

The Path to Loneliness in Claire Nixon's Poetry

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Abstract

Claire Nixon is a contemporary British poet, novelist, short story writer, and editor, who was born in 1973. Glancing over Nixon's poetry, one cannot help but notice a recurrent aspect that permeates through almost all her poems, that is, a strong feeling of loneliness. This overwhelming sense of loneliness has various causes and assumes several shapes in her poetry. For example, it can result from breaking up with the lover, losing the lover to death, the lover's cold-heartedness, a mother's growing anxiety about her sick daughter's health, homophobia, and drug addiction. It is also detected in some of her other literary works such as her fiction. The present paper, therefore, seeks to verify this unique aspect of her poetry first by spotting it in a number of her short stories then by examining it throughout her poetry.

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الطريق إلى الوحدة في شعر كلير نيكسون

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ملخص

تعتبر كلير نيكسون شاعرة وروائية وكاتبة قصص قصيرة و محررة لمجلات أدبية وهي كاتبة بريطانية معاصرة ولدت عام 1973. ويستطيع القارئ بمجرد تصفح قصائدها أن يتعرف على مظهر أساسي يغلب على أشعارها ألا وهو الإحساس الشديد بالوحدة. و ينتج هذا الإحساس الرهيب بالوحدة عن أسباب متنوعة كما يأخذ أشكالاً كثيرة حسبما يظهر ذلك في قصائدها. فعلى سبيل المثال قد يأتي الشعور بالوحدة من الانفصال عن الحبيب، أو فقدانه نتيجة الموت، أو من البرود العاطفي له، أو من معاناة أم خوفاً على صحة ابنتها المريضة، أو من مرض الخوف من ممارسة الشذوذ الجنسي، أو من إدمان المخدرات. كما يمكن أيضاً الكشف عن الشعور العميق بالوحدة في كتابات نيكسون الأخرى مثل أعمالها القصصية. ويسعى البحث الحالي إلى التحقق من وجود هذا المظهر المُميّز لشعرها أولاً من خلال رصده في بعض قصصها القصيرة؛ ثانياً من خلال فحصه عبر قصائدها.

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Claire Nixon is a contemporary British poet, novelist, short story writer, and editor. She was born on the ill-fated September 11, 1973 in the North East of England. She embarked on her writing career in September 2002, finding inspiration in her extensive reading. In December 2004, she self-published her first work of juvenile fiction *Tabitha & Pirate Jim*, which was written as a present for her eldest daughter Tabitha. The work was transformed into an audio tale with Audio Stories for Kids later that year. She has many publishing successes to her credit. Thus, several of her poems and short stories have been published in magazines, e-zines, and anthologies such as UKAuthors's anthology *Voices from the Web*. She has become an active and prominent member of the UKAuthors.com as far back as 14 August 2003. In May 2006, she was selected as "UKAuthors Writer of the Month." In fact, Nixon can be considered mainly as an internet author since she has been a full participant in many writing forums as well as literary discussion groups on the Web. She has even created her own webpage under the title *Simply Claire* whereby readers can have access to her biography, works, and related links. She has also won several competitions such as the Coast to Coast International Writing Competition, Skive Short Story Competition, Secret Attic Short Story Competition, and Motherwise Flash Fiction Competition. Likewise, she has received offers from many publishers who have shown interest in her first novel "A Writers Story." In between studying and writing, Nixon manages to work as marketing coordinator/interviewer for *Gold Dust Magazine*. Right now, she is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Twisted Tongue* magazine, whose first edition was issued in February 2006. Nixon is married, and she is the mother of five children.¹

Reading through Nixon's poetry, one can easily identify a frequent aspect that pervades almost all her works, namely a deep sense of loneliness. This feeling of loneliness stems from various

¹ For the information on Nixon's life and biography, one is indebted to the following sources: "Claire," "Claire Nixon," "Claire Nixon Biography," and Nixon, "Simply My Profile."

reasons and takes various forms, as will be seen below. For example, it may sometimes result from an acute anxiety about confronting society. More often than not, however, it can be attributed to the abandonment on the part of the lover, the loss of the lover, or breaking up with the lover. The cold-heartedness of the lover can also bring about a deep sense of loneliness. By the same token, the intense suffering a sleepless mother endures on account of her little daughter's incurable illness and the inhumane treatment she receives from her colleagues as a result can be a source of experiencing loneliness. Equally, minority groups and people often subject to prejudice and discrimination such as homosexuals are most likely to feel loneliness. Last but not least, drug addiction is similarly a common reason for suffering loneliness. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to cast light on this recurrent aspect of Nixon's poetry first by tracing it through some of her short stories so as to emphasize its far-reaching impact and then by tracking it through her poetry. I am partly indebted for the paper's title to the title of Nixon's poem "The Path to Loneliness," which is among the poems under examination in the paper.

Some of the causes and shapes of loneliness mentioned above have been articulated in a number of works of Nixon's fiction. For instance, in her short story "Where Is Everyone – (Challenge)," the speaker falls asleep while surfing the internet only to dream of some solitary underground place. The stairs in this deserted place lead "up to the land where the ground is puffy white clouds" and down to "a corridor, which is dimly lit." Fearing to go upstairs, the speaker goes down the corridor, which leads to several rooms that are all completely locked up. Being alone by himself with merely silence and fog all around, he feels so lonely that he imagines himself dead:

I'm feeling very lonely. A tear escapes the corner of my eye. There's one place to go – into the bright light. I must have died and now I'm in limbo walking around God knows where.

