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ENGL 326

Final Exam

1. Neoclassicism emphasizes rules and polish in literature with a great appreciation for Greek and Roman philosophers, artists, and poets. The gothic, however, generally emphasizes the beautiful aspects of the grotesque and/or a perverseness in nature. Some works we have read that use neoclassicism alongside gothic elements include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and Robert Burns' "Tam o'Shanter".

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley draws directly from the classical Greek story of Prometheus. In the Greek story of Prometheus, he is a Titan, or type of God, that gifts humanity with fire. As Shelley's alternative title *The Modern Prometheus* alludes to, Victor Frankenstein functions as a Prometheus-like character as he also gifts humanity with a God-like power. In this case, Frankenstein has the power of creation. Frankenstein, or rather Shelley, describes his scientific finding as "...a power placed within my hands..." to draw an even closer parallel to the mythic Prometheus (32). *Frankenstein* is a work of neoclassicism in the gothic as Shelley surrounds her story with vignettes of horror and supernatural elements. For instance, Frankenstein comments, "Darkness had no effect upon my fancy" in relation to his father's concern for his fascination with death (31). Here and throughout the novel, Shelley uses Frankenstein's character to find the beauty in the grotesque in a perverse sense. Drawing from Greek mythology and using the gothic genre creates a successful and fascinating reimagining of the Prometheus story.

However, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", differs greatly in its implementation of neoclassicism. Most obviously, the poem demonstrates the classical forms of poetry with a rhyme scheme and heroic sea journey much like the work of the Greek poet Homer. The supernatural elements of the poem is what categorizes it as gothic. After the mariner's crew had passed, a ghostly ship approaches him and he describes the woman on it as "The Night-mare Life and Death was she, / Who thickens man's blood with cold" (ll. 193-194). The mariner is haunted after killing the albatross and violating nature. Yet, the supernatural being representing life and death lets him live as long as he spreads awareness about his mistake. Coleridge utilizes the classical elements of poetry and the gothic to advocate for a better relationship between humans and non-humans.

Robert Burns' "Tam o' Shanter" is a lyrical ballad on top of implementing neoclassicism and gothic elements. In particular, Burns' poem illustrates a hero's tale as he describes Tam's character as 'heroic' mimicking classic heroic poetry (l.129). The gothic elements of the tale are present as Tam witnesses a strange scene of so-called ugly witches and warlocks dancing. However, Tam describes one of the witches he sees as "(A souple [hussie] she was, and strang)" (l. 182, original parentheses and my replacement of 'jade'). Meaning, despite their ugly nature, Tam found something strangely beautiful about one of the witches mimicking the gothic genre.

In comparison to one another, Mary Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge make direct conversation with neoclassicism in which they 'stand on the shoulders of giants'. While the elements of neoclassicism in Burns' "Tam o' Shanter" are undeniable they may have been unintentional. Shelley's *Frankenstein* also draws from an allgorical character

while the other two poems follow classical forms of literature. Nonetheless, the use of the gothic in all three works provides a more intriguing and vivid story while paying dues to the classics.

2. Reason and emotion are often contrasted Enlightenment terms, as they generally seem to oppose one another. Reason is associated with tangible facts in which we can observe using the five senses. Emotion, on the other hand, is not as definable and more abstract as it exists in the mind and is communicated to others. Poetry especially emphasizes the importance of emotion versus reason as William Wordsworth famously claimed “Poetry is emotion recollected in tranquility.”

William Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud” poem illustrates the overwhelming emotion Wordsworth felt as he walked through a field of daffodils. “A poet could not but be gay;” (l. 15). Wordsworth obviously recalls this memory with great fondness, especially when he needs something to boost his mood. “For oft, when on my couch I lie / In vacant or in pensive mood,” he then thinks of the field of daffodils “And then my heart with pleasure fills,” (ll. 19-20 & 23). Wordsworth values his emotion filled memory over being in a ‘pensive mood’, or overthinking.

Similarly, in Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven” poem, there is an interaction between an adult and a young girl who claims she is one of seven children with two of her siblings passed away. “If two are in the church-yard laid, / Then ye are only five” (ll. 35-36). The adult narrator reasons there are only five children, but the girl continues to reason there are seven. Thus, Wordsworth creates an argument for the girl’s belief that her two siblings are still alive, in an abstract sense, as they still exist when she recollects them.

