

World Through The Eyes Of Annie Dillard

Posted on October 6, 2022

In your discussion, provide quotes and explain the ways in which their details illustrate and support your claims (the hows and whys of your claims' reasoning). What happens ("what") is less important than emotions evoked, ideas communicated, or points made ("so what"). Provide interpretation connecting the language of the text to what Pilgrim at Tinker Creek or Annie Dillard accomplishes in language. In your claims and in your quote-claim, connect explanations of relationships between examples and their interpretations. Give coherent links between examples and interpretations.

Annie Dillard's book "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek" outlines her pure interaction with nature. The book records her interaction with different animals and insects. She spends countless hours observing the creatures of nature, realizing the brutal circumstances these animals and insects live in. This leads her to contemplate why God would create these creatures only to see them die. The book follows themes of suffering, isolation, and the meaning of life and death. Through these experiences, the author tries to develop the ability to see beyond the visible into the unknown so that she may understand the reason behind all the happenings in the world. In the last chapter, she concludes that the world is extravagant, and its extravagance is due to the presence of death. If death did not exist, then the world's beauty would have no meaning. "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek" is filled with beautiful quotes that make the reader dive deeper into the meaning of these words; this essay will discuss a few of these quotes in detail.

Suffering

“Cruelty is a mystery, and the waste of pain (Dillard, The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek).”

When Dillard witnesses the cruelty of nature, she does not understand the reason behind it. Why make such a beautiful world only to inflict pain and suffering on others through cruel actions? The reason a human would opt for cruelty is unknown, but the reason it exists in nature is the survival of the fittest. Animals do not have a reason to be cruel as they are not capable of hatred. Such notions do not motivate them. Their actions are guided by their wish to live another day. Human beings, on the other hand, have too many reasons to live, and these reasons can shape them into morally different people, either good or evil. Those whose circumstances cause them to become cruel may find their actions justifiable, but those who are not cruel may not understand them. Becoming a cruel person is a choice because many people may go through the same experiences but may choose to become better people as opposed to those who decide to take it out on others (Illing).

When Dillard talked about cruelty, she was talking about the way one animal attacked the other, for instance, the moment when the water bug kills the frog and when a dog is crossing the road with the leg of a deer in its mouth. However, the quote invokes a much deeper meaning that goes beyond these instances, and that meaning is that in comparison to many other species, human beings will always be the cruellest, and no one can truly understand the reason behind it. Yes, nature is cruel, but only for its survival (Burroughs).

Isolation

“What if I fell in forest; would a tree hear? (Dillard, the Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek)”

This quote by Dillard is the opposite of an old saying: “If a tree falls in the forest and nobody is there, does it make a sound?” Dillard is asking if the opposite happens, then nature would know about it. Nature is a mystery; no one knows what is happening in it; however, what about nature? Does it know what is happening in it? Of course, the question is not directed at the tree or nature for that fact. It is directed at the readers, and the answer is “no”. Even if the tree heard her fall, it would not acknowledge it as it is not the tree’s concern. Everything in nature does the designated functions, nothing more and nothing less. Acknowledgement and concern are the sentiments made by humans; they mean nothing to the workings of nature (Yu).

However, the reason Dillard asked the question was to acknowledge the fact that she was isolated. Even though she was not alone, as there were animals and insects around her, she was isolated from them. She was an outsider who could not be one of them but could observe them through the lens of isolation and finally “see” the things she could not see before.

Man and the Natural World

"I remember what the city has to offer: human companionship, major-league baseball, and a clatter of quickening stimulus like a rush from strong drugs that leaves you drained (Dillard, *The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek*)."

Dillard reflected on her life back in the city, where one could experience frequent adrenaline rushes and human companionship. However, this buzzing life just means that they are surrounded; it does not take away the feeling of isolation. This feeling of isolation is not as apparent in the cities as there are many distractions, but it becomes quite apparent when one is in nature. The reason behind this feeling is that people never spend time with their selves, so they are not aware of the person that they may be. Hence, when they are left alone, their personality feels like a stranger. This feeling of isolation becomes overwhelming when one is forced to face oneself, and nature does just that; it forces human beings to face themselves. This can either allow them to become better people or send them running back to the city, where they can distract themselves from their reality (Grant).

Morality

"And we the people are so vulnerable. Our bodies are shot with mortality. Our legs are fear, and our arms are time (Dillard, *The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek*)."

In this quote, Dillard is using metaphor to explain human mortality. She writes that human beings are weak and always at a disadvantage against death. Humans keep trying to run away from death, and they use their legs to run away, so the "legs" symbolize their fear, and the arms are like the arms of a clock slowly counting down the time left on earth. Humans were designed to die, and as such, we are expiring slowly. Dillard further states that God is the perfect hunter as he is invisible to us, his prey. He can shoot us down whenever he sees fit; we can do nothing about it.

Human beings have been obsessed with the concept of death from the beginning of the human species. No one knows for sure the things that are in store for us after death. Some say that there will be an afterlife where everyone will be judged for their deeds, and others say that there is no afterlife, so everything will just end. These are just speculations, and the true answer is known only to those who have left this earthly realm. The only thing that humans know for sure is that death is inevitable, and there is no denying it (Monsó and Osuna-Mascaró).

Conclusion

"Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek" is a philosophical observation of nature and human beings. It raises questions that make the readers search for deeper meanings of life, and it forces them to "see" beyond the visible things. Dillard has done an exceptional job at invoking the curiosity of the readers

by sharing her experiences. She brings the readers face-to-face with themselves and makes them question the authenticity of their reality. She concludes that the beauty of the world exists due to the existence of death; however, death is also the biggest truth that humans try to avoid. We will only be able to see the world for what it is when we stop being afraid of death and embrace the beauty of life.

Works Cited

Burroughs, John. "Is Nature Cruel?" *The North American Review*, vol. 208, no. 755, University of Northern Iowa, 1918, pp. 558-66.

Dillard, Annie. "The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek." *The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek*, Print, Harper & Row, 1985, p. 1.18.

—. "The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek." *The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek*, Print, Harper & Row, 1985, p. 6.41.

—. "The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek." *The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek*, Print, Harper & Row, 1985, p. 6.16.

—. "The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek." *The Pilgrim at the Tinker Creek*, Print, Harper & Row, 1985, p. 6.36.

Grant, Adam. "People Don't Actually Know Themselves Very Well." *The Atlantic*, 1 Mar. 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/03/you-dont-know-yourself-as-well-as-you-think-you-do/554612/>.

Illing, Sean. "Why Humans Are Cruel." *Vox*, 14 Dec. 2017, <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/12/14/16687388/cruelty-border-immigration-psychology-human-nature>.

Monsó, Susana, and Antonio J. Osuna-Mascaró. "Death Is Common, so Is Understanding It: The Concept of Death in Other Species." *Synthese*, vol. 199, no. 1, Dec. 2021, pp. 2251-75. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02882-y>.

Yu, Alisa. "Emotional Acknowledgment: How Verbalizing Others' Emotions Fosters Interpersonal Trust." *Stanford Graduate School of Business*, Mar. 2021, <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/publications/emotional-acknowledgment-how-verbalizing-others-emotions-fosters>.