That'll explain why no body else is around – well, they are around, I just can't see them. Looks like ghosts can't see

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the living. I don't want to hang around here by myself for the rest eternity.

In another short story entitled "Abyss," Nixon depicts a sad picture of a lonely man who remains single on account of dumping his beloved in favor of his work, thus leading an unhappy life. Falling fast asleep out of fatigue, he wakes up in a dark vacant train carriage to find out that the train has stopped and the passengers have just got off, leaving him behind. Holding on to his diary, which represents his past life and hence his identity, he tries in vain to open the door since his hands are freezing. He calls on people outside, asking them to help him out with the door, but there is no one to answer him. In the meantime, a howl of a lonely wolf is heard from afar, filling him with terror. Then all of a sudden, the wild beast is crying at the carriage door and scratching it trying to burst it open. Believing his life is about to end, the man reflects on his past life:

The creature lurched against the carriage door and screeched a terrifying howl. I silently wept. My time had come. There was so much more I wanted to do with my life. I had a new quest written inside my journal, one that I will never know anything about. I was yet to marry the love of my life. How foolish had I been? I should have married her, rather than push her away for a career—I could have had both. Never again would I see those bright eyes or that cheeky grin. Or smell her wonderful floral scent. No child to bear, my surname dies with me. No legacy.

It is curious how weeping and crying have become symptomatic of Nixon's lonely heroes. In both stories above, the heroes resort to tears as a defense mechanism against loneliness, which shows how loneliness has rendered them vulnerable and helpless.

Likewise, her short story "Faraway" describes the anxiety and the agony a woman undergoes while waiting her man who is late. Even though she believes that the man does not love her as much as she does, she forgives his delay because she cannot stand living without him nearby, which highlights her deep sense of

loneliness even in his presence. The story opens with Nixon's comment:

Anticipation draws upon her once more. Fear of the unknown drives her insane. A pallid face reflects off the dirty windowpane. It stares back, mocking her for being so foolish.

'The waiting game has just begun', the pallid face says to her.

Once again, she denies everything. And forgives him for his sins before he returns to her embrace. Dreams and fantasies hold her together. Without them she'd fall apart, willingly give up her life, all because she fears being without him.

Having seen how loneliness has tinged Nixon's fiction with its gloomy hue, one is now motivated to examine her poetry in search of this dejected tinge. The first poem to bring one's attention to this theme is "Within Myself." The poem is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 9-5-2005, and it shows how Nixon or, rather, the speaker in the poem lives her life in her own head:

Within me I am repressed,
Within myself I am suppressed.
Within me I am obsessed,
Within myself I am depressed.
Within me I am stressed,
But, within myself I should be blessed. (1-6)

The poem is a full confession on the speaker's part of her desperate loneliness because only a lonesome person would be afflicted with overwhelming feelings, particularly dismal ones, without sharing them with someone close like a beloved, a friend, or even a kinsman. Though loneliness is ostensibly a source of suffering and torment for the speaker, as evidenced by five sixths of the poem's verbs, namely "repressed," "suppressed," "obsessed," "depressed," and "stressed," which all denote desolation and anguish, paradoxically, she seems content with and even enjoys her loneliness since she concludes the poem with the fact that "within myself I should be blessed" (6). This

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shows that she conceives of loneliness not as a curse as much as a blessing or, rather, a mixed blessing. The poem's stylistic and structural features as well as its syntactical constructions all serve to illustrate its underpinning theme. Thus, the use of parallelism whereby Nixon begins the whole poem's lines with the word "Within" enhances the idea of mental seclusion and emotional alienation pertaining to loneliness. Likewise, the employment of the first singular person pronouns "I," "me," and "myself" exclusively is in keeping with the self-centered, egotistical nature characteristic of a lonely man. Nixon alternates between "me" and "myself" to avoid repetition. Similarly, the resort to the passive voice indicates that the speaker's loneliness is more of an inclination or disposition than a transient feeling or a temporary sickness. She cannot help but experience this feeling in the sense that she is obliged to by nature, which explains why she enjoys it and why she considers it a mixed blessing since a blessing is not earned but bestowed on man by God. Last but not least, the short size of the poem reinforces the solitary and introverted nature of the speaker who does not have much to say to or share with the other because she has no intimates or confidants, let alone the reader.

The second poem of interest with respect to the theme of loneliness is "I Hide behind a Wall," which is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 26-3-2004. In line with "Within Myself," "I Hide behind a Wall" is a full and explicit statement issued by Nixon's speaker that she lives a lonely life that is both happy and fearless on account of being hidden behind a wall of pretense. But while the first poem addresses loneliness from the mental and emotional, i.e., the personal, vantage point, the second one concentrates more on the social aspects associated with loneliness:

I hide behind the wall
That way you can't see me
I can say what I want
Living without fear

I hide behind the wall
You will never know the real me
I can wear what I want

Living without fear

I hide behind the wall
Showing you the false me
I can be who I want
Living without fear

I hide behind the wall
Don't try to knock it down
If you do you will see
The me that I fear (1-16)

