The wasp is an amazing yet misunderstood creature. While many people fear these insects, most do not realize the determination and devotion of the wasp to its home. In "The Wasps' Nest" by James L. Rosenberg, the speaker feels a connection with these "aerial tigers." Although they are building a nest on his mailbox, he begins to understand how his life is not unlike that of a wasp.

The description of the wasps as "aerial tigers" in line 1 gives the poem an admiring tone. Tigers are typically thought of as brave, strong, and majestic hunters, seemingly much different than wasps. The connection is made stronger throughout the poem. An example of this is in line 22 when the wasps are described as "fiercely occupied." This creates the notion that both tigers and wasps are fierce, which strengthens the poet's tone of wonderment for the wasps. Bravery is another attribute given to the wasps in the poem. "They know my strength," the speaker says in line 16. Yet the wasps continue to build their home, even when destruction seems inevitable.

Just as the wasps are devoted to their home, the speaker is also devoted to understanding these mailbox-dwelling insects. By destroying the wasps' nest, he will not risk getting stung when he gets the mail everyday. He cannot seem to destroy the nest, however, along with all the hard work of the wasps. To the wasps, the mailbox is a part of their lives now, it supports their home. Similarly, to the speaker the mailbox is a part of his life—he understands what went into building this structure that provides safety and protection for dozens of living creatures.

The wasps are constructing their "insubstantial and only home" (line 9). Although the nest's location on a mailbox seems inconvenient for the speaker, the mailman, and the wasps, nothing seems to deter the wasps from "their hummed devotions" (line 14). "With paper and with mud," Rosenberg writes in line 7, the wasps continue building their home even though they know it can be easily destroyed, especially with these light materials. The wasps do not let fear drive their actions; a sense of duty and commitment leads them to continue working.

In lines 26-13 the speaker realizes his likeness to wasps:

For though I am not in nor of them,
Still I think I know
What it is like to live
In an alien and gigantic universe, a stranger,
Building the fragile citadels of love
On the edge of danger.

The admiring tone of Rosenberg helps to create the relationship between humans and wasps. Although the two seem nothing alike, both species are doing all they can to survive. The doomed nest of the wasps only shows how vulnerable we all are in this "alien and gigantic universe." It just takes a lot of understanding for us to realize how similar we are. We are all working toward a common goal, a goal that will only be achieved through understanding each other.

Rosenberg conveys our likeness to wasps through his poem "The Wasps' Nest." Both humans and wasps are living in an unfriendly world but we need to do what we must to survive. We are all capable of destroying each other, but it is much more important to understand each other. It is the only way to realize how similar we all really are.

Source: Hilton High School, New York.

Examiner comments:
General understanding of intent, though misses the main point of the poem, Limited awareness of literary features, but fair structure and expression.
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