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The Loneliness Will Last Forever

Loneliness unites us all. Its sounds like an oxymoron, but yet it is so true.

Loneliness is one of the most universal emotions. Loneliness can be simply defined as an emotion resulting from being alone, but by looking at many works, one can see that loneliness is much more potent than that. In the works I have found, I will attempt to show the power that this emotion can have over a person. My works focus on the lives of people trying to cope with extreme loneliness. Works such as “Richard Cory” by Edwin Arlington Robinson, “Miriam” by Truman Capote, “I Am a Rock” by Simon and Garfunkel, *Casablanca* directed by Michael Curtiz, and Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat in Front of the Easel by Vincent Van Gogh show the devastating effects that loneliness is capable of inflicting on one’s life.

“Richard Cory” by Edwin Arlington Robinson demonstrates the most extreme result of loneliness: suicide. “Richard Cory” is about a man who seems to have everything. The speakers of the poem are the meager townspeople of the street. They see the perfect projection of Richard Cory that walks the streets. They think that they see “everything to make [them] wish that [they] were in his place”, but they don’t look deep enough. The townspeople focus on how they “went without the meat”, and they curse the bread they eat, but they spotlight the wrong things. In his poem, Robinson conveys the message that what is truly important in life is human companionship. One can see the

loneliness in Richard Cory's life through the poem. One can also understand how Richard Cory would feel like such an outsider. Already in the second line, the townspeople call themselves the "people of the pavement" as they look upon him; it is as if Richard Cory were so different from them that he floated above the ground as we walked. In the next line, Robinson uses diction to emphasize his point: in place of head, the word crown is used. Later, the peasants of the street say that Richard Cory "fluttered pulses when he said, 'Good-morning,' and "he glittered when he walked." The "people of the pavement" have put Richard Cory on such a pedestal, how could he feel any deep, equal companionship with them? He therefore suffers from acute loneliness. In the end, Richard Cory decides it is better to die than to live in loneliness.

In "Miriam" by Truman Capote, the main character is faced with just as lonely a fate as Richard Cory, but the character in "Miriam" would rather choose insanity over loneliness while Richard Cory resorts to suicide. I chose "Miriam" by Truman Capote because it is a very intriguing tale. Loneliness is but one inspiration for the short story. One can truly see how loneliness slowly changes the life of the character of Mrs. Miller. Mrs. Miller lives "alone", and "has no friends to speak of." She was married once, but her husband died. In the story, Mrs. Miller begins to see a little girl. When Mrs. Miller first sees the girl, Miriam, she feels "oddly excited." She smiles "warmly" and laughs "gaily." However, as Mrs. Miller sees more and more of Miriam, she demands that Miriam leave her alone. Still, when Miriam one night shows up at Mrs. Miller's apartment saying, "You know, I don't think you're glad I came", Capote writes, "Mrs. Miller was without an answer." Later, as Mrs. Miller is, of course, home alone, it is said that "the almond cakes, dusted with sugar, awaited a hand", and "the canary fluttered on its swing." The

stage is set as if Mrs. Miller were expecting the little Miriam, but when the girl again arrives at her door, Mrs. Miller resists letting her in. Eventually, however, she helps the girl in with what the author calls a “curious passivity.” These examples show how Mrs. Miller at the same time wants and resists Miriam. Mrs. Miller becomes scared of the girl and runs to neighbors to help her make Miriam leave. However, when the neighbors return from Mrs. Millers’ apartment, they say the apartment is empty.

