Emily Prosser

Mr. Milligan

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Passion and Character

This is student work. Emily has allowed me to use it for teaching purposes. It is a good example to follow for formatting your Dialectical Writing. You may notice some errors.

**Context:**

In chapter sixteen of *The Shipping News*, Quoyle is seated in Dennis Buggits’ kitchen one afternoon to pick up his daughters. While there, Dennis describes to Quoyle his love for being on the water and his father’s effort to keep him away:

“I never learned nothing about fishing from Dad. He loves fishing-but he loves it for himself. He tried to keep me away from it, tried to keep all of us off the water. It had the effect, see, of Jesson getting in with Uncle Gordon’s crowd, and me just wanting to be on the water. Oh, I wanted to be a carpenter, right enough, but I wanted to fish, too,” he went on dreamily. “Proper thing. There’s something to it you can’t describe, something like opening a present every time you haul up the net. You never know what’s going to be in it, if it will make you rich or put you under the red line, sculpins or dogfish. So I wanted to fish. Because the Buggits are all water dogs, you know. All of us. Even the girls. Marge is a sailboat instructor in Ontario. Eva’s the social director for a cruise ship. Oh, you can’t keep us off the boats. But Dad tried his damndest.” (Proulx 138)

**Personal Response**

It is evident that Dennis has a true passion for the water; while I read this passage I was struck at how accurately his description of this passion applied to my own. Music is something that I am, and have always been truly passionate about. From the time I was six years old and picked up my first violin I have never been able to let go, and in fact I have added the flute, piccolo, and cello to my repertoire. Every time I play something beautiful it is as if I am part of something better, something that exists outside of me that I can only tap into with an instrument in hand. I feel truly at peace when I am making music. Just as it was impossible to keep the Buggits from the call of the water, it is impossible to separate myself from music. If I am not playing my instrument, I am listening to music, and if I am not listening to music I am singing. I imagine life would feel incomplete if I could not experience music, and luckily I am not discouraged by my parents from pursuing my passion in the way Jack discourages Dennis. This passage stood out for me because I can identify with Dennis’ evident passion.

Literary Analysis

This passage is a great example of the characterisation of Jack Buggit. As Dennis describes his love for the water he also explains his father’s efforts to keep his children away: “He loves fishing-but he loves it for himself. He tried to keep me away from it, tried to keep all of us off the water.” (Proulx 138). At first the reader might assume Jack is selfish, but with further analysis shows that he is actually just concerned for the well being of his children. He considers fishing a dangerous career that yields only a hard life and no real benefits at the end, and this outlook seems to be confirmed with the death of his son. This paragraph is significant because it is one of the few times that Jack is seen as more than a boss. This is a contrast to learning of him only through the eyes of his employees and this passage provides the opportunity to hear how his son would describe him. Jack is being painted in a different light, that of a good and loving father. This knowledge adds relevant information and adds depth to his character. Readers can now understand his past and apply this knowledge when analysing any future actions. This paragraph effectively characterizes Jack making it significant in the novel.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This paragraph is a wonderful depiction of a true passion as well as a great example of characterisation. I was drawn to further analysing it because of this depiction of passion and my ability to connect so well because of my own passion for music. I also enjoyed being able to learn more of Jack’s character; making this an excellent choice for my dialectical journal. [555 words]

Work Cited

Proulx, Annie. *The Shipping News* . 1st . New York : Simon & Schuster, 1993. 337. Print.

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EXAMPLE 2

Context

The quotation I have selected is from chapter twenty seven of Annie Proulx’s novel *The Shipping News*. Quoyle and Nutbeem are discussing Jack Buggit’s choice of assignments over squidburgers. Nutbeem has observed that Jack assigns each writer the stories that will be most difficult for them to write, for example Quoyle covers car wrecks because that is how his wife died. Quoyle expands on Nutbeem’s ideas by explaining that perhaps Jack does this to ease his own pain as well as theirs, following the principle of misery loving company:

“It dulls it, the pain, I mean. It dulls it because you see your condition is not unique, that other people suffer as you suffer. There must be some kind of truth in the old saying, misery loves company. That it’s easier to die if others around you are dying.” (Proulx 221)

Personal Response

The wisdom behind Quoyle’s words is undeniable and they speak of a simple truth that every person can relate to. I believe that it is in our nature to seek the company of others and that this holds true especially when we are miserable. I’ve had times where I feel incredibly sad and I feel as though the pain will eventually swallow me up. Ironically when I feel this way, it is not the promise of better days that makes it easier, it is the knowledge that I am not alone in my suffering. By talking with friends or family and understanding that everyone has bad days, or have also gone through the angst that I’m feeling, I realize that I’m not the only one and it helps me to move on. I think that most people feel better when they know that they are not alone which is why Quoyle’s explanation of this type of response to suffering is easy for readers to relate to.

Literary Analysis

This passage is incredibly important for the characterization of Quoyle. Up until this point in the novel Quoyle has come across to readers as an unintelligent man who tries to make the best of bad situations. With this passage however we are shown a glimpse of a wiser, more sophisticated side of his character. His discussion with Nutbeem reveals that Quoyle can see past the pain that his writing assignments present and understand the benefit of it. He explains that facing his fears and writing about car wrecks is somewhat therapeutic; he says that it eases the pain to know he is not alone in his suffering. Not only is it evident that Quoyle understands the benefits of Jacks choices but he has realized that Jack also applies this theory of misery loving company to himself. Jack has a deep love for the sea but it has taken the life of so many of his family members, including his son. Unfortunately in order to enjoy the sea he must also face his pain. By making the others confront their pain it reassures Jack that he is not the only one that has suffered. This method of assignments is every bit as therapeutic for Jack as it is the writers. Because this passage is Quoyle’s thoughts and feelings of Jack’s method of giving assignments it shows a great deal of intellectual ability; he has clearly analysed the actions of his boss and the effect on everyone at the newspaper. This is a significant shift in his character. Proulx has effectively added an extra layer to her main character in this short passage. Readers can now appreciate Quoyle as an intellectual observer and interpreter of his surroundings whereas before he appeared to be the exact opposite.

Conclusion

I have selected this passage because I was able to both form relevant connections and also appreciate Proulx’s wonderful use of characterization. I believe that Characterisation is a powerful thing for an author to execute properly. It gives her characters more interest and adds more substance to the story she is trying to tell which is why I think it is an important literary device to analyse. [549 words]

Work Cited

Proulx, Annie. *The Shipping News* . 1st . New York : Simon & Schuster, 1993. 337. Print.

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