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The Labyrinth of the Mind

In “The House Of Asterion” by Jorge Borges, the infamous mythological minotaur, known best for being slain by the Greek hero Theseus, is not portrayed as an unthinking savage beast but a tragic complex character whose grasp on reality or lack thereof was what led to his death. The short story is through the minotaur Asterion’s voice which allows the audience to see his world and understand the state of mind the character possessed. As his thoughts of the world outside the labyrinth slowly By using first person point perspective, Borges was able to show an unreliable narrator’s reality shift from a grounded viewpoint of the world outside the labyrinth to a surreal and bizarre environment in which the minotaur inhabits. While Asterion’s voice is used to show insight into his character, Borges also utilizes the labyrinth itself as a symbol for the condition of Asterion’s mind. These elements all contribute to the overall foreboding feeling of doom that this story holds and leads to the tragic but predictable ending.

Asterion’s isolation not only from people but his self-imposed confinement to the labyrinth itself was a major factor that contributed to his fragile mindset. Borges shows through Asterion’s choice of words to show his state of mind is affected by the isolation he endures. At the beginning of the story, Asterion knows the way others perceive him as a prideful and unstable individual but scoffs at their concerns. This may seem as if Asterion can understand another person’s viewpoint of him adequately but this is contrasted greatly by a descriptor of what happens to men who encounter Asterion in the labyrinth. It shows how warped his view of reality is by the way he thinks about others. His ability to inflict harm and ultimately death to the men who enter his labyrinth without blood thirst because he believes death is a way to save them from evil. His descriptions of ending these men’s lives are gentle, positively-associated verbs or adjectives rather than what would be used to portray brutal deaths. The reality of what truly

happens to these men who encounter the Minotaur is missing and replaced by words such as “ceremony” to call the entire ordeal and “joyfully” to describe his way of meeting them. All this is to show how far removed Asterion’s perception of the world is from the reality of his situation due to his lack of social connection to anyone besides himself.

One of the first mentions of the labyrinth is by Asterion who claims that it is not a confined prison but his lonely house. He repeats himself, arguing against the rumors spread by the public, that it is adamantly not a locked barrier that separates him unwillingly from the outside. When he immediately begins to mention the first and only moment in which he went out in public, it is to be understood that it is the public’s reaction towards his unusual appearance that caused him to confine himself from the outside world. His meditations of the labyrinth go into a surreal and bizarre landscape that repeats itself infinitely. Architecture that continues endlessly without inhabitants reflects Asterion’s life, a repetitive cycle in which he simply exists without connection to others. There is no one in his life and the only time when he encounters others regularly is under the premise that he kills the people forced into his world. This all goes to show how the labyrinth is not only the setting in which this story takes place but as a means to express how Asterion’s true feelings of his situation, that the vast emptiness that is the Labyrinth stands for the isolation he suffers from.

Borges was able to express through the use of symbolism and choice of words the loneliness and unstable state of mind that Asterion possesses to create a new perspective of the famous Greek myth. His longingness for a redeemer to save him not from any physical confinement but his life was from the solitude that surrounded him. His only means to escape this solitude was the belief that eventually his redeemer will one day appear to him. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy that Asterion held onto and that Theseus himself commented on by expressing in disbelief how easy it was to end the minotaur’s life. Rather than dismissing the villain that was slain by Theseus as a cold and mindless beast, Asterion is shown to have been a tragic character doomed by his mind that sealed his fate.

Works Cited

Borges, Jorge. *The House of Asterion*. Edited by J.E.I, Labyrinths, 1962, pp. 138 - 140.