Mrs. Miller realizes that Miriam is an illusion created by her mind. From the text examples, one can see that there is an internal conflict where one part of Mrs. Miller accepts and wants Miriam and another side of her that fears and rejects Miriam. To understand this, one must understand what Miriam represents. To give into Miriam is for Mrs. Miller to give into her mental instability, but to refuse Miriam is to accept and be doomed to loneliness. In the end, we see that just as Richard Cory chose death, Mrs. Miller chooses insanity over loneliness. This is seen in the following passage:

Mrs. Miller entered her apartment softly; she walked to the center of the room and stood quite still. No, in a sense it had not changed: the roses, the cakes, and the cherries were in place. But this was an empty room, emptier than if the furnishings and familiars were not present, lifeless and petrified as a funeral parlor. The sofa loomed before her with a new strangeness: its vacancy had a meaning that would have been less penetrating and terrible had Miriam been curled on it. (page 8)

This passage again reiterates the domination that loneliness possesses over Mrs. Miller’s mind. Now, Mrs. Miller is alone and the apartment is “dark and getting darker.” It is said that Mrs. Miller “found nothing more disturbing than a sensation of darkness.”

Throughout the story, Miriam is associated with white, “silver-white.” The thing that strikes Mrs. Miller about Miriam is Miriam’s eyes. Later as Miriam holds her French doll, Capote writes that the doll’s, “idiot glass eyes sought solace in Miriam’s.” Miriam is also Mrs. Miller’s sanctuary. Loneliness is so perilous to Mrs. Miller that she prefers to submit to the tactics of insanity to save her mind. Capote creates a dark and cold atmosphere throughout his work. He uses words like chilling, deadening, cold, dark, separateness, desertion, helplessness, and lonely to describe setting and to enhance the emotion of the story.

Unlike Mrs. Miller and Richard Cory, the narrator of “I Am a Rock” by Simon and Garfunkel seems determined to overpower his or her loneliness. “I Am a Rock” is also different from the previous works because part of the loneliness results from loss of love. The speaker obviously had unpleasant experiences that caused him to create his or her “fortress” and “armor.” In the first part of the song there is the line, “Gazing...on a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.” Here, the musicians combine alliteration and diction to create a startling result. The alliteration shows the loveliness of speech and communication, but at the same time the defining word in the middle of the line is “silence.” This reveals the silence in the speaker’s life. The loneliness and rejection that the narrator experienced previously was strong enough to drive him or her to cut off all emotional connection with the world. However, it is my belief that this method only causes further pain and loneliness to the speaker. One can hear the attempted resolution of the speaker as repetition is used with “I am a rock, I am an island.” The words seem forced and almost yelled at times. It seems the speaker tries to convince him or herself that he or she is “alone” for a reason. Finally, the last lines come as the music slows and

the only instrument that plays is the guitar. The words, “and an island never cries”, sound almost to be uttered as a cry themselves.

Just as the speaker in “I Am a Rock” tries to escape his or her loneliness but is unsuccessful in doing so, the character of Rick in *Casablanca* attempts to recover from a broken heart. This is also similar to the previous work because the cause of Rick’s loneliness is a lost love. In his effort to forget, Rick retreats to Casablanca. The isolation of Casablanca is significant as one can see when Rick asks Sam what time it is in New York in relation to Casablanca. Sam’s only reply, however, is that his “watch stopped.” This means that Casablanca is truly an escape from time and from the rest of the world. In Casablanca, Rick surrounds himself with people by opening a bar. At the same time, however, he keeps himself emotionally detached from those that surround him. He wears a mask of cynicism and egotism, as he speaks such memorable lines as, “I’m the only cause I care about anymore”, and “I stick my neck out for nobody.” He further outwardly isolates himself by refusing to take a drink with any of his guests. Where he was known previously as Richard, he even changes his name as a means of forgetting his past.

