

## How do Duffy and Jennings portray loss?

From looking at *Havisham* by Carol Ann Duffy and *Absence* by Elizabeth Jennings, it is obvious that there is a common theme of loss. However, each extract shows a different loss, and different feelings towards loss. *Havisham* shows the feelings of a person who has been left and betrayed by their love, whereas *Absence* shows the feelings of someone whose love has died.

The lexical field of violence in *Havisham* shows the woman's feelings towards her partner's leaving. The choice of words such as 'dead', 'strangle', 'bite', 'stabbed' and 'corpse' suggest that she is angry about his choice and is seeking some kind of revenge for hurting her so. However, these could also suggest things about the woman herself, maybe she is a very violent person and this is the only way she can express herself. Yet, it is certainly evident that this couple did not end on good terms suggesting that maybe there was an affair involved or maybe that the woman was left at the altar. This can also be seen in the quote 'Love's hate behind a white veil.' This includes juxtaposition in the joining of the words 'love' and 'hate'. This can be interpreted to show that the woman was left at the altar because this would have been when she was wearing the veil. Furthermore, this can also be seen in the Duffy's word choice of 'Spinster' which means a woman that has never been married, this shows that although there is a wedding dress and other marital related things in the poem, the woman never actually gets married.

Another use of juxtaposition is shown in the first sentence 'Beloved sweetheart bastard'. This straight away shows the woman's feelings for her partner, by mixing terms of endearment with an offensive term. Furthermore, there are many definitions of the word 'bastard' which also link into the poem. When used as a noun the word can be an offensive term for someone who is obnoxious or disagreeable; or an offensive term for someone who is born to unmarried parents, which links with the word 'spinster'; or an offensive term to something that is extremely difficult or trying; or lastly it can mean something that is inferior. Moreover when 'bastard' is used as an adjective it can mean something that is not genuine, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for their relationship. This then shows a link to the quote 'the lost body over me,' here Duffy is reminiscing, yet she is remembering these memories in a different light now and she can see that back then her partner was 'lost'; he was not as part of the relationship as he was.

'Absence' is a clearly rhymed, three verse poem, written in a highly romantic, traditional style. The typically simple five line structure, with lines one, three, and five as one rhymed set, and two and four as the other, focuses the attention on the language used and the emotional content, and is ideally suited to the sincere and unpretentious emotions the poem chooses to present. Most of the language is understated and calm which heightens the effect of the more forceful lines in the closing section.

The language used in *Absence* is very different to that in *Havisham*, the lexical field of loss can be seen within the words of 'ended', 'forget', 'pain' and 'absence'. All of these words can be related to the loss of

someone. However, it is already evident that this loss is very different to that shown in Havisham. Jennings portrays someone who is obviously very upset by this loss which suggests they may have died. The quote 'nothing has changed' suggests that the person was expecting that as their partner had died, the garden would have changed, but it hasn't; it does not show the same pain the person is feeling. This can also be seen where Jennings says 'The thoughtless birds... singing an ecstasy I could not share,' this shows that the person is evidently in pain for her loss. Yet, this is not shown in a violent way, like in Havisham, which could back up the point that Duffy is portraying a more aggressive person. On the other hand, it could also back up the point that the kinds of losses are completely different, one loss is chosen the other is not.

Both poems show that the person breaks down just thinking of the loss. In Havisham the excerpt 'Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks.' This suggests that it is not only the woman's heart that is broken; it is also her life, herself. The repetition of the syllable 'b' can not only be shown as an onomatopoeia for something actually breaking, but it can also be shown as the person breaking down and stuttering just talking about the loss. This can also be seen in *Absence*, in the last sentence much like the other quote in Havisham: 'An earthquake tremor: Fountain, birds and grass Were shaken by my thinking of your name.' This can suggest that the person is physically shaking, and that as she is looking around the garden seems to be shaking too; because of the mere thought of her partner's name she is breaking down. It can also suggest that the garden is starting to show some change from the loss, like she is from thinking the name.

Looking at the structure of each poem suggests some similarity between them. They are both structured in how many lines there are in each stanza. Havisham has four lines to four stanzas and *Absence* has five lines to three stanzas. This may have just been a random structure that the poets chose to use or it may be that the number of lines has some significance to the poem itself. Furthermore, both poems have enjambments throughout, this is where a sentence of the poem carries onto another line. For example in Havisham 'Prayed for it so hard...' carries on over two lines. This allows the poems to flow and continue momentum and shows a lack of rhythm like other poems.

In conclusion, after looking at the poetic techniques of both poems it is clear they show a very different kind of loss and also show different feelings towards the loss. Havisham shows a very violent and aggressive view on their loss, whereas *Absence* shows a more serene yet painful view on loss. This could also be because *Absence* is a more traditional romantic poem, whereas Havisham is a more modern poem.

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