

Date 4 / 23 PV Log: (circle one) Poem / Movie / Picture / LyricTitle "Dangerous Astronomy"Author / Director / Sherman Alexie

Context (Where Found / Viewed / Read?)

I found this poem on Shmoop while browsing through poems to log for poetic vision.

Content / CD / Summary / Precis (Say? "Plot? Setting/Situation? Key lines/phrases scenes, etc?)

"Dangerous Astronomy" begins with a speaker wanting to "walk outside and praise the stars;" however, his son needs his attention, and so he goes back inside and tries to comfort his son. Despite his efforts, his "comfort [is] not enough" for his son because ultimately he cannot "compete with mothers' love." Mothers provide breast milk for their children, something a pan physically cannot produce, and this makes the father envious of his son because he is not able to help out with the situation. This makes him feel "less important than the furthest star." Nevertheless, the father comes to realize that his feelings and emotions may have been wrong, and the poem ends with him asking God for forgiveness.

Content / CM / Meaning? / Theme(s)?

The main two themes in this poem are jealousy and love. In the poem, Alexie tries to make clear and emphasize the big and efficient role a mother plays in a child's life. Moreover, he clearly tries to show how men are often left in the shadows in terms of relationships with others and even with their own family, evoking in them a sense of envy because they come to believe that fatherhood isn't nearly as important as motherhood. The mother is praised as the role of the star, while the father is merely an insignificant afterthought. Nevertheless, jealousy in this poem is shown to have a softer and more meaningful side than it outwardly appears. In the poem, a father gets jealous of his son, but this emotion does not lead him to carry out malicious and evil actions, but instead it motivates the speaker to ask deeper questions about himself and his motivations as a parent. Instead of wallowing in jealousy, the speaker uses it as an engine to move the speaker through his doubt and confusion. He gradually moves from being alarmed at his own jealousy to accepting his own faults and asking for forgiveness. In terms of love, the familial love of both parenting and marriage becomes the source for closeness and distance for the speaker. Although he loves and wants to worship his wife and son, he seems isolated because of the intimate relationship they have with each other.

Form (Diction? Construction Terms? Symbolism?)

"Dangerous Astronomy" is a villanelle, a traditional form that originated in France. Villanelles are always 19 lines, made up of five three-line stanzas and one quatrain. The first and the third lines of the first stanza alternate as the third line of each successive stanza. Finally, those two repeated lines form a couplet that finishes the poem. Various other aspects go into composing a villanelle, but these are the basic qualities that a villanelle possesses. Symbolically, the stars in the poem become comparable to the wife and the son of the speaker, and he eventually realizes that he could not praise and be more than the stars at the same time because of his restrictions as a father.

Commentary (What do you want to say? Why like? Questions? Synthesis / Allusions-Connections / Relevance to personal experience, to literature, 20Q's? etc.)? "Poetic" Traits?

"Dangerous Astronomy" seems to be a simple poem about familial relationships and the bonds that exist in a family environment; however, I think that it yields a much greater meaning when examined more closely. When the speaker finally comes to terms with his relationship with the stars and his family, the speaker realizes that he made a mistake in thinking he could both praise and be more than the stars at the same time. He comes to understand that it is not his role or place to feed or intimately comfort his son because he physically cannot provide the nutrients and food that the baby needs to survive and to develop properly. In the end, when he asks for forgiveness for lacking the humility he didn't realize he was missing, the speaker both comes to terms with his selfhood as well as with his limitations as a father and a husband. Ultimately, the jealousy that he develops towards the relationship between his wife and his son acts as a catalyst to help him find his true identity and to accept the reality of the existence around him. This concept of accepting the actual circumstances surrounding an event is extremely poetic because it is the only way by which a person can meaningfully grow, develop, and mature towards a greater state of existence.

over (do not mix logs; e.g., no poem log in front, and movie log on back)