

Research Article

Received: 12/04/2023; Accepted: 30/05/2023; Published: 30/06/2023

Loneliness as Depicted in James Arthur's "Empty Space"

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Abstract

This article discusses loneliness. Loneliness is an unpleasant condition, and the writers are interested in the condition expressed in James Arthur's "Empty Space". The aim of the writing of this article is to describe the loneliness as depicted in the song lyric. The writers limit their study to the kinds, causes, and effects of loneliness experienced by the lyricist. The writers use library research to collect data, and they apply a psychological approach to figure out the loneliness. The writers adopt the concept of loneliness by Daniel Perlman and Letitia Anne Peplau. The discussion indicates that loneliness can be emotional and social, and it also indicates that the cause of the lyricist's loneliness is the emptiness after a relationship's end. Last but not least, the discussion indicates that his loneliness leads to his drinking and overthinking habit. In all, the writers find the lyric not only musical, but also emotive.

Keywords: Loneliness; diction; symbol; imagery; literature and psychology

1. Introduction

Literature is an art and the author's creative process [1]. Because it is an art the language used in a literary work is different from that in scientific language. In addition to being written in denotative language, the literary work is also written with connotative language. That statement is supported by another statement which also states that literary work uses connotative language [2]. The literary language has an expression of tone, and it represents the character of the author. Furthermore, the literary language emphasizes signs, symbols, and words [1]. The language is commonly named as figurative language.

Literature has various kinds of forms, such as prose, poetry, drama, film, and essay. Among the kinds of the literary works, in this study the writers would like to read a song lyric by James Arthur which is entitled "Empty Space". The writers classify their study as that of poetry because they consider a lyric as one kind of poetry. The lyric is naturally emotive, and the lyric of "Empty Space" is about feelings. It is about coming to terms with the fact that only the special person can truly fill the empty space [3]. In other words, the lyric is about loneliness. The writers will analyze the "Empty Space" lyric using loneliness theory by Daniel Perlman and Letitia Anne Peplau.

The lyric is one of the most important elements of a song. The lyric conveys the loneliness through the singing of the song to the listeners, so through this lyric the listeners can imagine the meaning in which the lyricist wants to convey. "Empty Space" is easy to listen to, and the lyric is very emotional. It makes the writer interested in analyzing this lyric, and the writer would like to

inquire about the loneliness as depicted in the lyric, incorporating its intrinsic aspects--they are elements of figurative language, such as imagery and symbol, and its extrinsic aspects, namely the kinds, causes, and effects of loneliness.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the loneliness as depicted in James Arthur's "Empty Space". Loneliness is an unpleasant condition in which a person's social relationships have drastic decrease in quantity and quality [4: p. 4]. In their journal Perlman and Peplau mention the kinds of loneliness: there are emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Emotional loneliness occurs when there is no intimate emotional connection, while social loneliness comes from the absence of close social relationships [5-6]. Adopting this theory, the writers will figure out the kinds and causes of loneliness in the lyric. Besides the kinds and causes of loneliness, the writers will figure out the effects of loneliness in the lyric.

Reading the lyric, the writers perform library research and apply a psychological approach. For their library research, the writers chose references from books, journals, or internet sources which are related to the topic. For their psychological approach, the writers adopted Pearlman and Peplau's concept of loneliness. Based on the description, this paper will be titled "Loneliness as Depicted in James Arthur's "Empty Space"". It is expected that this study of the song lyric not only can be enjoyed by listeners, but it can also be analyzed in further study.

2. Methods

The research is conducted as library research. The writers select data to be related to the research topic. The primary data comes from the lyric of James Arthur's "Empty Space", and the secondary data from other references, such as books, journal articles, and web pages. The writers adopt Wellek and Warren's concept of literature and psychology and Perlman and Peplau's that of loneliness. Wellek and Warren mention that there are psychological aspects which reside in a literary work, and the writers agree that loneliness becomes one of the psychological aspects. Inferring from the concept of literature and psychology, the writers learn that the condition of a character in a literary work is considered to be psychologically true [7]. That makes the writers believe that the lyricist's condition in the lyric can be considered to be psychologically true as well. Besides that, Perlman and Peplau postulate that loneliness comes as emotional and social, and they postulate that loneliness may come from the absence of somebody precious. Perlman and Peplau exemplify that emotional loneliness may be caused by a breakup; that is, a situation in which somebody is no longer in a personal relationship with her/his dear one [8]. The writers found out that the situation in the example is like that in the lyric. They also exemplify that social loneliness may be caused by inability to adjust to different surroundings. Likewise, the writers also found out that the situation in the example and that in the lyric are alike. Consequently, the writers also agree their postulates, and the writers adopt their concept of loneliness to describe the song lyric in this study.

