Clare Magura

Mrs. Thomasen

English 12

February 24, 2020

**Temptation & Struggle**

Greek mythology and 1990’s African American rappers are connected through the struggles and temptations they face. Notorious BIG grew up in Brooklyn, New York in poverty with his mother. He wrote East Coast hip hop music during the 1990’s before being assassinated in 1997. He aspired to be rich and famous and pull himself out of poverty against all odds. Countee Cullen was a Harvard graduate who wrote poetry during the Harlem Renaissance; he supported and was influenced by both American and African American cultures. **The use of the poetic device, allusion, is used in both poems “Juicy” by Notorious BIG and “Yet Do I Marvel” by Countee Cullen. Both poets use allusions to represent their temptations and struggles. In contrast, past the struggles they face, Cullen speaks for all of humanity whereas Biggie personally wants to be a rich and famous rapper.** Both poets use allusions to show their goals and how a simple connection can represent so much in one poem.

Initially, in “Juicy”, Biggie references famous African American rappers “Salt’n’Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine / Hangin’ pictures on my wall” (line 3-4). These verses show how rich Salt’n’Pepa and Heavy D are because they ride in a limousine and how Biggie aspires to be like them because he hangs their pictures on his walls like possibly a poster in his bedroom. Biggie also shows his ambition in these allusions: “Every Saturday Rap Attack, Mr. Magic, Marley Marl” (line 5) where he again shows his yearning for fame and wealth like Mr. Magic and Marley Marl. In contrast, Countee Cullen isn’t as self-interested as Biggie. Cullen’s poem, “Yet Do I Marvel” references all humanity and their struggles: “Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus” (line 5) is a Greek mythological tale, where Tantalus is constantly tempted by fruit in front of him but every time, he tries to take it, it moves away from him. This demonstrates how people are always tempted by things they can’t have even if God could give it to them, he chooses not to, and he questions why that is. Another Greek mythology reference, “If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus” (line 7) illustrates the story of how Sisyphus was constantly pushing a boulder up a mountain, but every time he got to the top, it would roll back down and he would have to start all over again. Sisyphus is persistent and constantly tries to get the boulder to the top of the mountain, but he never can.

Despite the difference between the purpose for writing their poems, both the two pieces show the struggles and temptations the authors experience. Biggie wanted nothing more than to be rich and famous and so he references rappers Salt’n’Pepa, Heavy D, Mr. Magic, and Marley Marl. These rappers were at the top, right where Biggie wanted to be. Throughout the song, Biggie discusses his life in poverty but in the end, he quotes “Cause I went from negative to positive” (line 21), this shows how he struggled throughout his life to make it to the top to be rich and famous and succeeds despite the obstacles. Cullen references Sisyphus who is pushing the boulder up the mountain, just to have it roll back down and for him to start over again. In common illustrations, Sisyphus appears to look like he is struggling with all his might and weight under him to get the boulder up the hill. Rappers and Greek mythology seem to be so different yet when referred to struggles they are connected.

In “Juicy” and “Yet Do I Marvel” the poetic device allusion is used in both poems. Both poets use their allusions to represent their struggles and temptations they have in their lives. One poet has more self-interest than the other, he writes about his feelings whereas the other poet writes for mankind’s feelings. These allusions relate to human nature; we are constantly tempted by things we can’t have, like Tantalus, we are always struggling whether it’s to be at the top like Biggie or to do something impossible without knowing it’s impossible like Sisyphus. In some ways humans are always tempted and struggling to get to their goals. The allusions in these two poems have nothing to do with each other on the outside but put it into context with the poet, tone of the poem, and relation to the stuggles they are significantly connected.

**Works Cited**

Cullen, Countee. “Yet Do I Marvel.” *Color*, Harper & Brothers, 1925.

Notorious BIG. “Juicy.” *Ready to Die*, Poke, New York, New York, 1994.