

Compare and contrast two poems essay



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'The Woodspurge' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and 'Continuum' by Allen Curnow are both poems that deal with a sense of detachment the poet experiences. In 'Continuum', Curnow illustrates his mental state of being uninspired and slightly abashed at his lack of poetic inspiration whereas in 'The Woodspurge', Rossetti describes his depressive condition, possibly due to relationship issues. Both poets seem to be stuck, and remain trapped in their minds throughout the poems.

'Continuum' begins with Curnow depicting the moon rolling over the roof and falling behind, using it as a metaphor for his poetic inspiration, loneliness and in a way, himself. He uses repetition for the word 'moon', and describes how his poetic capabilities are sinking, as well as how he is failing as a writer. Similarly, the beginning of 'The Woodspurge' focuses on the 'wind' as Rossetti repeats it four times in the first stanza, and vaguely foreshadows his isolated, passive state. Rossetti's indecisiveness is shown by how he 'walks on at the wind's will', which shows that he is empty inside with no will of his own. Curnow decides to walk out on to the porch to deal with his insomnia in the same way Rossetti battles his depression by deciding to sit in a tight, vulnerable posture on the grass, unable to even speak. Nature plays small roles in both poems. In 'Continuum', nature does not provide the inspiration Curnow hopes for to continue his profession, leaving him in a listless state of confusion and frustration.

Throughout the poem, the poet solely concentrates on his inner turmoil and desperation. Alternatively, in 'The Woodspurge', the poet's focus is directed toward a weed that Rossetti sees halfway throughout the poem. Every time the woodspurge is brought up, it is directly followed by a description of

having a cup of three. This could be interpreted in various ways, one of many being how the poet finds complex mysteries of God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit) in simple places. The poem then ends, leaving the reader to wonder whether the poet is now lost in nothingness upon seeing the weed that 'flowered' yet is hardly a flower, or whether he is totally at one with the moment, in a strange way at peace. On the other hand, Curnow's poem ends with him simply walking back into his house, half afraid and still unsure. Calling himself a 'cringing demiurge', the poet feels as though he is not good enough for the complexity of the world, still struggles with what to do, and even questions his choice of words throughout the poem.

The structure of 'Continuum' and 'The Woodspurge' can be thought of as direct opposites of each other. In 'Continuum' there is no rhyme scheme, perhaps indicating the confusion and disorganization in Curnow's mind. On the contrary, 'The Woodspurge' has a strict rhyme scheme that gives the poem a slightly dull and monotonous effect, each stanza tightly contained and end-stopped. There is a great amount of punctuation in every stanza (at the end of line), each one ending with a full-stop, letting the sentence sink in. In contrast to this, 'Continuum' has limited 3-line-stanzas, the poet attempting to order his thoughts in the chaos of his mind. Moreover, the short stanzas show the writer's inability to look at any concept in-depth. Curnow ends his stanzas off mid-sentence, demonstrating the hardship enhanced by enjambment. There is little to no punctuation, letting his train of thoughts continue on and on. There is a lack of formal structure in the poem, and reading the poem one can sense a dreary stillness. The language he uses is almost conversation-like, and his sentences are messy and vague,

as if he were too conflicted to end his lines (ex: ' or something' , ' better barefoot it out the front'). The causal language he uses illustrates his lack of inspiration and how close he is to giving up.

Despite the clear differences seen in the structural forms of the poems, ' Continuum' and ' The Woodspurge' both use surreal images to portray two poets struggling with their ephemeral feelings.