3. Previous Studies

The writers found the following references relevant as their previous studies on the song lyric. First, Emina Lukarcanin writes "James Arthur Debuts Video for Nostalgic Single 'Empty Space': Watch", in which she cites James Arthur's interview, saying that the song is for anyone who has ever been deeply loved and lost someone dear to them and is then faced with the struggle of trying to fill that void. Second, Linna Amanda, Nia Nafisah, and Nita Novianti write "Loneliness in Haruki Murakami's *After Dark* (2017): A Focalization Analysis", in which they analyze the forms of loneliness in the novel through the main character, Mari Asai, using the focalization technique. Third, Syafira Noviyantia

writes “Loneliness as The Path to Happiness in Alice Munro’s *Four Selected Short Stories in Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage: A Structural Analysis*”, in which she explains the loneliness experienced by the main character in the short stories in the shed of Tzvetan Todorov theory of narratology, focusing on propositions and sequences.

Fourth, Elysa Noy writes “Characters’ Loneliness Depicted in *The Boy in The Striped Pajamas* Novel”, in which she explains the causes of loneliness experienced by the characters in the novel and the way they deal with loneliness using a psychological approach and the theory of loneliness. Fifth, Raudhatul Jannah Su’ud writes “An Analysis on Isabella Swan’s Loneliness in *New Moon* Novel By Stephenie Meyer”, in which she explains Isabella Swan’s loneliness, her reason for feeling lonely, and the way she resolves her loneliness. Sixth, Elfath A,K writes “Loneliness in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Man*”, in which he explains kinds, reasons, and ways the characters in the novel overcoming their loneliness. Seventh, Ananda Praswanta writes “Loneliness of Mari Asai Reflected At Haruki Murakami’s *After Dark* (2004): A Psychoanalytic Approach”, in which he explains the causes of loneliness in the character of Mari Asai using a psychological approach.

Eighth, Christiana Anindya Putri writes “The Causes of Loneliness as Experienced By Toru Watanabe In Haruki Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*”, in which he explains the causes of Toru Watanabe’s loneliness. Ninth, Muhammad Aziz Prastyo writes “A Portrayal of Loneliness As Seen In Simple Plan’s “Astronaut””, in which he explains how loneliness is depicted in the lyric, using New Critics theory to interpret the meaning of the lyric. Tenth, Mariana Sargsyan and Gohar Madoyan write “Representation of The Concept of Loneliness in Katherine Mansfield’s *Authorial World Picture*” in which they explain the concept of loneliness in the author’s world using linguistic theory: phonetic, lexical, and syntactic. The ten previous studies mentioned have not analyzed the song lyric “Empty Space” using loneliness theory, and nine of the ten previous studies analyzed novels using the theory of loneliness. Therefore, the writers will take liberty of this situation to analyze the lyric using the theory of loneliness postulated by Daniel Perlman dan Letitia Anne Peplau.

Amidst the relevance in the topic of discussion which the aforementioned studies contain, the writers consider Lucarcenin’s article to be the closest to that of loneliness in the lyric. Quoting the lyricist’s statement about the lyric, she does not literarily say that it is about loneliness. The writers, however, could read between the lines that “the struggle of trying to fill that void” denotes loneliness. The writers could infer that the lyricist feels lonely although he does not say it overtly. How lonely he feels will be described in the following section. The writers will describe his loneliness intrinsically and extrinsically. Intrinsically the loneliness will be described through the use of figurative language in the lyric. Extrinsically the loneliness will be described through Pearlmans and Preplau’s concept of loneliness, comprising the kinds and causes of loneliness.

4. Result and Discussion

In this section the writers would like to describe how loneliness is described intrinsically through imagery, diction, and symbol in James Arthur’s “Empty Space”. The writers found the two kinds of imagery, namely visual and auditory imagery. In the first stanza there is a line saying “I don’t see you” which represents a visual imagery. In the sentence, the writers are deemed to be in the position of the lyricist who can no longer see his lover wherever he is. The lyricist reads as though he did not know her whereabouts. Then, in the second stanza there is an auditory imagery which is contained in the line “I won’t hear it”. The words sound to invite the writers to pretend not to listen to people when they mention the name of the lyricist’s lover. The lyricist reads as though he did not seem to care about her.

The visual and auditory imagery, the writers think, could say that the lyricist is currently not with his beloved one. The lyricist is alone without her by his side [9].