The poem specifies the reasons why Nixon's speaker enjoys loneliness in terms of being at ease and free from the nagging anxiety arising from the attempt to cope with social hypocrisy and avoid severe criticism due to being short of meeting its standards, which is summed up in the recurrent use of the two phrases "I want" and "Living without fear" in the first three stanzas. The speaker realizes that public or, rather, social life imposes certain measures on people with regard to behavior ("I can say what I want"), dress ("I can wear what I want"), and even identity ("I can be who I want"), which may contradict with one's innate impulses and drives, causing one to lead a double life: one is private, which is the true one ("the real me"), and the other is public, which is the false one ("the false me") (3, 7, 11, 6, 10). This double life or schizophrenia brings about loneliness in two senses or, rather, on two levels, namely the personal life level and the social life level. On the personal life level, one is naturally lonely in terms of alone because there is no one to share one's instinctive likings and proclivities while on the social life level, one is alone because one does not sincerely share other people's likings and proclivities, but merely fake to do so in order to blend in with them. Thus, loneliness in "I Hide behind a Wall" is twofold. Nixon, however, seems to enjoy both forms of loneliness since, as pointed out above, it serves her as a defense mechanism against social anxiety whereby she can say, wear, and be whatever she likes without the fear of being held accountable for it: "I hide behind the wall / That way you can't see me / ... / Living without fear" (1-2, 4). This is why she asks people to respect her privacy and hence her loneliness without which she will be totally vulnerable:

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"Don't try to knock it down / If you do you will see / The me that I fear" (14-16). The phrase "The me that I fear" underlines the discrepancy between the speaker's private life and public life, and accordingly, the twofold facet of her loneliness.

Starting from the following poem on, each poem discusses a different reason for loneliness. The first of these poems is the poem whose title has partly inspired the paper's title, namely "The Path to Loneliness." The poem is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 3-10-2004. In "The Path to Loneliness," Nixon's speaker argues that loneliness is an inevitable, though welcome, outcome of love when breaking up with or being dumped by one's idiot lover:

That dark lonely dirt track
looks appealing to me.
I don't know why,
but it does.
My nights were filled
now they are shattered.
Foolishness is what it was.
Not love.
Nor pleasure.
Just a whisper in the breeze,
holding onto my sanity
What I had, drifted away
taking my heart along with it.
I suppose it's time
to wander that long lonely path... (1-15)

That the speaker describes loneliness as a "dark lonely dirt track" expresses how much suffering and pain she is going through. In fact, she is on the verge of madness, being unable to stand her lover's absence: "Just a whisper in the breeze, / holding onto my sanity" (10-11). The adjectives "dark" in the sense of sad and "lonely" affirm the emotional harm brought about by loneliness while the adjectives "dark" and "dirt" stress the physical harm. On the other hand, the speaker's bleak description of loneliness proves her deep love for as well as attachment to the man who has abandoned her, otherwise, she would not have suffered at all: "What I had, drifted away / taking

my heart along with it" (12-13). That the speaker discloses that the depressing path to loneliness "looks appealing to me," poses something of a paradox. However, it may indicate that she has been unhappy in her love, a fact which the next lines have unequivocally established. Though she disclaims any knowledge of the reason why loneliness appeals to her except that "it does," what she reveals about the nature of her love belies her (4). She thus relates that before she parts company with her lover, her "nights were filled," i.e., busy, and "now they are shattered," i.e., void of action or lonely (5, 6). The fact that she does not say that her nights are happy, joyful, cheerful, etc. when she has enjoyed the company of her lover and that she does not point out or even imply that they are not sad after he has left testifies to her unhappy love and paves the way for the surprise coming in the following line: "Foolishness is what it was. / Not love. / Nor pleasure." (7-9). Eventually, truth comes out as the speaker acknowledges that the relationship between her and her lover is not that of love nor even of lust but that of stupidity. In what way their relationship is foolish or on whom the blame falls for such foolishness, she does not delve into the matter, leaving it up to the readers to figure it out for themselves. Her silence on the matter can be interpreted as an apathy on her part after finding out the stupid nature of her love or, rather, as an overwhelming fear of coming face to face with the past after being deeply hurt. Unexpectedly, however, she realizes her all-consuming love for her lover immediately following their separation: "What I had, drifted away / taking my heart along with it" (12-13). Whether because she thinks it is too late to recover her lover due to his rejection or because she gives up all faith and hope in this stupid relationship, she compliantly submits to her inevitable fate believing that "it's time / to wander that long lonely path" (14-15). The ellipsis at the end of the poem hints to the reader that the ending of the love story is not decided yet and so the story is to be continued, which uncovers the speaker's surviving hope in getting back to her lover or getting over her loneliness and love again.

The next poem among those that focus on the reasons for loneliness is "That's the Way Life Goes." The poem is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 24-9-2004. Even though it is published ten

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days before "The Path to Loneliness," it seems to be a continuation of or, at least, an answer to it since it talks about the aftermath of losing one's lover this time to death not through the breakup of their relationship in terms of suffering intense loneliness and how one should cope with such catastrophe and relieve one's suffering:

That's the way life goes;
one hell of a trip ain't it?
We learn to love gradually,
then, within a flash,
a loved one is taken.
We cry with such despair.
Why bother living
when there is so much pain?
Suicide seems to be the only answer.
The mind wanders -
tablets or blades -
but it's not the way.
The grieving continues,
then that niggling ache
deep in the stomach
disappears without a trace.
Before we know it
we fall in love again slowly
and we get that urge again
to live and love
feeling free
happy;
hiding our memories
our past loved ones,
but that's okay
We have our special days
to remember
our time together.
That's the way life goes;
one hell of a trip ain't it? (1-30)

Nixon's speaker begins the poem by characterizing the suffering one endures through loneliness on account of the loss of a loved one as

