

“Sole Watchman” Annotated Example

Sole watchman of the flying stars, guard me
against my flicker of impulse lust: teach me
to see them as sisters & daughters. Sustain
my grand endeavours: husbandship & crafting.

*Opening noun of address
Seems to suggest vulnerability with “guard” request
Pattern of imperative structures developing
Who is “them?”
He holds his work in high esteem*

Forsake me not when my wild hours come;
grant me sleep nightly, grace soften my dreams;
achieve in me patience till the thing be done,
a careful view of my achievement come.

*Reading like a prayer in both structure and audience
Unexpected structure*

Make me from time to time the gift of the shoulder.
When all hurt nerves whine shut away the whiskey.
Empty my heart toward Thee.
Let me pace without fear the common path of death.

*Why has this been inserted?
He has an achievement to worry about!
Ambiguous – is he the shoulder or does he need one?
Opening relative clause – not typical in this poem*

Cross am I sometimes with my little daughter:
fill her eyes with tears: Forgive me, Lord.
Unite my various soul,
sole watchman of the wide & single stars.

*Atypical use in both verb and clause placement
Ambiguous – who is doing the filling?
Various soul explains the variety in the poem
Why the change from flying to wide & single?*

Notes made upon reviewing annotations:

- Emphasis on imperative structures seems to imply personal weakness (they all tell someone else to do something instead of announcing an action on the part of the narrator)
- Various can tie entire poem together (since the reader sees multiple views of him and seemingly explains the source of the narrator’s pain)
- Narrator seems to be at the mercy of many different forces (thus “various”)
- Every stanza ends on a positive note, more or less
- His ambiguous word choice seems to highlight his own weakness

NOTE: These annotations were written by the author of the lesson to help him understand the “surface” meaning of the poem while also recording his thoughts for a deeper interpretation later on. It is composed of items that jumped out to him based on his understanding of poetry in general and his own experiences in particular. When you are annotating a poem, your subjective attention has meaning and is important in constructing your understanding of the poem. Keep this in mind as you annotate.