With regard to diction in the song lyric, the writers found denotation and connotation. The sentence “I wanna tell all my friends” has denotative meaning. The sentence shows that the speaker wants to tell something anybody who befriends with him. The lyricist reads as though he was not alone; he was by himself when he uttered the line. Besides that, the sentence “Cause only you could fill this empty space” has connotative meaning. The writers believe that the words “empty space” in the sentence designate an indefinite dimension, so it will be impossible to fill up. Yet, there is somebody whom the lyricist believes able to do so. The lyricist reads as though he knew her more than anybody else. The writers think that the denotation and connotation suggest the importance of being together. He feels lonely unless she stays with him.

The symbol in the lyric is described through words chosen to contain more than what they are written, such as window, flames, and bed. In the first verse, the word “window” may designate a part of a building: “You’re not in every window I look through”. The sentence may say that the lyricist cannot see his beloved one anywhere he looks around, or he does not know his lover’s whereabouts. That is what makes the lyricist feel lonely. So, the window may represent the sadness felt by the lyricist when he lost somebody dear to him. In addition, the word “flames” in the line “Even when I’m burstin’ into flames” may represent anger which the lyricist wants to show to his lover. The clause reads as though he did not seem to care about her although he felt angry because everybody kept asking him about her. He does not seem to feel sorry about walking away from her, either. Also, the word “bed” in the line “Looking for love in a stranger’s bed” may represent another love. The line may say that when he feels lonely; he then tries to fill the void by looking for love from somebody else, but he finds out that he cannot find the love in the other person. The clause reads as though he could replace her for somebody else. Yet, he failed to do so. The writers think that the symbolic words represent the lyricist’s unhappiness when the two of them are literally apart.

Furthermore, the writers would like to describe how loneliness is described extrinsically through the kinds of loneliness, the cause of loneliness, the effects of loneliness, and how the speaker overcomes his loneliness. In James Arthur’s “Empty Space” the writers found two kinds of loneliness, namely emotional and social loneliness. The writers believe that the emotional loneliness occurs because the relationship between the lyricist and his beloved one ends. The line “I don’t believe that I was blessed” may say that the lyricist felt exalted when he and his beloved one were still in relationship; however, he disbelieves his own feeling. Later, the writers believe that the social loneliness occurs when the lyricist got left by his beloved. He needs to re-adapt to new circumstances without the presence of his lover. The clause “But I don’t think I’ll find it” may say that he found it difficult to substitute for his beloved. Accordingly, the writers believe that the lyricist feels lonely emotionally and socially because of an end to his heartfelt relationship to her: he feels lonely because he cannot deny that he felt blessed whenever he was with her, and he is ascertained that she is irreplaceable to him.

The writers would, moreover, like to tell that the loneliness experienced by the lyricist is caused by the end of his relationship with his lover. At first the lyricist seems alright after their relationship ends. The following verses may say that situation:

And I don’t miss you
You’re not in every single thing I do
I don’t think we’re meant to be
And you are

Not the missing piece

I won't hear it
Whenever anybody says your name
And I won't feel it
Even when I'm burstin' into flames
I don't regret the day I left

It can be seen that the lyricist does not seem to miss his lover. He does not seem to regret living his days without his lover's presence, either.

Reading the following verse, the writers could infer that during that time the lyricist just lied to himself; in fact, he still loves his beloved one. It can be inferred from the verse below:

I'm probably lyin' to myself, again
I'm alone in my head
Looking for love in a stranger's bed
But I don't think I'll find it
'Cause only you could fill this empty space

The lyricist might have denied his real feeling, but then he confesses that all he has done is a lie. He feels lonely when his beloved is not around. To conceal his feeling of loneliness, the lyricist tries to find another person. Yet, he cannot feel the same love he had. This is because only his previous lover could fill the loneliness he is feeling then.

Although the lyricist is pretending, the writers could read between the following line that he feels lonely after he left his lover: "I don't regret the day I left". Let alone the lyricist left his previous one because he chose to be with someone else. This can be seen in the lines below:

I'm a liar and a cheat
And that's why I might never see you again

The lines may tell that the lyricist confesses how he lied and cheated on her. Because of that, their relationship ends, and he may no longer be able to see her anymore.

With regard to the relationship's end, the writers think that at the beginning the lyricist intends to look alright after he broke up with his beloved. Then, he shares his feeling that he still misses her no matter how he is pretending and attempting to find somebody else. After that, he confesses that he became untrue to her and himself, and he realizes that he might lose her because of what he did. Thus, what the lyricist did wrong causes the break up, and that render his loneliness.