"the way life goes," that is to say, as a natural phenomenon and therefore, one should accept it as part and parcel of one's life, no matter how painful and depressing it is, which justifies her wonder and awe at life: "one hell of a trip ain't it?" (2). The speaker then elaborates on her characterization by giving the reader the details of how she reached this conclusion about loneliness. Thus, she explains that the path to loneliness begins by learning how "to love gradually" only to find out that "within a flash, / a loved one is taken" (3, 4-5). Consequently, one is eaten up by loneliness so much so that one would "cry with such despair," contemplating the idea of committing suicide as a way out of one's dilemma: "Why bother living / when there is so much pain? / Suicide seems to be the only answer" (7-9). The speaker then ponders over the various means of killing oneself such as taking a fatal overdose of sedatives, sleeping pills, painkillers, or any other over-the-counter drugs at hand or cutting oneself with a sharp tool like a razor or a knife. However, she realizes the futility of one's attempt at ending one's life as a practical solution for easing the aching loneliness: "but it's not the way" (12). She comes to believe in the proverb that says "time heals all wounds," which in its turn indicates that suffering loneliness is merely a temporary phase of one's life, and accordingly, one has to let it go without feeling despair or resentment, whereupon one may resort to taking one's own life: "The grieving continues, / then that niggling ache / . . . / disappears without a trace" (14-16). How soon one's suffering would take to end, the speaker argues, depends on how much time one would consume to fall in love again, which it will be soon enough, as she predicts: "Before we know it / we fall in love again slowly" (17-18). If Nixon's speaker sees in falling in love an incentive "to live and love," it is, therefore, natural that she should see loneliness as an incentive to resent life and hence to commit suicide (20). Likewise, if she associates love with freedom and happiness, loneliness must be associated with confinement and gloom. Freedom here is the freedom from pain and anguish while confinement refers to the state of being alone and lonesome, namely physically and emotionally isolated. The speaker then points to the habit that to protect their new love and to carry on with their lives, people usually strive to keep their past affairs hidden from their new

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lovers, a practice she endorses as long as one cherishes one's happy memories from such affairs: "but that's okay / We have our special days / to remember" (25-27). The poem comes full circle as it ends with the same couplet it begins with as if to assert the circle of life and hence the theme of the poem or, rather, the circle of life as presented in the poem in terms of the cycle of love and loneliness, which pretty much resembles the cycle of life/birth and death: "That's the way life goes; / one hell of a trip ain't it?" (29-30).

In line with "That's the Way Life Goes," "So Many Questions..." can be regarded as a sequel to "The Path to Loneliness" because it meditates on the loneliness one experience in the aftermath of breaking up with one's lover. However, unlike the former poem, which treats of loneliness in realistic, acquiescent way, the present one tackles loneliness from a logical, dialectical point of view by rationalizing the breakup of the speaker's relationship with her lover while expressing her bewilderment and disbelief at the tragic end love usually comes to. "So Many Questions..." is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 4-7-2005, i.e., ten months after the two previous poems:

Are we growing apart you and I?
Why does falling out of love hurt?
Are we supposed to feel like this?
Why do we have mixed emotions?
Are we going to hold on to what we had?
Why do we have to forget our past?
Are we meant to be together?
Why does it have to end at all?

Am I meant to feel so much anger?
Why do I want to hurt you?
Am I the one driving you away?
Why do I say these silly things?
Am I going to cope without you?
Why do I feel afraid and alone?
Am I the one that caused this?
Why are you breaking my heart?

Wasn't it you who pushed me away?

Why do you blame me for this mess?
Wasn't it you who needed some space?
Why did I decide to agree with you?
Wasn't it you who blocked me out?
Why did I think it was a passing phase?
Wasn't it you who went astray?
Why do you scream and shout at me?

Are we growing apart you and I?
Why does falling out of love hurt?
Are we supposed to feel like this?
Why do we have mixed emotions?
Are we going to hold on to what we had?
Why do we have to forget our past?
Are we meant to be together?
Why does it have to end? (1-32)

The whole poem is written in the form of rhetorical questions so as to affirm Nixon's speaker's deep-seated belief in some facts as well as her utter disbelief in other facts with respect to suffering loneliness and her separation from her lover. One cannot help but notice the alternation between the "yes/no" questions and "why" questions throughout the poem. The yes/no questions unmistakably express the speaker's doubt and skepticism towards certain issues while the why questions convey her faith in and certainty about other issues. Accordingly, each why question is regarded as an answer to or a refutation of the preceding yes/no question, as will be pointed out below. It is also worth noticing that the first stanza is addressed to both lovers, the second one to the speaker alone, the third stanza to the lover alone, and the final stanza, being a repetition of the first one, to both lovers again.

Since the first stanza is directed to both lovers, it inquires of things that both of them are held responsible for and control. Thus, the speaker, being in shock, is uncertain whether she and her lover are truly parting company with one another or not only to find out that they actually are, as evidenced by the pain and suffering she is enduring: "Why does falling out of love hurt?" (2). She then raises doubt as to the kind of pain they are suffering, but she soon realizes that they "have mixed emotions," very probably of longing and

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resentment, of hope and despair, of cheerfulness and loneliness, as the following stanza demonstrates, which reflects both her yearning for the past and her acquiescence to reality (4). She also gets skeptical about their obligation to their treasured past memories, perceiving that they "have to forget" their past, perhaps in order to manage to carry on with their lives (6). Finally, she concludes the stanza by summing up all the abovementioned questions in one last question that expresses her shock at their separation, and wakes up to the grim reality that their love is over once and for all: "Why does it have to end at all?" (8).

