

Plants

Plants are deceptive. You see them there
looking as if once rooted they know
their places; not like animals, like us
always running around, leaving traces.

Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!)
and twine, from their exhibitionist
and rather prolific nature, we must infer
a sinister not to say imperialistic

grand design. Perhaps you've regarded,
as beneath your notice, armies of mangrove
on the march, roots in the air, clinging
tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere?

The world is full of shoots bent on conquest,
invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces,
matériel gathered for explosive dispersal
in capsules and seed cases.

Maybe you haven't quite taken in the
colonizing ambitions of hitchhiking
burrs on your sweater, surf-riding nuts
bobbing on ocean, parachuting seeds and
other

airborne traffic dropping in. And what
about those special agents called flowers?

Dressed, perfumed, and made-up for
romancing

insects, bats, birds, bees, even you –

– don't deny it my dear, I've seen you
sniff and exclaim. Believe me, Innocent,
that sweet fruit, that berry, is nothing
more than ovary, the instrument to seduce

you into scattering plant progeny. Part of
a vast cosmic program that once set
in motion cannot be undone though we
become plant food and earth wind down.

They'll outlast us, they were always there
one step ahead of us: plants gone to seed,
generating the original profligate,
extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed.

In *Plants* by Olive Senior, the relationship between the speaker and the implied audience is one where the speaker is using the plants as an example to talk about the negative aspects of people. The speaker is trying to convince the audience that people are bad by applying negative human traits to plants and convincing the audience that plants are bad.. The author does this by examining the similarities between plants and the worst aspects of humanity. This is done by using tone, diction, and personification. The tone of this piece is formal and persuasive. The diction the author uses has a very strong negative connotation. The plants are the things that are being personified with the negative aspects of humanity to make the audience make the realization about people as a whole.

The author uses a persuasive tone in *Plants*. Although the speaker is trying to persuade the audience of something, they still use formal and professional language. The speaker has to do this so that the people will listen to the negative things that they have to say about plants. This is a rather epic undertaking as the general view of plants is a positive one. The speaker even acknowledges this in the poem by saying, "I've seen you sniff and exclaim." The speaker understands that the audience enjoys plants, but uses this enjoyment to enforce the idea that the plants are bad by immediately following it by saying that the flower is , "the instrument to seduce you into scattering plant progeny." This makes the reader feel as if the plant is manipulating them into doing something against their will and helps the speaker's point that the plants are bad. After convincing the audience that the plant is bad, using a formal and persuasive tone, the speaker is able to convince the audience that people are like the plants and that people fulfill all of the negative beliefs that are being spread. Making the audience feel as if they have been manipulated by plants in the past eases the transition from believing that plants are bad to believing that people are bad. This is because many people understand the manipulative nature of people, but don't fully consider the negative ramifications of the manipulation. The bridge here helps to allow the audience to understand the negative concepts of humanity.

Although the speaker is trying to convince the audience that people are bad by comparing the negative aspects of plants to the negative aspects of people, the speaker is trying to do it in a way where the audience does not know that this is their true intention. The author does this at the beginning of the poem by saying that the plants are "not like animals, like us always running around, leaving traces." This specification allows the audience to feel some pride in our not being like plants. However, the intent of the speaker is still there, and is even shown in that sentence. Running around and leaving traces are not inherently negative things, but when they are put into the context of the whole poem, the negativity of them starts to appear. The speaker has to try to make people seem positive for the audience to listen. When a person is told that they are bad or have negative qualities, they shut down and dismiss the claims in their entirety, but by saying that plants are sinister and enumerating the negative qualities of them, many of which are human qualities, the audience can realize that there is a problem that needs to get fixed.

The speaker uses very specific words to describe the actions of the plants. The words that are used like, “exhibitionist,” “sinister,” “reckless,” and “improvident” all have negative connotations. These negative connotations are being used to try to convince the audience that these plants are in fact bad. These words all invoke a sense of unjustness and a lack of dignity. These words are also often used to describe negative actions that people take. By using similar words throughout the poem to describe the negative actions of plants, the author is reinforcing the idea that these actions are wrong and that they should not be happening. Ultimately the speaker makes the claim that plants were, “always here” and that they “generat[e] the original profligate, extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed.” This final examination of the acts of plants concretizes the idea that the plants are malicious and are not benefiting their surroundings.

The speaker also uses personification to compare these plants to people. This act of personification reveals the true intention of the speaker, which is to convince the audience that people are bad by comparing the negative actions of plants to people. This method of persuasion subverts the expectations of the audience and leads them to make their own conclusions instead of the speaker making the conclusions themselves. The speaker uses words and actions that are very person-specific to describe the plants. This makes the audience consider why those actions are bad, and relate the negativity to the human race. Actions like “colonizing,” “conquest[ing],” and “deciv[ing]” are all very human actions that the speaker relates to plants. By saying that a plant has “colonizing ambitions” the speaker is making the plant sound like a bad person. The audience then has to take the step to realize that the speaker was never really talking about plants, but is talking about people. It is important for the audience to make this step because they need to know what their problems are before they can make any changes. Without realizing the negative aspects of humanity, one can’t fix them.

Carefully read Olive Senior’s 2005 poem “Plants.” Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. You may wish to consider the author’s use of such literary techniques as syntax, diction, and figurative language.

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