The loneliness which the speaker renders due to the break up with his lover certainly has a big effect on him. This can be seen in the lines below:

I've been drinking
I've been doing things I shouldn't do
Overthinking

The writers think that the word "drinking" signifies the lyricist's first encounter to the impact of detachment as a way of escape a way out to his sorrow. Drinking is the only solution he could find as he immensely tries to forget the presence of his lover in the past. The lyricist seems to expect it as a

way to escape unhappiness, or as a reason to detach from his inevitable feeling of loneliness which brings him the despair. The writers also think that the word “overthinking” signifies an understatement. The lyricist might have gone into a place where he cannot expect to go to: he keeps thinking of a situation which is too difficult for him to understand. In this situation, the writers think that drinking and overthinking become the bad effects of the break up, and the activities do not stop him from being lonely.

Referring to the aforementioned verses, the writers would describe that the lyricist attempts to overcome his loneliness by finding somebody new. Yet, his attempts were unsuccessful. First, the lyricist cannot find a replacement of his previous lover because only she was able to fill the void he felt. Even when he pretends to be alright, he will still find himself alone unhappily. Later, the lyricist cannot cure the break up by drinking and overthinking, either. He confesses that he did wrong with his steps, and that ended his relationship to her. Despite the attempts, however, he is still feeling lonely.

5. Conclusions

After discussing the song lyric of James Arthur’s “Empty Space”, the writers came to the conclusion that the lyric describes loneliness which the lyricist renders because the relationship with her lover ends. The loneliness is described through both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the lyric. Through the intrinsic aspects, the loneliness is designated as imagery, diction, and symbol. The imagery comes into the visual and auditory imagery. Both kinds of imagery designate his lonesome condition at present. The diction comes into the denotative and connotative meaning of the lyric’s lines. The denotation and connotation signify the lyricist’s need of togetherness with his beloved. The symbol comes as the words of resemblance, such as “window”, “flames”, and “bed”. The symbolic words decipher unhappy life he lives after she is no longer with him.

Through the extrinsic aspects, moreover, the loneliness is designated into the kinds, the cause, the effects, and the cure of loneliness. The kinds of loneliness fall into the emotional and social loneliness. The cause of the loneliness points out into the end of the lyricist’s relationship with her lover. The effects which fall upon the lyricist is that he always found himself drinking and overthinking, neither of which should he have done. Meanwhile, to overcome this loneliness he tries to find a substitute for his past lover although he finally realizes that it is impossible for him to do so.

In all, the writers found the lyric of James Arthur’s “Empty Space” special. On the one hand, it reads direct. The writers think that each line in the lyric is a straightforward expression of the lyricist longing for his beloved one. The writers consider the expression as an honest one, and that what makes the lyric feel real to the writers’ feeling. On the other hand, the lyric reads ample. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the lyric constitute its fine quality. The writers could assess that the lyric was meticulously written. The imagery, diction, and symbol are figuratively structured in accordance to the cause and effects of the loneliness as well as the lyricist’s efforts to overcome. Thus, the writers believe that the lyric deserves general studying and public listening.

Acknowledgements

The writers would like to extend their gratitude to Department of English Office, Diponegoro University for their support.

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Appendix A

The song lyric of James Arthur's "Empty Space"

I don't see you
You're not in every window I look through
And I don't miss you
You're not in every single thing I do
I don't think we're meant to be 5
And you are not the missing piece
I won't hear it
Whenever anybody says your name
And I won't feel it
Even when I'm burstin' into flames 10

I don't regret the day I left
I don't believe that I was blessed
I'm probably lyin' to myself, again

I'm alone in my head
Looking for love in a stranger's bed 15
But I don't think I'll find it
'Cause only you could fill this empty space

I wanna tell all my friends
But I don't think they would understand
It's something I've decided 20
'Cause only you could fill this empty space

Space, space This empty space Space, space This 'Cause only you could fill this empty space	25
I've been drinking I've been doing things I shouldn't do Overthinking I don't know who I am without you I'm a liar and a cheat I let my ego swallow me And that's why I might never see you again	30
I'm alone in my head Looking for love in a stranger's bed But I don't think I'll find it 'Cause only you could fill this empty space	35
I wanna tell all my friends But I don't think they would understand It's something I've decided 'Cause only you could fill this empty space	40
Space, space This empty space Space, space This 'Cause only you could fill this empty space	45
I couldn't make you love me? I couldn't make you love me? I couldn't make you love me? I couldn't make you love me? Couldn't make you love me? I couldn't make you love me?	50
I couldn't make you love me? (space, space) I couldn't make you love me? I couldn't make you love me? (space, space) I couldn't make you love me? Couldn't make you love me? Couldn't make you love me?	55