Stanza Two, being addressed to the speaker solely, casts suspicion on some of her feelings and actions and so denies that she could have possibly experienced these feelings or performed these actions at the same time as it affirms her association with other feelings and other actions. Thus, though she suspects that she is capable of feeling "so much anger," she is quite positive that she wants to "hurt" her lover (9, 10). Likewise, she is unsure that she is the one to blame for their separation, but she is fully aware that she does "say these silly things," which is not, from her viewpoint, a sufficient reason for her lover to break up with her (12). She also does not believe that she is able to survive without her lover staying by her side: "Am I going to cope without you?" (13). However, she cannot escape from the bitter reality that she is "afraid and alone" (14). She ends the stanza, disclaiming any responsibility for their current unfortunate situation and emphasizing that it is her lover who after all breaks up with her and thus breaks her heart: "Am I the one that caused this? / Why are you breaking my heart?" (15-16).

Though the speaker addresses her lover in the third stanza, one cannot fail to realize that while the yes/no questions in the stanza pinpoint the lover's role in bringing about the end of their love relationship, the why questions highlight the speaker's reactions to as well as reflections on the matter. Therefore, she wonders how her lover is the one that initiates the breakup of their relationship in the first place, brooding over how unfair it is that he lays the blame squarely on her: "Wasn't it you who pushed me away? / Why do you blame me for this mess?" (17-18). She also marvels at the effrontery

he has to justify dumping her on the grounds that he has "needed some space" and explains that she has made up her mind to comply with his desire (19). Then, for the second time, she shows her utter surprise at the fact that it is her lover who shuts her out of his life, not the other way around, illustrating how she consents to his desertion in the hope that "it was a passing phase" (22). In the end, she reaffirms that her lover has full liability for their total failure to nurture their love while speculating on his reasons for yelling at her furiously: "Wasn't it you who went astray? / Why do you scream and shout at me?" (23-24).

The speaker concludes the poem with the same stanza she starts with so as to throw light on the fact that by the end of the poem, she has failed to achieve any progress with regard to her present dilemma in the sense that she has not found satisfactory answers to her probing questions, has not done away with her growing skepticism, and accordingly, has not alleviated her unbearable suffering. In short, she has brought her miserable life to a virtual standstill, being unable to find a successful resolution to her romantic crisis. On the other hand, she ends the poem with the stanza that is addressed to both herself and her lover to accentuate their shared responsibility for what their love has come to as well as their common suffering as a result. Moreover, the idea of beginning where one ends brings to mind the circle of life with its emphasis on the fact that life in terms of endless cycles such as those of good and evil, joy and fear, and love and hatred goes on no matter what discussed in the previous poem "That's the Way Life Goes."

Contrary to the foregoing poems, the next two poems approach loneliness not as an inevitable outcome of love failure but as a typical symptom of being deeply in love. The first of these poems is "Thy Sinner," which depicts how Nixon's speaker suffers loneliness on account of her cold-hearted lover, who conceives of their love as a sin and of his beloved as a sinner. The poem is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 14-10-2005 along with its audio recording:

A sinner ye shall be
A sinner I may be to ye

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Alas I hear the calling
Not from above
Or from afar
but from a brick...
And where is this
I hear ye say
I laugh and giggle
at your dismay
Ye say I'm the blind one
I fear ye not
I'm wiser than ye say...
I place a hand upon thy chest
A glint sparkles in thine eye
I caress my lips with thy tongue
Why darling can't ye see
Ye were born not a throbbing heart
but a swinging brick... (1-19)

The sentence "A sinner ye shall be" is supposed to be uttered by the speaker's lover to which she sarcastically answers in disbelief: "A sinner I may be to ye" (1, 2). The lover accuses the speaker of being a sinner, very probably because of their lewd love acts, a view with which the speaker totally disagrees, as expressed in her use of the modal auxiliary "may," in the fact that she confines her lover's opinion to himself alone ("to ye"), and in her resort to the interjection of regret and frustration "Alas" (2, 3). Completely overcome with remorse and disappointment, the speaker ridicules her lover's indictment of sin on the grounds that the indictment is brought against her not "from above," i.e., from God/Heaven, nor "from afar," i.e., an external authority such the law, tradition, customs, etc., but from "a brick," namely himself (4, 5, 6). Then, she sneers at her slow-witted lover's failure to understand what she means by "a brick" when he inquires of her "where is this [brick]": "I laugh and giggle / at your dismay" (7, 8-9). Her lover's short-sightedness reminds her of another charge leveled against her by him, that is, being foolish and unwise: "Ye say I'm the blind one / I fear ye not / I'm wiser than ye say..." (11-13). The clause "I fear ye not" underlines the speaker's irony whereby she implies, "I am quite

positive that you do not think of yourself as a fool, but you are." She attempts to refute this charge by making a physical demonstration of his cold-heartedness. First, she lays her hand on his chest, and to her surprise, a flash of light erupts from his eye, which proves, of course metaphorically, that his heart is made of stone: "I place a hand upon thy chest / A glint sparkles in thine eye" (14-15). The fact that the flashing of an eye is usually taken to represent a sinister sign of evil enhances the idea of the cold-hearted lover whose heart is made of flint. Second, the speaker seeks to give her lover a French kiss so as to show how apathetically he receives the kiss like some inanimate thing, as Line 16 points out: "I caress my lips with thy tongue" (16). She ascribes the act of kissing her lips to herself rather than to him, thus converting the usual order of the situation in that she should have said: "I caress thy tongue with my lips" or "ye caress my lips with your tongue" not the other way round, as she does in the poem. She concludes the poem stressing her lover's lack of both sense and sensibility: "Why darling can't ye see / Ye were born not a throbbing hear / but a swinging brick..." (17-19). The speaker recruits the ellipsis ". . ." in place of exclamation marks throughout the poem to signify her amazement and mockery.

