

Portraits of human condition in the spoon river anthology

[Business](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Spoon River Anthology, written by Edgar Lee Masters, explores different portraits of human conditions. Through the stories of townspeople who have passed away, many human conditions are mentioned and explained. Some of the poems emphasize the condition of love and marriage. “ William and Emily,” “ Lucinda Matlock,” and “ Herbert Marshall” are three poems that explore the many diverse aspects of love. Other poems demonstrate negative human conditions such as sadness or anger.

These poems divulge into the despair and sorrow of some human conditions and show the dark side of life. On the other hand, the anthology also shows some positive conditions such as joy and hope. These instances shed light on the happiness found in life and serve as a dynamic contrast to the darker conditions. In The Spoon River Anthology, Edgar Lee Masters uses his characters and their stories to paint different portraits of the human condition such as a focus on love and marriage, a focus on positive human conditions such as joy and hope, and a focus on negative conditions like sadness, fear, and anger. One of the main human conditions that Edgar Lee Masters emphasizes in The Spoon River Anthology is love and marriage. “ William and Emily,” one of the most prominent poems in the anthology, paints the portrait of a married couple in a loving relationship.

William and Emily are shown to have an inseparable love for each other that overcame all other factors: “ Their surnames, social class, and professions are irrelevant; they represent any couple whose mutual love matured over the years. Emily and William speak with one voice” (Campion 1681). The love of Emily and William is even said to surpass all obstacles including death. Through their never ending love, Masters shows that love is one of <https://assignbuster.com/portraits-of-human-condition-in-the-spoon-river-anthology/>

the most powerful human conditions. Another example of love and marriage in the anthology is found in the poem “ Lucinda Matlock.

” In this poem, Lucinda’s long, loving marriage to a man named Davis is established. Through the long years of their marriage, they were able to stick together through the trials and tribulations of life, raising children together, and experiencing the journey of growing old together: “ And then I found Davis/ We were married and lived happily together for seventy years/ Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children” (Masters). Their marriage stays strong throughout their lives, so when Lucinda looks back on her past life, she sees consistent love. This loving life that Lucinda lived reflects a positive human condition for her. The poem “ Herbert Marshall” describes the condition of love in an extremely different manner than it is regarded in the previous poems such as “ William and Emily” and “ Lucinda Matlock.

” It details a man, Herbert, who has lived a lonely life loving someone who does not share the same affection. Herbert explains that all humans love; however, they do not always receive love in return. Love is shown as a lonely condition and a tragedy of human life instead of a happy topic that is compared to in the other works of literature. This shows how dynamic love can be, and depending on a person’s experience with love, it can either be a blessing or a curse. Love and marriage are two important human conditions that can be seen in The Spoon River Anthology throughout the poems “ William and Emily,” “ Lucinda Matlock,” and “ Herbert Marshall.” In addition, Edgar Lee Masters also touches on the positive conditions of the human existence such as joy, hope, and love in society.

Joy can be found in the poem “ Lucinda Matlock.” In this poem, Lucinda possesses a love for life that is unique to her story. This joy in her life is what contributes to her happiness and positive look on her life. Hope is also exemplified in Lucinda’s story. Though Lucinda goes through many tribulations throughout her life, such as the loss of many of her children, she stays hopeful for the future. The end of her story exemplifies hope and strength through the uplifting works Masters writes.

Her hope is so strong, it overcomes any sorrow or sadness: “ Although they may be willing to give into their sorrow and weariness, she has not lost hope for them. By addressing the despondent people directly, Lucinda is affirming her hope that they will listen to her and possibly learn from her experience, so that they might be able to make the corrections to their outlook while there is still time to enjoy the life they have” (Lucinda 175). Her hope and strength can be taken as inspiration for anyone who is sorrowful. The last positive condition exemplified in the anthology is the love of society. Masters uses the love in “ William and Emily” to also symbolize love in society: “ The love of which Emily and William speak may not refer also to one’s family and to society as a whole” (Lant).

Masters creates a sense of overarching love that can be extended throughout the whole community. The whole community is intertwined with each other and is said to be one. Through all these characters and their stories, Masters expresses the positive side of the human condition with conditions such as joy, hope, and love in society. Another area of the human existence that Edgar Lee Masters explores is negative human conditions

such as sadness, fear, loneliness, anger, and regret. These emotions are evident in the poem “ Anne Rutledge,” where Anne admits to her longing for love that she never received when she was alive.

From this perspective, life is seen as something painful and heartbreaking instead of full of opportunity and new chances. Similarly, Emily Sparks spends her whole life longing for a boy she loves: “ Where is my boy, my boy- In what far part of the world?” (Masters). However, she never finds this love and is forced to live her life in sadness. Masters demonstrates the dark side of the human condition using Emily’s sadness. Sadness can also be found in the life of the Painters. The Painters are wealthy and from the outside can be mistaken as happy.

The facade is let down in the anthology, and the darker condition is revealed to the audience. The depression of Mr. Painter found through substance abuse and mental problems show a cruel, dark dynamic that is a part of life for many people. Similarly, Jeremy Carlisle, another victim of sadness, illustrates the negative condition of loneliness by living and dying alone. He lives his life in solitude and makes no effort to extend his boundaries and be social with the community: “ Masters puts Carlisle’s words into perspective, showing that it is one’s duty to try to know the people of one’s community, to try to pierce the loneliness and lies and sadness that separate one person from another” (Lant).

When Jeremy looks back on his life, he only sees a life alone with no social interaction with any other beings. Some other negative conditions that are indicated by Masters are anger and regret. Judge Somers looks back on his

<https://assignbuster.com/portraits-of-human-condition-in-the-spoon-river-anthology/>

life with regret of all the things he did not accomplish. He never made an impression on any of the townspeople, which explains his unmarked grave. This regret has made him become a cynical, angry man with no appreciation for the beauty of life. Similarly, Daisy Fraser shares in this dark perspective on life and the world.

Considered provocative by the other townspeople, Daisy is always treated with disrespect and scorn: “ But I- Daisy Fraser who always passed along the streets through rows of nods and smiles, and coughs and words such as ‘ there she goes’” (Masters). She expresses her deep shame and regret for her actions in life. She feels like it was her against the world and she had no other purpose in the world. She feels as though she wasted her life and is ashamed to look back on her time alive. Her feelings exemplify a life lived in a dark, lonely human condition.

Masters expresses the darker side of human conditions such as sadness, fear, loneliness, anger, and regret by using the stories of all these characters. In Edgar Lee Masters’ *The Spoon River Anthology*, the characters portray different portraits of the human condition such as love and marriage, positive human conditions such as joy and hope, and negative human conditions like sadness fear and anger. The condition of love and marriage is highlighted as positive experiences of life in “ William and Mary” and “ Lucinda Matlock;” however, the lonely side of love is explained in “ Herbert Marshall.” Also found in “ Lucinda Matlock” is evidence of joy and hope, some of Masters’ happier depictions of the human condition. Love of society is also a positive perspective on the human condition.

This love is spread throughout the whole community by the twisted connections between the characters. However, the negative conditions show a darker side of the community. Regret, shame, and anger make their way into the lives of characters such as Emily Sparks, Judge Somers, and Daisy Fraser. These dark realities are a contrast to the positive side of life. Overall, The Spoon River Anthology is a brilliant piece of literature that touches on the positive and negative parts of life and human conditions and will continue to touch anyone who reads it.