Stylistic Devices In Rudyard Kipling's Poetry

Rudyard Kipling is a well-known poet from the late nineteenth century. Kipling is recognized for his use of politics in poetry. Since his death, Kipling has come under fire for writing poetry that reflected his support for imperialism. Kipling was also known to be a racist (which many men were during his lifetime). Kipling also wrote some encouraging poems, including his most famous poem “If”. “If” has become a poem loved by many. Rudyard Kipling uses repetition, similes, personification, alliteration, and irony in his poem “If” to give advice on how one should go about living their life.

Rudyard Kipling uses repetition throughout this poem. Kipling constantly repeats the word “if” to give multiple examples of how a young boy (specifically his son) should act in order to become a successful man. Many times he uses the words “if you can” which implies that you do have control over these behaviors, should you choose to. Kipling wants to help his son find a place in this world without sacrificing his values. Kipling also continuously repeats the word “you” in trying to appeal to a broader audience. Rudyard Kipling repeats the word “you” to get the reader to “own up and take responsibility.” (author unknown) He wants to teach the reader that they should believe in themselves. Everyone has the power within themselves to get ahead in life while still being responsible for their actions.

Rudyard Kipling uses personification throughout his poem. The line “If you can dream - and not make dreams your master” (line 9) is an example of personification. “Dreams were like masters who can control our lives. In this case, dreams are assumed to have had a human role/quality; that is being a master.” (Helmi Airan). You can dream without allowing those dreams to take over reason. Kipling also personifies the line “If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster” (line 11). Success represents “Triumph” and failure represents “Disaster”. This line can encourage the audience to consider that failure is indefinite. Kipling uses the word “meet” which is a human activity, but in this line, Kipling uses “the verb to beautify the meaning.” (Helmi Airan).

One of the oldest, most widely used means of enhancing poetry is alliteration. Alliteration is a method of linking words together for effect. In using alliteration a writer contrasts words with the same letter in order to create cohesion. The use of alliteration in his poem helps to create a smooth flow of words without rhyming. “The alliteration in his poem serves to add to the already lyrical nature of the poem by adding even more rhythm.” (Author unknown). Alliteration is used throughout the poem “If.” For example, the /K/ sounds; can, crowds, keep, Kings, common. Or /O/ sounds; on, of, toss. Kipling uses the rhyme scheme of AAAA in the first stanza, but throughout the rest of the poem, he uses ABAB BCBC DEDE to keep the readers interested. “He also makes use of the rhyming scheme of AAAA in the first verse. In the rest of the verses, he has used an ABAB BCBC DEDE rhyming scheme to keep the readers captivated.” (author unknown)

The poem talks about how to get ahead in life without allowing others' behaviors to control yours. You can take the moral high road while not judging others. You should not be conceited or abandon your old friends just because you are learning to better yourself. It’s teaching leadership skills and a good work ethic. It teaches how to deal with others' behaviors, while not falling victim to them. He wants to show a way to have balance in your life.

Rudyard Kipling uses irony as a literary device in his poem.“For instance, the line: ‘if you can think’ (line 10), is contradicted by the author by saying: ‘and not make thoughts your aim.’ Similarly, in urging the reader to both ignore doubt and make allowance for doubt,” (author unknown).

In conclusion, the poem “If” uses many examples to teach something that every man (or woman) should know. How to become successful in life without compromising your integrity. Kipling uses various literary devices for one intended purpose. By using more than one literary device he is able to bring his poems to life. His poetry has a smooth flow that allows for the words to take hold in your memory. Kipling’s poem “If” is mainly directed at his son, yet could be applied to any man or woman’s life. His poem “If” while appearing simplistic actually causes the reader to give pause in order to see how that applies to their lives. Kipling wants you to know that the power is within you to have that success“If” that’s what you wish for your life.

Works Cited

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