Another way in which Rick deals with his loneliness is drinking. When asked his nationality, Rick says he is a drunkard. Although this is partly a smart remark toward a Nazi general, there is also much truth in it. One can see that Rick clearly turns to drinking in order to deal with his emotions when he finds out that Ilsa, his lost love, has come to Casablanca. Also, one sees the significance of the alcohol in the flashback to Paris. In one scene, when referring to German occupation of Paris, Sam says, “This ought to take the sting out of being occupied, doesn’t it Mr. Richard?” as Sam raises a glass to Rick and Ilsa. To this, Rick replies, “You said it”, and then those famous words, “Here’s lookin’ at

you kid.” Rick still turns to alcohol in Casablanca. The director also uses music to show the deep love and intense loneliness that Rick feels. Music is such a powerful thing because it is created entirely with emotion. Through the sounds, energy is released. The director, Michael Curtiz, understood this and made music, especially the song “As Time Goes By”, such an integral ingredient in this work. And finally, who can forget the last scene at the train station? Curtiz created the mood of loneliness using the foggy and dark setting. The future is clouded as the screen. It seems that at any moment rain will start to pour from the sky like a billion tears that would at last reveal Rick’s soul: tortured by loneliness and longing.

The soul of Vincent Van Gogh was also a tortured one: tortured by love, insanity, and loneliness. To show this, I picked a painting by Van Gogh which was painted before many of the loneliest and most trivial times in his life, but which I think captures the emotional turmoil of Van Gogh’s life. To illustrate this point, I picked Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat in Front of the Easel. The thing which distinguishes this from other self-portraits of Van Gogh is its lack of color. The entire painting seems to be cast under a shadow. Only dark greens and browns and black are used. Van Gogh paints himself with a shadow cast over his face. This can be related to his loneliness. Throughout his life, Van Gogh always had problems with people. He never seemed to be able to get along with anyone. He was not disliked, but he could never live with anyone because of his devotion to art and painting. It is said that Van Gogh might go days without eating so that he may instead use his money to purchase paints. Art was always first in Van Gogh’s life, and that is why it accompanies him in this portrait. Art helped him deal with his

loneliness. Even when others abandoned him, as happened repeatedly throughout his life, Van Gogh's paints and drawings stayed with him.

A few years after painting this portrait, Van Gogh wrote, "I am now trying to recover like a man who meant to commit suicide and, finding the water too cold, tries to regain the bank." He also wrote that "working on my pictures is almost a necessity for my recovery." Van Gogh constantly sought human connection, but every time he was deserted by his companion. A certain incident is a perfect example of the extreme loneliness that overcame Van Gogh during these times. At some point, Van Gogh entered into a relationship with a prostitute. However, the prostitute ended up rejecting him. In this moment, I believe Van Gogh became overwhelmed by his eternal curse of loneliness and so he reacted by cutting off a portion of his left ear which he delivered to the prostitute in a box. I connected this incident with the painting because the only bright color used is red. The red is a dab of paint on his palette. Just as Van Gogh and other artists use their paints to express their strongest emotions, I believe Van Gogh used that violent act as a means of releasing and expressing his sorrow in loneliness. So, as no one ever came to know Van Gogh very closely, Van Gogh puts his face, his identity, in shadow and places himself farther back in this portrait as compared to his other portraits. He also places his paints and easel between himself and the viewer, as he uses his art to protect himself from his loneliness and also uses it as his only communication with the outer world. Like Richard Cory, Van Gogh decides the only way to escape the curse of loneliness is to end his own life.

From "Richard Cory" by Edwin Arlington Robinson, "Miriam" by Truman Capote, "I Am a Rock" by Simon and Garfunkel, *Casablanca* directed by Michael Curtiz,

and Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat in Front of the Easel by Vincent Van Gogh, one can see the extreme power and influence loneliness can have on one's life. The works demonstrate many of the ways in which people try to deal with their loneliness: from evasion, to denial, to alcoholism, and even to insanity or suicide. Everyone in our society suffers from loneliness whether it results from rejection, or loss, or just not having anyone to feel a connection with. If we could eliminate loneliness from the world... but we can't. Loneliness is part of humanity. After Vincent Van Gogh shot himself in the head and as he was lying on his deathbed, some of his last words were, "The sadness will last forever." Van Gogh was right; the loneliness will last forever.

Works Cited

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