
Jealousy, Conflict And Regret In The Poems My Last Duchess, O Captain! My Captain And Ulysses

Poets, during the 19th century, emphasized passion and emotion in their poetry based on experiences that they had faced during their lifetime. The three poems in this essay will show or represent an experience that each poet had experienced. A mixture of jealousy; confliction; and regret, the poems "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning, "O Captain! My Captain" by Walt Whitman, and "Ulysses" by Lord Tennyson-Alfred explored the theme of loss through character analysis and the use of different poetic techniques.

In, "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning, the Duke of Ferrara is showing a portrait of his late wife to an envoy of a Count. He speaks of her "improper" ways; such as her glances towards others and her possible affection towards other men. He also speaks of how the late duchess did not appreciate the, "gift" (Browning line 33) the Duke had given her. The gift was his nine-hundred-year-old name. Towards the end of the poem, the Duke reveals that he had his late wife murdered by saying, "I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together", (Browning 45-46), and then joins with the Count to discuss the agreement of his new marriage with the Count's daughter. Browning, in this poem, displayed the Duke as a monster or villain. The Duke's character expresses his feelings of anger and hatred towards his late wife but uses false humility to keep his charms alive. The poet used the Duke's character to convey the idea of loss with his jealousy and demand for control. For example, the Duke shows jealousy when he says, "A heart-how shall I say?- too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed...and her looks went everywhere" (Browning 22-23). This quote provides the idea that the Duke was jealous of his wife's glances towards others that were not him and that she was impressed too easily by others. The jealousy represented in this quote drove his anger to new heights. Another example of jealousy in the poem is, "as if she ranked / My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody's gift" (Browning 32-34). From this quote, the reader is able to understand that the Duke feels like his wife did not accept his lineage name and she did not deserve it. The Duke's monstrous side became enraged because his tone, during this part of the poem, showed his fury and anger the most. He is basically saying that she did not accept his name as a "good" wife. After his outburst towards the envoy, he realizes that his anger was beginning to show and uses false humility to try to keep his charm alive. Even though jealousy was one of many characteristics of the Duke, his main characteristic was his demand for control. Browning showed control between himself and the late Duchess and between him and the envoy. In the quote, "since none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I", (Browning 9-10), the Duke says that nobody but him has the power to display this painting. Since the painting is in his home and he owns the painting, he is the only one who can control who sees it. The control over his wife is displayed throughout the entire poem because the Duke is controlling the story of his late Duchess and her death, making her seem like she had committed unspeakable sins and that she was not a respectful wife. The loss in this poem is more of "good riddance" rather than a mournful farewell. The character analysis of the Duke showed that he was glad his wife was dead because she was not at his beck-and-call like wives during the Romanticism era should have been. In opposite of this poem, the next poem focuses more on a tearful goodbye.

The next poem that uses a theme of loss is, "O Captain! My Captain" by Walt Whitman. In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker shows his relief that the "ship has weather'd every rack,

the prize we sought is won, /The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting” (Whitman 2-3). This means that the ship (war) has returned home to port (ended) and the people are cheering for its return. Even though everyone is celebrating this triumph, the speaker reveals that his captain's body is lying, “on the deck” (Whitman 7), and has, “Fallen cold and dead” (Whitman 8). As the poem continues, the speaker wishes that the Captain to rise up and see that their uphill battle has been won. The speaker repeats the phrase, 'For you” (Whitman 10-12) because he is telling his Captain that this achievement was all his doing and that this is his celebration. In the last stanza, the speaker is contrasting his feelings of mourning the death of his captain and the celebration of their triumphs. Whitman wrote this poem shortly after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, who the poet admired most. He experienced a great loss in his life and he wanted a way to memorialize the great President. One poetic technique that the poet used is that the entire poem is an extended metaphor to commemorate Lincoln's life and his work. The Captain in the poem is Lincoln and the ship represents the nation following the Civil War. The “object won” (Whitman 20) represents the salvaged union. The speaker's feeling towards the end of the poem embraces America's confusion at the end of the Civil War. Another poetic device that was used was repetition. Whitman repeats the word “heart” (Whitman line 5) and the phrase “Fallen cold and dead” (Whitman lines 8, 16, 24), to show his grief and deep loss. The last poetic technique that Whitman uses to emphasize loss is anaphora. The lines that define this technique the most are “My Captain does not answer... / My father does not feel my arm” (Whitman lines 17 and 18). The poetic techniques Whitman used highlighted the theme of loss in a more mournful aspect than the first poem.

The final poem that explores loss is “Ulysses” by Lord Alfred Tennyson. The loss in this poem is not like the other losses that have been examined in this essay. The speaker of this poem is experiencing a loss of adventure and excitement in his life. The poem begins with the speaker complaining that he is “idle” (Tennyson 1) and that his “aged” (Tennyson 3) wife is as boring as the life he is living. The speaker continues by saying that he does not want to stop his travels because he, “has suffered greatly, both with those / That loved me, and alone; on shore...[and] the dim sea” (Tennyson 9-11). In the second part of the poem, the speaker is revealing the differences between him and his son. The main difference that he noticed is how his son was made for the political life of being a ruler rather the adventure part of it. The last part of the poem focuses on Ulysses addressing his “[hearty] mariners” (Tennyson 45). The poetic techniques in this poem emphasize the loss of years in life, or growing old. For example, when Ulysses says, “this still hearth” (Tennyson 2), he is using symbolism for the stillness or dullness of his old age. Another example of the poetic technique used is, “There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail; / There gloom the dark, broad seas.” (Tennyson 44-45). This quote uses imagery to portray Ulysses reminiscing about his time at sea. One final poetic technique Tennyson used was personification. For example, “For always roaming with a hungry heart” (Tennyson 12) shows Ulysses' desire and hunger for adventure. The poetic techniques in the poem emphasize the speaker's loss of adventure. In conclusion, each poet showed a theme of loss in their poem with the help of character analysis and poetic techniques. Browning used the Duke's character analysis of jealousy and demand for control to show that the loss of his wife meant nothing to him; while Whitman and Tennyson used poetic techniques to represent the loss of something of value to them, like the loss of an admired patriot and the loss of youthful years.