
A Comparative Analysis of “The Piano” by D.H. Lawrence and “The Gift” by Li Young Lee

One of the most potent works by the writer D.H. Lawrence is *The Piano*, a poem that explores the role of memory in life. A similar idea is explored in *The Gift* by Li Young Lee. These two poems show that memory plays a complex role in the journey of life and that it often poses a dichotomy, acting as a boon as well as bane at the same time. These two poems essentially explore both the facets of memory and delineate memory as a potent force in life.

In *The Piano*, D.H. Lawrence talks about how memory brings with it an uncontrollable sense of nostalgia. This nostalgia, however, may bring joy as well as suffering in the mind of a person. In this poem, the sound of the piano "betrays" the speaker back into the past, and he is forced to revisit a part of his life he had so far buried in his mind.

The tone of the speakers of both the poems is heavily laced with nostalgia, but this nostalgia affects them in very distinct and contrasting ways. The poem *The Piano* has a melancholic tone, and it is abundantly clear that the poet wishes to deny himself the misery that comes with revisiting the past.

The Piano explores the experience of a man who is resisting nostalgia because he knows that his dialogue with the past would weaken him emotionally and make him lose his grip on the present. The experience of the speaker of the poem is bittersweet as he is betrayed back into his past and forced to confront his memories. These memories inevitably make him long for his childhood and struggle with his present as he is unable to uphold his manhood and weeps like a child. *Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me; Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.*

In these lines of the poem, the speaker is taken back into his past as a woman softly sings to him. The use of the word "dusk" is very significant. Dusk marks the end of daylight and the beginning of night. This could be an analogy for the state of the speaker's mind which wavers between the past and the present, belonging completely to neither. Just as dusk connects day and night, it may also be seen as a connecting force between past and present. It is interesting that while the woman in the present sings softly to him, the sound from the past is that of a boom, indicating that his past is a very potent force in that moment. It is no surprise that the nostalgia which grips the speaker comes with a sense of bitterness over having lost that past.

In contrast to this, *The Gift* explores memory as a boon and defines what the speaker's past has had to offer him. The speaker expresses that he feels that he has grown in experience due to the lessons taught by his father that have been preserved in his memory. The memories of the speaker of this poem, unlike the ones of the speaker of *The Piano*, strengthen his hold on his present and help him forge a beautiful and loving bond with his wife: *I can't remember the tale, but hear his voice still, a well of dark water, a prayer. And I recall his hands, two measures of tenderness he laid against my face, the flames of discipline he raised above my head.* The poet remembers the beauty in the past memories; not the tale, but his father's calming voice.

His father's voice is likened to "a well of dark water" and "a prayer", indicating that the speaker loves and worships his father. Perhaps this is a factor that helps him cherish his memories.

The defiance of the speaker in *The Piano* can be juxtaposed with the celebration of memory in *The Gift* to form a complex idea of the role of memory, a facet of life that plays a positive as well as negative role in shaping a person. The speaker of the first poem is helpless when confronted with his memories. Despite the fact that these are pleasant memories, they make him long for his childhood and resent his manhood. On the contrary, *The Gift* celebrates memory as a beautiful part of the human experience and explores the potency of a universal element, love, and the role of childhood memories in the cultivation of this love in a person. The dichotomy between memory as a bane and a boon surfaces time and again in *The Piano* as the speaker celebrates and mourns for his past at the same time. However, a singular aspect of memory is observed in *The Gift*.

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