Another of Wordsworth's poems "Expostulation and Reply" also expresses a value of emotion over reason. There are two men, William and Matthew, which represent emotion and reason respectively. Matthew argues that William should be reading instead of relaxing in nature (ll. 1-12). However, William argues that "Our bodies feel, where'er they be, / Against or with our will" (ll. 19-20). In other words, William believes he should not fight his urge to relax and dream like Matthew believes he should. Matthew simply values reason over exploring emotion.

Although all of these poems examined are by William Wordsworth, they each draw varying arguments for the value of emotion over reasoning. "I wandered lonely as a cloud" describes the peace Wordsworth finds in remembering a beautiful field when he begins overthinking. "We Are Seven" shows how when a child recollects her dead siblings they are still members of her family as they still exist in her mind. "Expostulation and Reply" argues that we should give into our urge to dream sometimes rather than constantly learning. Wordsworth had a well-rounded perspective of the value of emotion.

3. A ballad is a narrative, lyrical poem of medieval origins with a clear moral. Joseph Addison described ballads as "darling songs of the common people"; they were for everyone to enjoy (31). Some ballads also include supernatural forces to further emphasize their morals. I will analyze three ballads; "Bonny Barbara Allan", Robert Burns' "Tam o'Shanter", and William Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill".

"Bonny Barbara Allan" tells the tale of a young woman who is pursued by an upper class man whom she turns down. He becomes ill and passes away without marrying her. Barbara Allan then says: "Since my love died for me today, / I'll die for

him tomorrow” (ll. 35-36). Only after he has died does Barbara Allan realize she loves him and then, she dies as well. The ballad moralism in this case is that by breaking traditional gender roles and denying a marriage offer, Barbara Allan is violating a societal law. As a result, she is condemned to face an unexplained early death that the reader is left to assume was a result of supernatural forces.

Another ballad with a clear moral is Robert Burns’ “Tam o’Shanter”. In Burns’ tale, Tam commits a series of immoral acts; including secretly admiring a dancing woman, stealing from the market, and drinking in excession. Soon the witches and warlocks catch Tam spying on them and they chase after him while he rides his horse, Maggie. “So Maggie runs, the witches follow, ... And left poor Maggie scarce a stump” (ll. 199 & 218). Here, the poem comes to a head and the moral of the story becomes clear as Tam’s innocent horse is hurt by the witches as a result of his immoral actions. “Tam o’Shanter” serves as a warning for those that want to commit similar immoral acts that the supernatural will seek vengeance.

The ballad “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” by William Wordsworth explores how the psyche can affect the physique. The ballad starts off with Harry Gill struggling with being cold. “Beneath the sun, beneath the moon, / His teeth they chatter, chatter still” (ll. 15-16). As a young man, Harry Gill attacked old Goody Blake and she prayed for him to never know warmth again (ll. 99-100). Thus, seemingly cursing him to remain cold for the rest of his life. According to a footnote at the bottom of page 285, Wordsworth intended the poem to be an exploration of how the psyche can affect the physical body. Meaning, although Goody Blake seemingly uses a supernatural ability to curse him, it was really just Harry Gill believing he was cursed and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ballad moralism is intended to apply to the common people, as the ballads analyzed above do as well. Yet, each moral pertains to different contexts and audiences with specific implications. The moral of “Bonny Barbara Allan” is specific to perpetuating traditional gender roles. The moral of “Tam o’Shanter” is specific to pervasive and conniving men. The moral of “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” shows the implications of hurting old women. The supernatural elements implemented by each poet creates a strong rhetorical fear appeal in audiences.

4. A theodicy tries to explain where evil comes from with the simultaneous existence of a benevolent God. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” are great examples of texts that discuss the existence of evil.