The second poem that attributes loneliness to passionate love is "Rescue Me...." The speaker in the poem feels an intense longing for her lover's affection, tenderness, and care, not because he is cold-hearted as in "Thy Sinner," but because he stays away from her causing her to spend the night alone without him. "Rescue Me..." is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 25-7-2005:

Embrace me in your arms;
tell me that you want me.
Rest your lips on my forehead;
I need to know you are with me.
Stroke my hair from my face;
comfort me with your warmth.
Kiss away the tears I shed;
taste my pain and desperation.

Be my saviour tonight;
whisk me away to your fair land.

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Where you would be King;
and I will be your Queen.
Waltz me across the heavens;
shield me from the face of evil.
Do as you desire with me;
Allow my soul to be your shadow.

Can't you see in my wanton eyes;
I shall worship and obey you?
Each breath I take is heartbreaking;
you're my reason for existing.
Read these words carefully;
listen, depict them as you will.
We don't have to be distant;
my love... time alone will tell. (1-24)

The first stanza depicts how the lover expresses his all-consuming passion for the speaker on the physical level. He habitually holds her in his arms as a token of attention and kindness. He would also convey his emotions in words by telling her that he is need for her. One reason why he should demonstrate his love as such is to do away with her desperate loneliness: "I need to know you are with me" (4). In like manner, he would remove her hair from her face while allowing her to revel in the enveloping warmth of his body, which is the second reason for his acts of love: "comfort me with your warmth" (6). Last but not least, he would wipe away her tears through kissing her on the cheeks in an attempt to share her pain and suffering, thus providing the third reason for his physical demonstration of love: "Kiss away the tears I shed; / taste my pain and desperation" (7-8).

In the second stanza, the speaker asks her lover to comfort her on both the imaginative and spiritual levels by inviting him to save her from the bitter reality of her present inferno and take her to his fairy land in the dream world: "Be my saviour tonight; / whisk me away to your fair land" (9-10). The speaker's use of the word "saviour" with its religious and Christian connotations is in keeping with the spiritual atmosphere of the stanza. In this fairy land, her lover would play the role of the king while she would be his queen, a

royal fantasy that is not strange to a British subject like Nixon's speaker. The speaker then expects her lover, now the king, to ask her to dance waltz, a royal dance, "across the heavens" as well as to protect her "from the face of evil" (13, 14). Eventually, she runs out of suggestions and gives him the opportunity to do whatever he wants to her, welcoming any plans he comes up with, as long as she will not leave his side: "Do as you desire with me; / Allow my soul to be your shadow" (15-16).

The third stanza begins by highlighting the speaker's compliance with her lover's desires and wishes on grounds of adoration, which is religiously in line with her conception of him as her saviour, mentioned above: "Can't you see in my wanton eyes; / I shall worship and obey you?" (17-18). The adjective "wanton," however, looks rather incongruous in this spiritual-religious setting with its sensual overtones. The speaker then acquaints her lover with one aspect of as well as one reason for her adoration, namely having breathing difficulties and her lover being the center of her life: "Each breath I take is heartbreaking; / you're my reason for existing" (19-20). She also urges him to dwell on her words both on the auditory level and on the visual level as is his habit: "Read these words carefully; / listen, depict them as you will" (21-22). In the end, she sums up the theme of the poem, arguing that they should not be apart as the case is tonight, building on her strong affection for him, to which time itself will testify: "We don't have to be distant; / my love... time alone will tell" (23-24).

Loneliness can also be experienced as a result of homophobia, which in its turn arises from the religious and social taboos against homosexuality, as the following poem "HE" points out. The speaker in the poem suffers loneliness because he cannot express his physical love the way he desires for fear that society will persecute him. That is to say, he does not have enough courage to come out of the closet. The poem is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 16-4-2004:

He's everywhere
When I stare
As I pull at my hair.

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He's under my skin
It's such a sin
As I stroke at my chin.

He will find
The truth in my mind
As I try to be blind.

I turn away
Not wanting this today
As I try to pray.

Why should I lie?
When all I do is cry
As I hold his tie.

Why be ashamed?
I'm not to be blamed
As I hold his flame.

He's everywhere,
He's under my skin,
And he has found,
I can't turn away,
Why should I lie?
Why be ashamed?
I am GAY! (1-25)

The speaker cannot get the image of his male beloved out of his mind. It is ubiquitous. Thinking deeply about him, wherever he turns his eyes, he sees him right in front of him, especially when he jerks at his hair, imaging that it is his: "He's everywhere / When I stare / As I pull at my hair" (1-3). As the speaker fondles his chin, of course believing it his beloved's, he feels a burning desire for him. However, he soon realizes that "[i]ts such a sin" to experience such emotions and gratify such desire (5). Thus, he comes to the conclusion that the only place where he can establish his true sexual identity and be himself is in his mind not reality for there he can ignore religious and social taboos against homosexuality: "He will find / The truth in my mind / As I try to be blind" (7-9). Then,

