The Poem Celestial Music

In today’s world, people with different outlooks on life and backgrounds are brought together more and more often. Places where we live and work are filled with conflict, and often religious differences are the worst. In the poem, “Celestial Music” Louise Gluck explains a disagreement between a person who believes in god and someone who doesn’t. In spite of their different beliefs they are close friends. Using imagery, the poem tells a story that shows how friendship can bring people together even though they disagree.

The differences between the woman and her friend are part of the theme of the poem, and though they are friends, these differences are discussed in detail. The author of the poem in the first part of the poem uses a disturbing image from everyday life to show that believing in God gives a person strength. The woman and her friend are out walking and find “a caterpillar dying in the dirt, greedy ants crawling over it”. (line 6) The woman is upset at seeing this and she shuts her eyes. But her friend is “able to watch, to let events play out”. (line 9) The woman means that how she reacts herself to the caterpillar is how she reacts to all suffering. Her friend is like a mother, telling her “to wake up an adult like herself, a courageous person”. (line 16) She indicates that her friend believes in God strongly but she doesn’t. The woman says that her friend can face suffering and pain because she has faith in god who is control of everything, including suffering.

The poem seems to make those who believe in god the stronger ones, but later that changes. The woman dreams it is winter, and the two friends are walking down a road. The woman’s friend tells her to look up at the sky and says that “when you love the world you hear celestial music”. (line 21) The woman doesn’t hear anything like her friend does, which again shows the different outlook of the two friends. The women look at the world very differently.
When the friend looks up into the sky, she hears music. But when the woman looks up she sees a beautiful image of “brides leaping to a great height” which is actually the snow in the trees. (line 22 – 23) The woman worries about her friend because she sees her as “caught in a net deliberately cast over the earth” by her belief in God. The net is the old religious beliefs that make her a prisoner of her beliefs. On the other hand, when the woman sees the leaping brides it shows great creativity and thinking outside the box.

The most important part of the poem is the last part where the woman and her friend are sitting together in “a stillness that we both love”. (line 36) The poem ends with the line “The love of form is the love of endings”, which may be hard to understand at first, but it makes sense. (line 37) The friend’s love of form is shown when she draws a circle around the dead caterpillar to contain it and the caterpillar’s suffering, that the woman didn’t like to see. The woman says that her friend is “always trying to make something whole”. (line 31) But the poem also tries to make things whole. It starts with talking about the caterpillar, then it goes to the dream, and then it comes back to the caterpillar where it began which brings things full circle, and a circle is also a form. When something takes a form, it is whole. When a person has lived their life, they face death, and their life is also something that is whole. That explains why when someone loves form they also love endings.

Therefore, the last part of the poem refers to death. In the final part, the women “sit by the side of the road, watching the sun set.” (line 26) The woman believes that “we’re at ease with death, with solitude.” (line 29) Even though they’re not really alone because they share the solitude. The sun sets and the caterpillar doesn’t move. The women understand that they will die too. But they become closer as friends because they both believe that even though they don’t both believe in god they know that one day their life will end and be whole.
When I first read the poem, it was hard for me to understand. But then I realized that the poem begins with the caterpillar, goes into the dream, and then comes back to the caterpillar, so it circles around. It discusses how life is a whole, from being born to dying, and how different beliefs can still be similar. By reading this poem, you can see that even though people have different religious beliefs, they can still be close friends.

Works Cited


Note: This is a “C” paper because it adequately meets the guidelines for a “Competent Essay” as outlined in the General Rubric. The essay has a clear thesis controlling the flow of ideas from the introduction through the body paragraphs and to the conclusion. The sentence structure is somewhat varied, but at times sentences lack the focus and control of language needed for clarity, as in the fourth paragraph: “It starts with talking about the caterpillar, then it goes to the dream, and then it comes back to the caterpillar where it began which brings things full circle, and a circle is also a form.”

While the body paragraphs provide evidence to support claims and avoid major logical fallacies, there are several minor errors in grammar and mechanics. Some errors include: missing commas (as in the previously quoted sentence), end punctuation placement before parenthetical citation, comma placement outside of quotation marks, and underlining the Works Cited heading. More serious errors include pronoun use (“That explains why when someone loves form they also love endings.”) and sentence fragments (“Even though they’re not really alone because they share the solitude.”).