

## English commentary

### The Knight in the Wood

In 1870 a poet named Lord de Tabley released a set of poems called *Rehearsals* one of which is the poem 'The knight in the Wood'. This poem is about the poet trying to convey to the reader his feelings towards art and his feelings about one sculpture in particular 'The Knight in the Wood'.

The poet spends the first part of the poem contrasting this particular sculpture with the rest of the artistic artefacts displayed in the 'great Roman palace', the setting of this poem. It opens with Lord de Tabley taking a lot of care and detail in conveying to the reader just how imperfect this piece of art is and how it has been discarded due to its poor quality and imperfections. We are told this piece is a 'rough' and 'crudely done' sculpture carved from a 'skill-less' hand, which helps the reader to immediately picture and acknowledge the sculptures poor quality. The phrase '.. spitefully placed aside As merest lumber, where the light was worst..' suggests that this piece, in the eyes of others was so bad it was treated as if it was an old off-cut piece of wood, and the word 'spitefully' suggests it was put in the worst light intentionally because of its poor quality which introduces the idea that this piece was not appreciated or valued. This idea that the sculpture had no worth is reinforced further on in the poem, when the poet describes how it 'had no number in the list of gems'. The poet then moves on to illustrate to the reader how beautiful and perfect the other paintings seem yet how meaningless and shallow they actually are, words such as 'faultless', 'smirking', 'skin-deep' create this image perfectly.

The poet recognises immediately that this sculpture isn't beautiful however he obviously finds this piece extremely evocative and finds that beyond its skin deep imperfections it is expressing more merit, meaning and compassion than any of the beautiful yet artificial and non realistic pieces that fill the halls and rooms of that grand Roman palace. The poet conveys to us how he feels this piece stands out above all of the other art and instead through its 'utter failure' and flawed features this one piece of badly done art can be identified with more than the meaningless and perfect paintings of saints and martyrs that fill the art world. The poet feels that this clumsily carved sculpture represents more of human life than a thousand picturesque paintings by Guidos and Dolces. The poet has captured this knight in such a way that although his actions are described as motionless the whole sculpture is a very good representation of our human condition. The way the horse is stumbling reflects how we plod our way through our lives, and the way in which he sounds the marsh could be seen as how we are always hesitant, testing to make sure things are the right thing to do.

This poem can be interpreted in many different ways and I feel that this poem could also be looked at as almost autobiographical. It is possible that the art in this poem and the feelings the poet conveys about this one piece of art not being understood or valued, could quite easily be a metaphor or a mirror of his own poetry and how it wasn't understood or valued either. Lord de Tabley's poems were unusual for his time period and they certainly did not conform to the traditional Victorian style of poetry. The whole structure of this poem and methods he has used are all very unusual for the poems time. The main things are that there are no stanzas, the poem is not split up in any way and there is no regular rhyming pattern, which were both very traditional aspects of Victorian poetry. Although there is no regular rhyming pattern the poet has written in iambic at times, this gives the poem some consistency, as it is a pattern of stresses and unstressed syllables. He has also used caesura a lot throughout the poem, which is a method where there is a pause in the sentence. This leaves the poem fairly disjointed however it does create some suspense, especially in the last sentence where there is a pause before the last two words, 'That's all!'. The pause itself is unusual, however the statement 'That's all!' is particularly odd. Firstly its 'That's' is slang which wasn't commonly found in Victorian poetry and secondly with the exclamation mark it just strikes me as such a modern phrase.

Throughout this poem Lord de Tabley has constantly used negative language, which creates a rather depressing mood. However I feel it is the theme of this poem combined with the negative descriptions that makes it ultimately depressing. If we do recognize the meaning behind this poem and fully accept what this poet is trying to say then what does that say about our lives. If what the poet is trying to say is that this shoddy, doomed sculpture identifies with and reflects human life so well, then it is a depressing thought to think that this 'doomed pair' stuck in this 'treacherous ground', 'feared to advance and feared to return' reflects our lives so well. Another meaning behind this poem could also be that human life is desolate. I think that it is because the meanings behind this poem are related to reality it makes this poem very. I thought what made this poem so effective were these meanings and how they were represented through the sculpture of the knight.