remembering that he has to go to the church that day, probably Sunday, to attend the church services, he makes up his mind to postpone his erotic fantasies about his beloved: "I turn away / Not wanting this today / As I try to pray" (10-12). He argues that there is no reason to lie presumably both to people by hiding his real sexual orientation and to himself by assuming the false identity of a heterosexual since he does not have the nerve to go public with his sexual inclinations and thus to fulfill his desires, but only fantasizes about gratifying them: "Why should I lie? / When all I do is cry / As I hold his tie" (13-15). He also reasons that he needn't feel guilty or disgraced since one cannot take the blame for one's innate desires or instinctive drives, which are as uncontrollable as the burning fire: "Why be ashamed? / I'm not to be blamed / As I hold his flame" (16-18). Admitting the failure of his attempts to elude the beloved's omnipresent shadow, which chases him wherever he goes, arousing his passion for him, and drawing on his argument and reasoning that he is free from guilt and blame, the speaker reaches a final decision to acknowledge his homosexuality publicly: "Why should I lie? / Why be ashamed? / I am GAY!" (23-25). One cannot fail to notice the parallelism ensuing from the repetition of the structure "as + I + verb + Object" in the third line of each stanza throughout the poem with the exception of the last stanza as if to underline the speaker's current obsession, or, at least, preoccupation with his sexual desires because he cannot satisfy them in reality.

"I Should Be Tired Now but I'm Not" directs one's attention to a different kind of loneliness, one that an anxious, depressed mother feels for her helpless, sick daughter. The mother remains sleepless and restless all night long despite her extreme fatigue out of concern for her daughter's health as well as because she has awful nightmares about her daughter being a freak. As in the previous poems, loneliness here is also brought about by love, not romantic or sexual love, but a unique kind of love, that of maternal love for one's daughter. The poem is posted on Nixon's own website in 2004:

I should be tired now but I'm not.
It's almost midnight,
I have started again, writing that is
I stopped for a while

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Not sure why.

I should be tired now but I'm not.
It might have something to do with my daughter's diabetes
Or, because she's being bullied at school for being a freak –
She's just a little different.
Her stomach looks like a pincushion
I could cry for days,
But she gives that dopey smile of hers
And tells me that one day she will show them all.
I thought I was brave –
I am nothing but a coward
Compared to my twelve-year-old daughter.

I should be tired now but I'm not.
Might be that I'm scared to sleep,
Those nightmares of my child being the freak,
Watching those needles pierce her tender skin.
Waking in my sleep with tears on my cheek,
Wanting to cry for days,
But I see her dopey smile
And I know that one day she will show them all.
I thought I was brave –
I am nothing but a coward
Compared to my twelve-year-old daughter

I should be tired now but I'm not.
I have never written a poem before.
So, I will keep this in my pocket for now.
Where I can look at it when I am feeling down –
To remind me of her dopey grin.

Love you my precious daughter Chantelle... (1-33)

The speaker begins the first stanza by apprising the reader of her present situation. She must be completely exhausted seemingly after a long day of back-breaking work, but unexpectedly, she does not feel so, a paradoxical fact that is repeated at the start of each stanza and that will be demystified soon. It is approaching midnight when she should have been in bed long ago, but she turns to writing

poetry instead, a hobby she has sustained for quite some time "[n]ot sure why" (5). Though she disclaims any knowledge of the reason why she has stopped writing, one realizes that it has to do with her daughter's illness, as the following stanza makes clear.

In the second stanza, after emphasizing the fact that she is dead from exhaustion, the speaker unravels the mystery why she is lonesome as well as why she has temporarily given up writing, i.e., her daughter is a diabetic: "It might have something to do with my daughter's diabetes" (7). However, this is not the only reason for her loneliness and apathy for writing since her daughter's sickness leads to unintended consequences. The daughter has been discriminated against by her peers on the basis of being abnormal or mutant, which exposes her to their intimidation and harassment: "Or, because she's being bullied at school for being a freak – / She's just a little different" (8-9). Recalling then how her dear daughter's abdomen has been transformed into "a pincushion" due to her regular injections of insulin, the speaker "could cry for days" (11). Nevertheless, the daughter's courage and contentment embodied in her "dopey smile" lend strength to her mother whom she "tells . . . that one day she will show them [her fellow colleagues] all" (12, 13). Her mother cannot help but reflect in bitterness, "I thought I was brave – / I am nothing but a coward / Compared to my twelve-year-old daughter" (13-15).

The third stanza sheds light on an additional reason for the speaker's insomnia and hence loneliness, namely having horrible nightmares about her poor daughter. She sometimes dreams that her daughter's colleagues refer to her as a monster, and at some other times, she sees the insulin needles stabbing her soft flesh: "Might be that I'm scared to sleep, / Those nightmares of my child being the freak, / Watching those needles pierce her tender skin" (18-20). She wakes up from her deep sleep to find tears streaking her face, "[w]anting to cry for days" (22). Again, she rebukes herself for being a coward, finding consolation in her child's foolish smile, her shield of valor and strength, and hoping that some day the child will prove herself to be better than her little spiteful peers, by repeating the final five lines in the previous stanza: "But I see her dopey smile / And I know that one day she will show them all" (23-24).

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In the fourth stanza, the speaker brings the reader's attention to the fact that this is her first poem, which shows that the poem, if one takes the speaker to stand for Nixon herself, is also the first of Nixon's poetic oeuvre: "I have never written a poem before" (29). The speaker then underscores the social function poetry performs in consoling people and easing their loneliness when she indicates that she will tuck the poem into her pocket so that she can retrieve it in time of depression to cheer herself up by recollecting her daughter's childish grin: "So, I will keep this in my pocket for now. / Where I can look at it when I am feeling down – / To remind me of her dopey grin" (30-32).

Addressing her child by name in the final line as she expresses her deep love for her, the speaker thus dedicates the poem to her as well as immortalizes her name: "Love you my precious daughter Chantelle..." (33). This also proves that Nixon herself is the speaker of the poem, that is to say, she is talking about herself.

