

## Compare how the poems “piano” and “at castle Boterel” portray the power of memory

The poems “At Castle Boterel” and “Piano” are both written about memories and have much in common.

One of the most obvious similarities is that in both poems, the poets show memory to be highly powerful, and speak of the poem as having overcome the present.

The man in “piano” shows some reluctance towards revisiting his past, but the power of memory is so great that he finds himself being dragged back in a “flood of remembrance”. The poem reads “in spite of myself” which shows he is reluctant to relive his past, and then continues “the insidious mastery of song betrays me back” which shows that the memory has reigned over his will and given him no option but to return to a time he would rather forget. The words “betrays” and “insidious mastery” bring about ideas of cunning, and presents the idea that memories can creep up on you when you are least expecting it. Use of enjambment also helps with the idea of memories being powerful, because your eyes are forced from the end of one line, back to the beginning of the next, and just as the man found the song taking him back, the enjambment is “taking” the reader back. At the beginning of the first stanza, we are taken back to the present with the words “So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour.” The words “burst” and “clamour” are onomatopoeic words, which inject an immediate increase in volume after the calming use of sibilance in the second stanza, and are supported by the word “appassionato”. The fact that the man considers it “vain” for take such a noise shows that it has no impact on him and creates the idea of the memory having trapped him in the past.

In “at castle Boterel” the man is more relaxed about returning to his past, but the memory is still portrayed as having much power over him. The weather plays a big part in showing this. The scene of the first stanza is set with the word “drizzle” but when the man looks at the hill which we know to be “envisages only the “dry March weather” that exists in his memory and so we see that the past has ruled the present. The “fading byway” seems also to be referring to a fading memory, and yet as the man looks up at the slope, he sees the moment he spent with his girlfriend there so many years ago “distinctly yet” It is almost as though he has been blinded by the power of memory and this demonstrates again that memory can be powerful enough to overcome the present. The idea of the past reigning over the present is echoed in the idea that the ancient rocks, who have watched endless masses walk past them since that day, will always remember that one particular moment as being of the most importance.

Another similarity between the two poems is that they both portray memories as being happier places. This enhances the idea of the person wanting to return to their past and therefore shows memory to be powerful because it still affects the, even after all these years.

Many aspects of the poem “Piano “ are childish, which helps the idea of the memory being happy, for many people look back on their childhood fondly, as being carefree days of innocence and joy. The poem rhymes in couplets, which is easy to spot, and therefore gives a childish feel to the poem, and many of the words are childish and happy, such as “boom” and “tingling” which are typical sound effects found in children’s comic books. The poet has also used a constant use of alliteration when describing the past in the first

two stanzas, such as in “smiles as she sings” and this creates a bouncy rhythm and cheerful tone which have further allowed the poet to show the past as being idyllic. Imagery has also been used to make this point and the particularly strong image of a happy family singing songs together makes the past seem a very desirable place to be. One of the words used to describe this rather cliché image is “cosy” and this is a good use of onomatopoeiatic for the word sounds warm and childish. The man talks in the second stanza of “the glamour of childish days” is not a fully matured human being. This shows however that to him, his childhood seems glamorous in comparison to his life now and shows once again that then was more beautiful than now. The fact that the man weeps to “belong” to his past suggests that he is currently insecure, and this supports the idea of the past being a more desirable place to be.

In the poem “At castle Boterel” the poet Hardy has used contrast to show how much better the past was in comparison to the present. The scene is set in the first stanza with the word “drizzle” and we are able to understand immediately that the weather is miserable. As soon as the man begins to reminisce on his past, we are told “dry March weather” and so from the start the past is seen as a more desirable place. Another contrast between the beauty of the past and lack of excitement in the present is made through the mention of transport. In the present, we are told that the man rides on a waggonette, which is symbolic of his insignificant, rather tired life in the present. Then he talks of his past, we are told that the happy couple rode on a chaise. A chaise is a grand carriage and this is symbolic of the richness of life then, compared to now, and is just one way the poet has shown the past to be more idyllic than the present. The poet has used the rhetorical question “was there ever a time of such quality since or before in that hill’s story” to persuade the reader into accepting that the man’s memory was a most perfect moment.

Another similarity between the two poems is that they both combine a use of metaphors and strong imagery in order to present the power of memory.

The first metaphor in the poem “piano” comes in the sentence “taking me back down the vista of years” the metaphor “vista of years” creates the image of the man’s vast past stretching out before him and of him travelling back along his balcony of life to the past. Probably the most powerful metaphor in the poem comes at the end of the final stanza when memory is likened to a flood in the words “my manhood is cast down in the flood of remembrance”. This creates an immensely strong image of the man being swept away in a mass of gushing water and dragged along with its powerful current, back into the past. The fact that he is being cast “down” makes it seem as though he is almost drowning. All this shows clearly the overwhelming strength of memory. The cliché image in the poem of a united family huddled together at home, safe from the cold outside is a very vivid picture, and the fact that the man should be able to remember his memory so clearly is a sign that memory is a powerful thing.

In “At Castle Boterel” there is a strong image of the moment the young couple spent together being recorded by the rocks in “colour and cast” and this creates the idea of a coloured photo having been taken, which has captured the moment and will always remain. The word “colour” also shows the brightness of their life together, and the alliteration of the letter “c” helps the whole image stand out the poem, time is personified and made to seem relentless and unwilling to change its ways for anyone. The man shows a clear hostility for time, which has “ruled from sight” the “substance” which was his

love in body and left in its place just the memory. There is a strong contrast between time, which will continue to tick along ruthlessly, regardless of what is going on, and the memory, which, being so powerful will always prevail.

Both “Piano” and “At Castle Boterel” although comprising of much nostalgia in their middle sections, end with a sense of regret, helplessness and generally leave the reader feeling sad that the men in the poems are unable to return to their past.

Piano ends strongly with the simple phrase “I weep like a child for the past”. This sums up the whole poem and brings about a lot of emotion due to the clever use of the word “weep”. This word has been chosen instead of “cry” because it is a more emotive word and more associated with children than fully-grown adults. The idea of a grown man weeping, just like a child is a touching image and therefore gives to the poem a sense of helplessness. The word “weep” is repeated elsewhere in the poem and the reader, when reading the word, is reminded of the earlier phrase “the heart of me weeps to belong” this phrase shows just how deeply moved the man is by the memory for the heart is the centre of one's emotions and he must therefore be weeping right from the inside of him.

Throughout the majority of the poem “ at Castle Boterel” the reader is taken into the man's beautiful past. In the last stanza, however, we are dragged abruptly back into his miserable present and reminded once again that it is raining. The weather here acts as a barrier, which separates the man from his past, for we know that in the past the weather was fine and dry. This creates a feeling of helplessness, for we know how much this man longs to be back in his past, and yet there is no way he can return, because the moment has been and gone, there is also a sense that time is running out and that the man finds his memory slowly escaping from his grasp. Repetition is used in the words “shrinking shrinking” to add emphasis and show that the memory is gradually fading. The strong image of the egg timer counting down what little time he has left, coupled with the phrase “for the very last time”, adds a note of helplessness and uncontrollable finality to the poem. At the end of each stanza is one short, simple phrase, which sticks out on a line by itself and is therefore subject to much emphasis. In the final stanza, this is the words “never again” which finishes the poem on a sad, butter note and gives to the whole poem a sense of regret, helplessness and finality.