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### A Light In The Attic Mini Analysis

A Light in the Attic is an enjoyable book filled with a variety of children's poetry that covers many topics, ranging from creative to encouraging to downright absurd. While a few are clearly meant to portray a specific theme or idea (such as *Reflection* (Silverstein, 29) which is an metaphor for acceptance and understanding), a great deal of them have no unifying theme or feelings other than humor or silliness. In fact, there are several places where it appears that Silverstein uses a non sequitur purposefully. The lack of an overarching theme for the book could almost be considered a theme unto itself.

When pondering absurdist humor and non sequiturs, it is nearly impossible not to think of the classic british television show Monty Python's Flying Circus. Flying Circus was a short sketch show that made constant use of parody, satire and non sequitur transitions constantly. The troop was so fond of this style of transition that they often used the catchphrase "And Now for Something Completely Different.", even going as far as using this catchphrase as the title for one of their films. These unrelated transitions were often accompanied by illustrations and animations by Terry Gilliam, and there is a striking similarity in feel to the crazy drawings that Silverstein uses to illustrate his poems.

Another similarity of the two is in the way that both Silverstein and the Pythons take great pleasure in skewering well held beliefs. For example: in the episode *Archaeology Today*,

the Pythons attack the view that judges are always distinguished, absolutely proper, respectable and stiff, by showing two judges disrobing after a day in court. The actors portray the judges as silly, gossipy homosexuals. One of the best and well-known examples of Monty Python's satire is the sketch *Ministry of Silly Walks*, from the episode entitled *Face The Press*. In this sketch, a fictional government ministry is portrayed, as well as people asking for grants to develop silly walks, thus poking fun at the perceived uselessness of many government institutions.

In *A Light in the Attic*, Silverstein frequently makes fun of various societal tenets, such as in *Little Abigail and the Beautiful Pony*, wherein he portrays a small girl who dies because her parents will not buy her a pony. In addition, the coda of the poem tells the reader "This is a good story to read to your folks when they won't buy you something you want." (Silverstein, 121). This contrasts with the common saying "No-one ever died from not getting a.....", as well as poking fun at his own works, as children's literature is generally supposed to portray positive values. Silverstein also uses satire in a similar fashion - in his poem *Hot Dog* (Silverstein, 69), we are shown a boy who has a hot dog on a string, and who keeps it as a pet. This would appear to be a jab at the Pet Rock fad of the 1970's.

There are a variety of poems in this book that children will relate to, as there are many children portrayed in situations that occur frequently. In *How Not to Have to Dry The Dishes* (Silverstein, 12), a child will be able to relate to having to do chores or schoolwork that they don't want to do, and fanciful ways they may think of to get out of these. In *Prayer of the Selfish Child* (15), children are presented with the futility of being selfish. Lastly, in *Here Comes* (32), the shortness of school breaks and summertime is something that every school-age child will be able to easily relate to. Although many of the poems are pure nonsense, and are merely to

be enjoyed, rather than analyzed, there are several interesting bits of satire and many points of discussion and teachable issues.

## WORKS CITED:

Silverstein, Shel. *A Light in the Attic*. HarperCollins; Special Edition, 2009. Print.

*And Now For Something Completely Different*. Dir. Ian MacNaughton. Perf. Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1999. DVD.

*The Complete Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Perf. Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones. A&E Home Video, 2000. DVD Set.