The last poem worth examining with regard to the subject of loneliness is "Addiction." The poem tackles loneliness of a particular type, namely the involuntary loneliness suffered on account of drug addiction, since a drug addict more often than not loses touch with the world around him as well as with reality in general. The poem is posted on the UKAuthors's website on 1-4-2005 and on *Famous Poets and Poems . com* in 2006 after making final revisions and some editing. The present version of the poem is the one cited in *Famous Poets and Poems . com*:

What have I become
in this false fantasy?
Thriving on something sweet,
submerging into another world.
Without it I tumble
transforming into nothing.
I'm locked in a stalemate
not capable to stir.
Look closely through my eyes,
as deep as the end of sight.
See! My ailment and do

your very best to repair.
Save me from this ogre
I have become, before
I sit in a dark painful void...

lost inside my addiction (1-16)

Assuming the character of a drug addict, the speaker laments the deplorable condition she has come to. She explains that now she is living in a world of fantasy that is isolated from the real world: "What have I become / in this false fantasy?" (1-2). She then adds that though she believes her life to be sustained by "something sweet," that is, "narcotics," which is in keeping with an addict's conception of drugs, she cannot help "submerging into another world," i.e., the fantasy world (3, 4). She is so attached to this false world that she cannot do without it, otherwise, she would "tumble / transforming into nothing," which shows how far drugs have completely taken control of her life (5-6). She has become literally a slave to drugs in a way that put her life on hold for an indefinite period of time, reducing her to a still inanimate carving such as chess pieces: "I'm locked in a stalemate / not capable to stir" (7-8). Changing the sentences from statements (declarative sentences) to requests (imperative sentences), the speaker then turns her speech to who seem to be people that are intimate with her or, at least, care about her. She asks them to take a thorough look at her illness, presumably to win their sympathy, and thereupon, she seeks out their help: "Look closely through my eyes, / . . . / See! My ailment and do / your very best to repair" (9, 11-12). She specifies the eyes in particular for people's inspection, because an addict's eyes are usually the first sign that attracts one's attention to his/her addiction, being intoxicated and sleepy. Feeling helpless and weak, the speaker repeats her request for help, admonishing those who are concerned about her health to rescue her from the monster she has become before addiction preys on her and ruins her life: "Save me from this ogre / I have become, before / I sit in a dark painful void..." (13-15). The image of an addict as an "ogre" is quite insightful since it does justice to the condition of an addict as one who cancels out one's mind and is in thrall to one's desires. So is the image of addition as

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"a dark painful void," which perfectly describes the inactive, purposeless life of an addict, hence the last line in the poem: "lost inside my addiction" (16).

Having examined various selections from Nixon's poetry, one cannot help but arrive at the conclusion that loneliness takes on a fundamental and unique aspect of her poetry. This aspect is also spotted in some of her fiction, which proves its far-reaching impact. For example, in her short story "Where Is Everyone – (Challenge)," the speaker dreams of being locked up in some solitary underground place where he feels so lonely that he believes himself to be dead. In another short story entitled "Abyss," Nixon relates how a man who feels forlorn after breaking up with his beloved, having favored his work over her, wakes up in a dark vacant train carriage to find out that the train has stopped, the passengers have just got off, leaving him behind, and a fierce animal is trying to break into his carriage. Likewise, her short story "Faraway" describes the anxiety and the agony a woman undergoes while waiting her man, who is being late. As for her poetry, it has already been seen how her poems convey a deep sense of loneliness on various levels and in various forms. For instance, her poems "Within Myself" and "I Hide behind the Wall" depict the aching loneliness one suffers on both the psychological and the social levels. Thus, while the former illustrates how a lonely person is usually endowed with an introverted nature, the latter shows how one sometimes resorts to loneliness as a defense mechanism against social anxiety. On the other hand, the rest of poems under examination in the paper highlight the main reasons for as well as the major sources of experiencing loneliness. So, in "The Path to Loneliness," Nixon argues that loneliness is an inevitable, though welcome, outcome of love when breaking up with or being dumped by one's idiot lover while in "That's the Way Life Goes" and "So Many Questions...", she deals with the aftermath of losing one's lover by revealing how one should cope with loneliness and by reflecting on the causes of the breakup so that one can ease one's loneliness. Unlike these three poems, "Thy Sinner" and "Rescue Me..." approach loneliness not as an inevitable outcome of love failure but as a typical symptom of being deeply in love.

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Accordingly, while the first demonstrates how the speaker's lover views her acts of love in terms of a sin bringing about her loneliness, the second attributes the speaker's loneliness to her lover's absence. The final three poems in the paper, however, turn the reader's attention to additional reasons for loneliness that are largely irrelevant to the theme of love. Consequently, loneliness can be experienced as a result of homophobia or, rather, the religious and social taboos against homosexuality, as "HE" points out. It can also stem from a mother's concern for her sick daughter's health and for the ensuing bullying her daughter exposes to in school, which gives her awful nightmares, as "I Should Be Tired Now but I'm Not" makes clear. Last but not least, one can feel loneliness on account of drug addiction whereupon one becomes isolated from the world around him as well as from reality in general, as Nixon declares in her poem "Addiction." In the end, one wonders what other reasons for and other forms of, i.e., what other paths to, loneliness may be there in Nixon's poetry and oeuvre as a whole and who might be the other authors that have gone down these paths, i.e., have come under the influence of loneliness, besides Nixon!!!

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