being separate, which refers back to the first stanza and the equation of 'one and one stayed one and one'. However in the last stanza of the poem, Pattern contradicts himself. He uses the simple statement 'I was wrong of course' in line thirty one to begin his reason for changing the way he now reacts to love.

He says that if one is given love then they should not reject it - 'That given love, by taking love all in time can refute'. He believes that as long as he can accept love then what has happened to him in his childhood should can be prevented now and that he doesn't have to do what his parents did, but can only learn from it. This also suggests that he has found love as he has completely changed his thoughts on love and commitment in a relationship. He also says that we should not judge others to be like ourselves just because we have been damaged in some way - 'It's absurd to believe all others are as damaged as ourselves'.

This can be referred back to the mentioning of the crowd in stanza four - 'And kept my head down low, and drifted with the crowd' Here he is saying that he is drifting with people who have been hurt, like him. However he realises in stanza five that it was not right to do that as it is almost self pity to a certain extent and we should assume that others have been hurt more than we have. The poem has a an irregular rhyme scheme throughout, but in the last two lines of the poem there is a rhyming couplet which shows that his intentions are clear and that his thoughts are now final.

It is also the breaking of the cycle in which he was unhappy. There is also an irregular verse length which shows the different stages in his life and how he is feeling. The first stanza of the poem gives the reader the history of his parents' relationship and how he was affected by it as well as showing the reader the cause of his 'disease'. The second, third and fourth stanza are about his feelings as he gets older and the final stanza shows the reader how he has changed and what he feels at the present time. The poem has a very sad and depressing tone however; this is changed at in the last stanza, due to him possibly finding love.

The atmosphere becomes uplifting and happy because he has learned that he should not suffer because of the mistakes his parents made. I think that the purpose of the poem is to try to convince the reader that Pattern is right about love and relationships. The title 'The Sick Equation' gives the reader the image of the equation of one and one, in terms of a relationship, to be destructive and wrong. The equation is an extended metaphor as there are always references to the equation of one and one remaining one and one rather than becoming two through out the poem.