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College Reading and Writing

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### In Another Year of Fewer Disappointments

Eliza Griswold is the poet who wrote this poem and Eliza seems to write her poems about the world today and typically she doesn't paint a happy, glorious world. She usually writes about how the world is a sad and dismal place to live in. Sure enough, her poem titled *In Another Year of Fewer Disappointments* seems to follow that style in which she describes a conversation we, the audience, have with a suffering "minor angel".

The poem starts out with saying "The minor angel mops his brow and laughs / his miraculous laugh, ringing with sorrow." (1 – 2, see appendix). Just by taking that sentence literally, which I believe the poet had intended, means the angel is suffering. She doesn't say any old angel though, she says the minor angel. Minor is an adjective describing something of lesser importance, so Eliza could be describing an angel who isn't an official angel yet, or in other words, she might be describing an old religious man. She also says he mops his brow and laughs miraculously, ringing with sorrow, which may indicate frustration of a goal he or someone he knew failed to accomplish.

"His face – if this is his face – this mask / of wrecked grace says, Sit with me." (3 – 4). So now, the minor angel asks the reader to come sit with him to probably talk in an attempt to make him feel better, but the reader doesn't recognize his face since he is so sad and emotional. In the next line the angel repeats what he said, "Come sit with me for

a while.” (5). Possibly conveying the fact that he doesn’t want to see this event happen again. Eliza uses the words *a while* instead of *awhile* which denotes that the angel would like to talk for quite some time evidence of the notion that he wants to teach a lesson and help us. In lines one through five, Eliza uses a lot of alliteration, some rhyme, and repeats words. Using those elements of craft gives me the impression of a stutter in her writing, hinting at the fact that the angel is so choked up he is stuttering as he speaks.

In the next line the poet switches over to something we, the reader, are thinking in our minds, “Ah, to be as wise as he is-“ (6). After reading that, I get the impression that this minor angel is a wise old man that many people look up to, and he could also be someone who the reader looks up to personally in which Eliza leaves him open with the intention for us to fill him in with an important person in our life. If, in fact, that was her intention, it was a smart move since that enables the poem to become closer and more personal to its audience.

The next stanza dives into a conversation we have with the minor angel. “but we can’t know what suffering will cost us. / It could cost the very self that longed for it, / that winked at its specter, lurking” (7 – 9). What she is saying there is we don’t know what suffering is going to cost us, it could cost us our own life if the suffering is severe enough. When she says we wink at its specter, I think she means that we acknowledge its presence, yet don’t want to get involved with it. Immediately after “specter”, she writes “lurking” which means present but in a barely recognizable state, yet still presenting a threat, therefore, we can infer this thought of suffering is there and we acknowledge its

existence but it's hardly there and we don't want to dwell on the displeasing thought. That thought of suffering existing in a faint form in which we like to avoid thinking of, leads us to wish for better days in the future or even reminisce in the past. Eliza conveys this message in the next line when she writes "blueing the sky." (10). Meaning better days are ahead because up till now she paints a dismal picture of the world so when she says "blueing the sky", it brightens things up and gives us hope.

After Eliza gives us hope of better days to come, she tears those hopes down in the next couple of lines by saying "In the wake of its coming, / the small boat of our souls- / where we imagined we'd ride out the gale/ in high style – has splintered and sunk," (10 – 13). I believe line ten describes the future drawing nearer, and the next two lines describe our dreams and aspirations of amazing accomplishments we wish for in the future. But in line 13, our dreams fail, or in other words our dreams have "splintered and sunk" when we finally get to the future. Line 13 has the repetition of *s*'s with *style*, *splintered*, and *sunk*. When I make the *s* sound over and over, it sounds like a noise a snake or serpent of some sort would make, so that might represent a dark force, possibly the devil, holding us back from our goals.

Lines 14 and 15 give me a sense of humiliation. She writes, "one gunwale washed onto the beach / for the jittery, pea-brained seagulls to perch on / and spatter." (14 – 16). She refers to the gunwale as a metaphor for a dream, saying it has been washed up onto the beach for pea-brained seagulls, which I believe is a metaphor for ignorant people, to perch on and spatter. I think she is implying these ignorant people

find out about an unsuccessful dream and, basically, just mock and ridicule the idea and even laugh at the person for thinking such an idea could be successful. This method of humiliation is how the devil keeps us from our goals, and that is to fill us with doubt about our ideas and ourselves.

What I like about this poem is the poet ends with a couple of humbling remarks. “What does that matter, / the angel asks. One rib made the world once.” (16 – 17). After having this deep conversation with the minor angel he says that it doesn’t matter what people think about our dreams or ideas, so we shouldn’t let them get us down and second guess ourselves. I am under the impression that the sentence, “One rib made the world once.” (17) means that no matter how crazy our dreams are, they are never impossible to achieve especially with the help of angels.

Because of this advice the minor angel has given to us, we are able to live *in a year of fewer disappointments* since we shouldn’t let people ridicule our dreams and disappoint us, but, instead, we know anything is possible. At the same time, in the pursuit of our goals we must know that suffering may lurk ahead, but the knowledge that angels can be on our side if we let them, will help us achieve all our dreams.