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is one of the most highly praised and criticized theodicies. The mock-epic poem is a retelling of the Genesis mythos in which God’s creation first lived in a world free from evil until they chose to disobey Him. However, Milton’s rendition of the tale credits humanity’s fall to the fallen Satan’s powerful rhetorical persuasion. “... Yet all His good proved ill in me / And wrought but malice” (4.48-49). Satan, here, is presenting a basic form of the problem of evil in which evil exists while God is supposed to be good. It seems contradictory to him that a good God could create a world with evil, which Adam and Eve eventually subscribe to his ideology as well. Thus, causing man to have an inherently sinful nature.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge finds the existence of evil to be an inherent part of the human psyche and human nature. For instance, in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”,

Coleridge describes a mariner who shoots an innocent albatross. He writes, “With my cross-bow / I shot the Albatross” (ll. 81-82). Coleridge does not provide the reader with any explanation for why the mariner decides to kill the albatross. Instead, we are left with an unsettling feeling of confusion as we have to settle on the idea that the mariner killed the bird simply because he could. To make up for his evil act, the mariner has promised the Life and Death character to spread the moral he has learned - that all of God’s creation is valuable. Similarly, in “Kubla Khan”, Coleridge experiences an opioid induced dream where he envisions a poem. Although there is a lot of criticism claiming “Kubla Khan” outlines the genesis of poetry and gives insight into the human psyche of a poet. After describing a beautiful, almost sublime, land, the poet finds “A savage place! as holy and enchanted / As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted / ... with ceaseless turmoil seething” (ll. 14-15 & 17). Here, Coleridge is describing how deep and dark the human psyche really is as he is imagining an introspective view of the mind. Thus finding evil as an innate part of our human nature that we must work against.

Milton and Coleridge have two seemingly opposing views of the origin of evil. Milton theorizes its origins as being a result of the fall of mankind and Satan’s powerful rhetoric while Coleridge theorizes evil to be an innate part of the human psyche. Although Milton’s theory perpetuates the Genesis mythos, Coleridge’s theory of the existence of evil can also not be definitively proven. Meaning, both theories are simply speculative.

5. The sublime is interpreted in two main ways that we studied this semester. Edmund Burke defines the sublime as something that can be found in nature. Immanuel Kant disagrees, however, and defines the sublime as something that can be found in reason.

Both, however, describe the sublime as a sort of overwhelming, almost terrifying, feeling in which we realize we are a small part of a larger whole. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" as well as William and Dorothy Wordsworth present different experiences of the sublime.

As previously stated, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" gives an introspective account of the human psyche. In particular, Coleridge describes the poet's psyche using sublime-related metaphors. For instance, he writes "Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea" (ll. 4-5). Coleridge's framing of a world in which there are measureless caverns and a sunless sea fits the overwhelming and terrifying aspects associated with the sublime. Especially when we take into consideration the poem's symbolism of a poet's mind.

In William Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud" poem, Wordsworth recalls walking through a field of flowers and experiencing the sublime. "Continuous as the stars that shine / And twinkle on the milky way, / They stretched in never-ending line ..." (ll. 7-9). Here, Wordsworth is describing the overwhelming emotion he felt in nature that he remembers with great fondness. These contradictory feelings of both being overwhelmed and being at peace is a great representation of the sublime that works more with Burke's definition as he found it in nature.

William Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, also journaled about the daffodil field, but in a completely different light than her brother. "... We saw a few daffodils close to the waterside. We fancied that the sea had floated the seeds ashore... I never saw daffodils so beautiful" (414). According to Norton Anthology's footnote, William did not write his poem examined above until two years after the actual event. Meaning, his poem was



largely based off of Dorothy's journal and his own memory. Notice, also, that Dorothy does not describe the field in quite the same vastness as her brother. While also noting the beauty of the flowers, Dorothy provides a reasonable explanation for the field of flowers and describes things in great detail with little metaphors. Meaning, Dorothy may not have experienced the sublime in the same way William did. Much like Kant's definition, Dorothy seems to find the sublime in understanding the world through reason.

Although all of the described sublime feelings above are different, they each describe a nearly indescribable, overwhelming awe in the universe. Coleridge finds the sublime in the depths of the mind, while the Wordsworths find the sublime in nature. Yet, even William and Dorothy disagree slightly as William thinks of the sublime as an immeasurable, limitless feeling and Dorothy's sublime aligns more with Kant's idea that the sublime is found in reason or lack thereof.