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October 16, 2012

AP Literature 2A

POD Response 4

### Pathedy of Manners

The narrator of *Pathedy of Manners* by Ellen Kay talks about smart a young girl who was adored in her youth, and was popular with the opposite sex. She begins to learn the lifestyle of the wealthy and slowly loses her intelligence as she bluntly speaks before thinking. She discards her old life in search for a new one out of the country and finds a wealthy man of her standards. They have an “ideal” marriage, but their children were lonely in this home.

Twenty years later, her children leave and her husband passed away, leaving her alone with the thoughts of what could have been. She is left with hundreds of people that call her, but none of which are her friends. She walks in this circle of people alone until the very end.

The way that the poem *Pathedy of Manners* starts as if it is going to reflect the young woman to an older version of herself later on in the poem brings about questions of whether or not she is going to stay “brilliant and adored” as she starts off. It is also made clear that in her youth, this woman caught the attention of several men.

This woman learns the language of the elite with the expensive crystals and pearls. Yet, she’s slowly starting to lose this brilliance that she once had for she doesn’t think before she speaks, and rambles on with the conversation instead.

After this step towards changing herself, she hangs up her diploma to go out of the country. This symbolizes the fact that she’s leaving behind her education in search for a more high-class life. Now with a higher standard, she rejected a man of Nobility due to the fact that he

was poor and would not be able to give her the high-life that she searched for. She is then able to distinguish between real Wedgwood pottery that is of worth from a fake one that is valueless.

When she finally changed herself to the standard that she sought for, she married a man of real worth. This man owned genuine pearl cufflinks, symbolizing his wealth. It is then said that they had an ideal marriage and lived in an ideal house. Yet ironically, this ideal house held lonely children.

In the fifth stanza, the narrator reveals themselves as being an observer of this woman as the poem states that he/she saw her twenty years later. The woman's children have departed from their home and her husband had died for a year's time. Being left alone with her thoughts, she plays with the ideas of various plans in order to pass time. She also reflects on her life and how she has lost opportunities that she can no longer redo.

She is scared to admit what she knew all along about the glamorous life that wealth had given her. Ignoring her own thoughts, she cares more about the opinions in everyone else's mind except her own. In doing so, she ceases to have her own opinion because she relies too heavily on what others think.

Now alone, there are hundreds of people that she converses with over the phone, but none of them are her friend. She avoids her doubts with small talk, and is lost because she no longer knows her true self. She walks in a grand circle of people who she wanted to be one of, but yet she will walk alone until the very end, regretting what she can't undo.

Very similar to the bandwagon effect, this poem emphasizes the idea that we human beings find it necessary to change ourselves in order to fit in with other groups. However, changing oneself in order to be like others does not necessarily mean that one is happy. The woman in the poem *Pathedy of Manners* reminisces on her life and makes up illusions of the lost

opportunities that she could have had. The person that she became left an empty void that she could not fill even with the illusions that she conjured up for herself.

Taking a look at the overall structure of this poem, it is a gradual transition through the women's life. The first stanza talks about a girl that used to be, and the final stanza concludes with what she had become. The last stanza is a conclusion to the foreshadowing that is done in the first sentence of the poem. She is no longer the brilliant girl that she once was, but a hollow person that walks alone in a circle of people that claims to be her friends, though none of them are. After stanza one, Kay gradually transitions to how this women slowly turned into a person that sought for the ideal, yet losing herself instead.