
The Similarities and Differences in Describing What Happens You Observe Birds in Ornithological Biographies and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

Simple events in our lives are often overlooked by our rushed and demanding lives. John James Audubon's *Ornithological Biographies* and Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* show what happens when one stops to smell the roses, or rather, watch the birds. Although describing similar events, the authors differ in their descriptions and views of, what they would both observe as, a wondrous phenomenon. The authors' dissimilar tone, divergent diction, and disparate style show just how one event can be seen in many ways.

John James Audubon utilizes a more precise tone in his excerpt when recounting the pigeon's migration from "north-east to south-west" (5). Audubon displays his use of precise diction in saying, "In a short time finding the task which I had undertaken impracticable, as the birds poured in in countless multitudes, I rose, and counting the dots then put down, found that 163 [dots] had been made in twenty-one minutes" (10-15). When the author depicts this occasion, he had decided to sit down and count the number of flocks that had passed him. Instead of just saying he sat down to count the flocks, he continues on to say precisely how long he had been sitting on the bench and exactly how many flocks he had counted. The author does this to allow the reader to feel like they are essentially undergoing what he is. On the contrary, Annie Dillard intertwines a more informal tone into her writing when saying, "I didn't move; they flew directly over my head for half an hour" (7-8). She adapts a tone that makes it sound like she is in a casual conversation. The reader can assume that she rounded off the time period. Instead of being precise like Audubon who marks the exact period of time as "twenty-one minutes," Dillard expresses the period of time as half an hour. She allows the reader to imagine the scenario by giving an estimation of time and also by being heedless in her description. Her simple setting and plain words are very unlike Audubon's polysyllabic diction and extended description.

John James Audubon's sophisticated diction creates a passage that seems well processed and thought through. Annie Dillard's simple diction creates a more spontaneous description of the experience. When Dillard explains the start of the phenomenon she plainly says, "Out of the dimming sky a speck appeared, then another, and another," (1-2) instead of adding detail like Audubon does when he talks about the birds flying in masses. Audubon states, "In thee almost solid masses, they darted forward in undulating and angular lines, descended and swept close over the earth with inconceivable velocity...which then resembled the coils of a gigantic serpent" (35-42) Audubon's description allows the reader to do less wondering. The excerpt is already well-processed and with the use of polysyllabic diction, the reader would rather find Audubon to be a quite intelligible individual whereas Dillard's excerpt does not so much use polysyllables as it does create an image that seemed almost effortless; a piece of art.

John James Audubon's excerpt is an extensive, detailed description of an experience he encountered when going on his normal day. Although complex, the way he describes the experience is almost scientific. He gives exact numbers as to how many flocks flew past him in an exact amount of time and precisely the direction they were flying. He describes one situation almost like the big bang theory, "At once, like a torrent, and with a noise like thunder, they

rushed into a compact mass, pressing upon each other towards the centre” (33-35). To the reader, Audubon’s scientific way of writing is one way to create this wondrous image in the reader’s head. Although differentiating from Audubon, Dillard does a respectable job at creating a spectacular image in the reader’s head as well, except Dillard’s piece of writing seemed less scientific, almost effortless. Dillard’s piece of writing seems a little more spontaneous, as if she wrote down everything as it was happening. Audubon’s writing almost seems like thought about it afterwards and tried to make it sound as best he could. Annie Dillard demonstrates her artistic style when she describes how, “They seemed to unravel as they flew, lengthening in curves, like a loosened skein” (5-6). Her artistic style and way of describing things allows the reader to picture the marvel in a whole different way than Audubon.

Both John James Audubon and Annie Dillard describe what was, to them, the most extraordinary experience they’ve ever had. Yet, both use different approaches when it came to writing about it. Audubon came off almost like a professor, using polysyllables and creating a sophisticated excerpt with precise measurements. Dillard’s approach is more of an artist that wanted to be spontaneous yet still paint the same picture. Both Authors were complete opposites when it came to describing the same thing. That is what is so wonderful about writing. You can take one spectacle like an endless trail of birds and describe it in so many ways, and that is exactly what Audubon and Dillard accomplished.