

ENGLISH: LIST 1

'The characters in Maestro learn to live with regrets'. Do you agree?

Many characters in Peter Goldsworthy's *Maestro* carry the burden of lamenting aspects of their past. The text illustrates that grappling with the notion of regret is a difficult challenge that is handled differently by individuals. Several characters find it impossible to overcome the strong sense of guilt they feel as a result of their actions in the past. In some cases it seems that such a heavy emotional burden can only be resolved by death itself. Additionally, some characters find that an increased level of maturity can help to ease the regrets they may have. Alternatively, there are times when it is relatively easy to accept and move on from one's mistakes, or to recognise the positive aspects of a particular event.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible for individuals to live with their paralysing regret. Eduard Keller is a man undoubtedly troubled by his past experiences. As a famous concert pianist throughout Europe, Keller wrongfully believed that his Jewish wife and child could be saved from the horrors of the Holocaust. Keller blamed himself for their deaths and as a result registered himself as a Jew, spending years in a concentration camp before exiling himself to Darwin, "a town populated by men who had run as far as they could flee." Goldsworthy highlights the huge impact that Keller's regret has on his everyday life in Darwin through his heavy consumption of alcohol, namely Schnapps. Additionally, Goldsworthy's specific choice to place Keller in the "stifling, oppressive" environment of the Swan Hotel enables him to highlight Keller's isolation and self-inflicted segregation from the world. The severe impact of the events of Keller's past is clearly illustrated during a performance by the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra in the Darwin Botanical Gardens. When the orchestra begins to play a Wagner excerpt- Act 1 prelude from *Lohengrin*- Keller rises unsteadily from his feet and begins to shout and cry in German. Paul recalls in his narration that Keller entered a zone of silence "so deep that is screamed." This reinforces the level of deep regret that Keller struggles to contend with on a daily basis. He simply cannot bear to face the passionate romantic music he once loved due to the raw emotional ties it has to his lamented past. During their final meeting before Paul goes off to University in Adelaide, Keller says to him, "I do not tell you this for me. But for you." This highlights Keller's acceptance that he will never allow himself personal abolition from deep guilt and regret he holds from his past. It inevitably stays with him up until his death.

Similarly, Paul Crabbe fails to cope with the pain of his past experiences. From a young age, Paul was pushed into the direction of becoming a famous concert pianist. However, their ambitions and expectations proved to be unrealistic as Paul lacks that elusive spark of brilliance that distinguishes a good pianist from a world class success. Although bearing a seemingly less distressing burden to that of Keller, Paul greatly laments the fact that he did not reach his ultimate goal. This is illustrated by Goldsworthy through the first person perspective of the text, revealing Paul's deep sense of sorrow and disappointment as a result of his perceived 'failure.' His narration reveals that he spent the years since Darwin "sitting at the piano" struggling to come to terms with the fact that he simply was not good enough to make it in the elite world of concert pianism. Paul is dissatisfied with his role as a music teacher in later life, and as a result greatly regrets not having a stronger influence over his future when he had the chance many years ago. This is shown by Goldsworthy through Paul's authorial intrusions when discussing the end of his time in Darwin as a teenager. When narrating a meeting between his family and Keller to discuss Paul's tertiary options Paul reflects that the "future became the present, unchallenged; and all too soon the regretted past." Paul carries this regret with him well into adulthood where it continues to hinder his life and level of personal satisfaction. Therefore, it is not always possible for individuals to live with their paralysing regret. Conversely, some individuals learn to live more effectively with the regret they carry in their daily lives. Paul is portrayed for the majority of the text as an arrogant, self-centred individual. As a young man, his over-riding sense of smugness means that on many occasions he fails to see the pain that he causes others. However, as Paul matures, he begins to regret some aspects of his past that for

most of his youth he felt indifferently towards. An example is his relationship with Bennie Reid, a boy who was simple “born to suffer.” When Paul first started at Darwin High Bennie was his only companion, however, Paul didn’t think twice about rejecting him once he began to find his feet amongst the members of the teen band ‘Rough Stuff.’ Yet Goldsworthy alerts the reader through Paul’s authorial intrusions as an adult that Paul later “squirms” at how horribly he treated Bennie, particularly when he betrayed him to the school tough Jimmy Papas for placing a bad of dog poo in Jimmy’s van as an act of revenge. Similarly, as Paul grows in maturity, he recognises that his meeting with Keller on his last night in Darwin was a “confessional; a privilege” which he, through “selfishness and sensual addiction” failed to accept. This is certainly something that Paul is revealed to regret in later life, as he realises that Keller had needed his support to release some of the guilt burdened by his past. However, Paul doesn’t carry the guilt and regret he feels from these events in the same way that he handles his personal dissatisfaction and ‘failure’ in relation to his career. Therefore, individuals can sometimes learn to live effectively on a daily basis despite acknowledging their mistakes made in the past.

Finally, there are times when it is relatively easy to move on from one’s prior faults or regrets. Despite gaining much confidence as a member of the teenage band ‘Rough Stuff’ Paul ultimately acknowledges through his narration that his time spent in the band was time wasted. In fact, he describes rock and roll as “music to shit by.” However, although Paul does in part regret involving himself in the band, especially when Jimmy and Scotty show up accompanied by Rick Whitely at his grandparents house in Adelaide, this is not something that hinders him later in life. It is an experience that he doesn’t particularly value, but it definitely exposed him to a very different world to what he knew. Additionally, John Crabbe originally regretted moving to Darwin from Adelaide not long after the family’s arrival. He struggled to fit in amongst other members of the “city of booze, blow and blasphemy,” and took quite a while to adjust to the new way of life.

This was shown by Goldsworthy through his negative initial outlook on life in Darwin and his reluctance to change his way of life. For example, he insisted on wearing traditional suits to work as he did in the south until he eventually gave in to the open-necked shirts and shorts worn by other Darwinians once he began to feel more at home in the Crabbe’s new lifestyle. Therefore, Goldsworthy illustrates that there are times when it is relatively easy to move on from prior regrets or begin to see them in a more positive light over time.

In conclusion, the way in which characters deal with their regrets and disappointment is an important aspect of Peter Goldsworthy’s Maestro. Several characters never move on from the strong sense of guilt they feel as a result of their actions in the past. In the case of Keller it seems that that such a heavy emotional burden can only be resolved by death itself. However, a period of reflection and increased level of maturity can sometimes help to ease the regrets that an individual may have. Alternatively, there are times when it is relatively easy to accept and move on from one’s mistakes, or to recognise the positive aspects of a particular event.