

Loneliness without solitude



**ASSIGN
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Lord Byron's poem *Solitude*, is at its core a piece about true solitude; showing that it is not something achieved in nature but within the chaos of society. But it goes beyond this, becoming a criticism of those who find comfort within in society. Throughout the poem, the narrator contradicts common belief, stating his own opinions as fact, and holding himself higher than his fellow man. *Solitude* is a poem with many sides; it shows that there is glory in nature, but that true solitude is found within society. It also shows that those who live and think mundanely are inferior to the alleged freethinkers. However, the poem does not begin on such a note; rather it starts out with a series of vivid descriptions about nature. This imagery acts as a base for points to be made later in the poem.

The first lines of *Solitude* read " To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell / To slowly trace the forest's shady scene," (Byron 1-2) These lines provide a starting point for the poem, as the narrator describes the actions one might take within the seclusion of a natural scene. He uses words with artistic connotations, such as muse and trace, to show the thoughtful perspective expected to accompany someone who views nature in its unperturbed state. He goes on to add, in the third line, " where things that own not man's dominion dwell," (Byron) This stresses the fact that there is some type of isolation in nature; just not the kind which would qualify as solitude.

This an idea that is reiterated with the next four lines of the stanza. The first two read " And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been; / To climb the trackless mountain all unseen," (Byron 4-5) The narrator again addresses the lack of human interface within a particular scene. It is a place out of the grasp of society, where other people can not view or disrupt; however, this does not

mean it is a place of solitude. This can be seen as the narrator goes on to write “ With the wild flock that never needs a fold; / Alone o’er steeps and foaming falls to lean; / This is not solitude...” (Byron 6-8) Which shows that seclusion from society is not solitude, even in the most secluded of places.

This is supported by the use of alone in line seven; a word that is by definition quite similar to solitude. However, it is used in contrast with the word solitude, giving it a different meaning and connotation. Using alone in this way also shows a disregard for the general consensus of society; regardless of official definitions, the narrator uses words in accordance with what he believes them to mean. This is the first of several instances in the poems where the narrator holds his beliefs or ideas above those of others. This also further accentuates the fact that the absence of other people is not akin to solitude.

With lines eight and nine, the narrator reiterates the point he had made with the first several lines. “ This is not solitude, ’tis but to hold / Converse with Nature’s charms, and view her stores unrolled.” (Byron) Another notable feature present in these lines is the use of enjambment, which gives them a special emphasis, as the rest of the stanza is punctuated. It is also emphasized by the use of a direct claim, in contrast to the flowery descriptions that had comprised the poem up until the final two lines. These two factors combined draw the reader’s attention to this part of the poem, and give it more of an impact; true solitude cannot be found in the isolation of nature, as even though one is away from society, all they are doing is witnessing something beautiful without the presence of others. It also raises the question of where true solitude can be found if it is not present when an

individual is alone, far away from society. The fact that the first stanza ends by raising this question in the reader's mind suggests that an answer can be found in the second stanza. A change in stanzas often means there will be a shift in the ideas presented in the poem.

There are several notable changes in the first two lines of the next stanza, "But midst the crowd, the hurry, the shock of men, / To hear, to see, to feel and to possess," (Byron 10-11) There is a distinct syntactical change; while the first stanza was composed primarily of intricate, unbroken lines, the following lines contain several commas each, giving them a stark choppiness that contrasts the first stanza. They are also less complex in regards to language, with short, easily understood words in place of more vivid ones.

There is also repetition of sensation words; line eleven is devoted entirely to the use of these words, where they are listed without further context. This is in essence, a barrage of sensations, showing that the city is alive with chaos but little else. The elegance present in the lines describing nature is clearly lacking in those describing life within society. This shows the narrator's differing beliefs about those two places; he believes the natural world is a place of beauty and complexity, while society is simple and chaotic.

The change in syntax remains present in the next several lines "And roam alone, the world's tired denizen, / With none who bless us, none whom we can bless;" (Byron 12-13) There is an element from earlier in the poem here; the narrator's belief in his superiority over others, seen in the use of the term "world's tired denizen..." (Byron 12) The narrator isolates him from the rest of the world around him; he is alone and weary traveler in the world, despite

the fact that he exists within the same society as everyone else. He further isolates himself with the use of the word alone, with the same unusual context as earlier in the poem; a loneliness reiterated with the inability to communicate or be communicated that is presented in line thirteen.

The next line, "Minions of splendor shrinking from distress!" (Byron 14) provides further support for this idea. Minions, in this context, can only refer to people who are not the narrator or do not think like him, as it follows the lines describing how the narrator exists isolated in society. The use of splendor suggests that these individuals are essentially slaves to the excitement and social nature of society. The narrator uses them together, along with the rest of the line, to suggest that the idea of loneliness without society would result in terror in most of these people.

There is also an exclamation point used at the end of line fourteen, which is used only one other time in the poem. It emphasizes the claim, showing how the narrator believes that a lack of contact with others would not just cause fear in most members of society, but an extreme level of panic. It also adds a level of mockery to the narrator's claim, as exclamation points are used to express feelings of excitement, and often in instances where humor is involved.

The next line reads "None that, with kindred consciousness endued," (Byron 15) continuing on a similar train of thought as the rest of the stanza. The "kindred consciousness..." (Byron 15) or in other words, the state of thought in which the narrator is accustomed to existing would make him immune to such panic; something which would plague the other members of society as

suggested by the narrator. The poem continues with the lines “ If we were not, would seem to smile the less / of all the flattered, followed, sought and sued;” (Byron 16-17) Another claim by the narrator, which suggests that if he lacked that consciousness he was familiar with, he would be far more miserable than the rest of those within society.

Lines sixteen and seventeen provide another use of enjambment, again emphasizing the claim of the narrator, this time in reference to the necessity of his own believed thoughtfulness. Line seventeen also uses a similar pattern of repetition to that seen in line eleven; however rather than sensations, it used to stress the mediocre nature of other people within society. They are defined by being “ flattered, followed, sought and sued,” (Byron) or nothing more than objects in the eyes of other people.

The poem ends in a similar manner to the first stanza, this time declaring “ This is to be alone; this, this is solitude!” (Byron 18) which acts as a summary for the purpose of the poem. There is also an exclamation point, stressing both the correctness of the narrator and the truthfulness of his claim. Oddly, the word alone is used again, but rather as something synonymous with solitude then something opposing it. This makes the meaning of language itself in this poem seems dependent upon the feelings of the author.

Solitude is a poem where the conventional is defied; alone is not alone, and solitude is anywhere but where solitude is found. It is a poem about being isolated within society, interwoven with feelings of superiority, as well as a

deep appreciation of nature. And throughout the poem, a myriad of tools and techniques were used to show this.