The Facebook Sonnet By Sherman Alexie

“The Facebook Sonnet” by Sherman Alexie is an intriguing take on both the expectations that an older generation has on how their kin use the internet and social media, as well as a peek into how those in the middle of life find themselves trapped in the traps meant for young people. One would0gthink, when looking at lines like “Let’s exhume, resume, and extend Childhood.” that the subject of this sonnet would be late teens to those in their late twenties, but the majority of facebook users are vastly older. What’s interesting is that this current generation of our class is late millenial or early Gen Z, and we have a different experience on the platform. The older generation, whom I will refer to as Gen X, did not grow up with the internet. Facebook was one of the first main experiences with the internet for many people in this generation, as it let them reconnect with old friends. Sociologists see this as a proxy for the dwindling numbers of close friends that older generations are facing, and this is reflected in the poem in likes such as “Here in the altar of loneliness.”

This is mildly heavy to discuss during an English paper, but I have personal experiences of Facebook being used not only as a method of abusive stalking but of pushing past trauma on victims of sexual assault with malicious intent. The phrase “however kind or cruel” when referring to friends rings all too painfully true.

I think this sonnet pushes an overly nihilistic view of Facebook and social media in general though. For instance, the poem discusses how worshipping a deity becomes a public spectacle instead of a private matter, but if you’d like more people to worship your deity is it not a good idea to make such worshipping mainstream and accepted in the largest social platform on Earth? Is it not a good idea to stimulate aging brains with challenging puzzles and games? Is it not cathartic to confess things you may be too shy or passive to confess in front of others? Facebook and other platforms of social media have started revolutions, built businesses from the ground up, solved crimes, and a plethora of other wonderful things that couldn’t be done without it. I don’t think the sonnet intentionally expressed such a one-sided view of the issue to satirize the cliche of juvenalia, but to fit inside that very cliche.