Will Barlow

Professor Lovesey

ENGL 433

Final Exam

**A-2:** What have you taken from your reading of 18th-cen novels during the global pandemic? Make reference to *A Journal of the Plague Year* in your answer.

There are both parallels and differences between plague and pandemic culture. Comparing the two experiences highlights profound details about each experience and implications for future pandemic or plague events. Reading *A Journal of the Plague Year* presents an insightful take on the plague and its culture. Incidentally, much of the mannerisms displayed by people according to *A Journal of the Plague Year* could have very well been recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, naturally, some instances of the novel are wrought in their historical context. One of the overarching differences between the pandemic and the plague is that the pandemic is a global phenomenon whereas the plague was regionally localized to the island of Great Britain and parts of Scandinavia.

Some of the aspects of *A Journal of the Plague Year* that are adhered to their historical context and thus are remiss from contemporary contexts are as follows. The novel in some ways orbits around the looming presence of death, made explicitly clear by the number of bodies described in the novel. The narrator even describes his horror at viewing one of the pits in which bodies were discarded. In the novel’s paradigm, and assumedly the plague paradigm in general, there was little to no disconnect between the living and the deceased—people were well aware of the body count. This contrasts our current pandemic for, its affects have caused many unfortunate losses of life but there are not masses of dead bodies in pits outside each municipality.

Similarly, the novel captures the sheer grotesqueness of the plague. *A Journal of the Plague Year’s* narrator relays the variety of cosmetic cues that denote the plague’s presence in an individual. Its boils, blisters, and even green skin gave affected individuals recognizable marks that communicated their ailment. The ongoing pandemic in this regard is strikingly invisible. Save from a cough or a sniffle, which can be common cold symptoms, COVID-19 does not make itself well known until its too late. Thus, another contrasting aspect of the plague and the current pandemic is visibility.

Given that these are the most striking and obvious differences, *A Journal of the Plague Year* in turn documents significant similarities between now and then. The most interesting of which is the experience of shutting up houses. This is a direct ancestor of contemporary lockdowns that began in March 2020. Further, *A Journal of the Plague Year’s* remarks on the restrictions on individual travel echo their contemporary counterparts. These restrictions forbade individuals from leaving their municipalities without letters of health from a doctor. This is similar to contemporary vaccine passports. *A Journal of the Plague Year* also highlights the ways in which people evaded health mandates out of selfishness, only to succumb to the plague and/or infect others. Though, this is much more difficult to track in today’s pandemic, the moral message continues to be profound. Moreover, this message sits at the heart of the novel, communicating a tone of togetherness and interconnectedness that is being realised now on a global scale with COVID-19.

**B-3:** Discuss the use of different types of symbolism in *The Castle of Otranto* and the role of determining prophecies, inheritances, embedded narratives, dreams etc. in that novel.

Types of symbolism *The Castle of Otranto* features a variety of symbolism ranging from objects that signify death or supernatural events as well as more abstract symbols that emphasise morality. All of which can be summarized as inherently gothic symbols. They are concerned with drawing attention to anxieties that may be felt by the reader, to then be made manifest for enhanced surrealism. In fact, the nature of supernatural symbolism in *The Castle of Otranto* serves to erect the uncanny world of its narrative. In conjunction with moral symbolism, the novel perpetuates a theme that is obsessed with juxtaposing the physical and metaphysical. The moral symbolism present in the novel hods tension with its supernatural elements. It maintains that sexual deviation and power corruption are morally wrong, yet may be catalyzed by powers beyond what is seen or heard. As mentioned before, gothic symbolism encapsulates these sub categories, *The Castle of Otranto* hinges on tension between supernatural and moral symbolism to affect an overarching gothic symbolism.

Part of manifesting the gothic nature of the novel lies in the determinate prophecy of Otranto’s rulership. The novel defines and advances the prophecy as an extension of its gothic symbolism. The prophecy further serves as a functional element in the novel’s narrative framework for its key feature of plot enhancement. Predetermining Manfred’s fall from power not only sets the stage for the novel, but it also provides a narrative trajectory for the reader. It works with gothic elements and symbols to then progress the signature gothic style of the novel. For, much of the novel’s plot hinges on Manfred’s refusal of the prophecy and dramatic irony between his ignorance and the reader’s understanding of his prophesised fate.

Similarly, inheritances and instances of embedded narratives perform a similar function. Manfred’s inheritance serves as a desirable concentration of power that in turn becomes the coveted object of the novel. Effectively inheritance in *The Castle of Otranto* become a plot device that symbolises power. Embedded narratives in the novel conversely do not progress the plot, instead these inclusions, or sub-narratives make the plot opaquer. Yet, this in and of itself is intentional for the novel employs these features to obscure what realism exists in the novel while enhancing a supernatural tone. The supernatural tone is enhanced as the novel introduces embedded narratives because they distract the reader from the ongoing narrative in pursuit of a non-linear plot.

Not only does the non-linear nature that follows the inclusion of embedded narratives lead to a non-linear narrative, this non-linear plot progression toys with alternate realities. Hypothesis and wonderings that, in an uncanny manner have an effect in reality. In other words, the embedded narratives correlate to the function of dreams in the novel. Where dreams are depictions of these alternate realities that contribute to the supernatural and metaphysical qualities of *The Castle of Otranto’s* Gothicism.

**C-5:** Does *Tristram Shandy* have a closure or does it simple end? Argue for or against, first presenting the opposing position and pointing out why it is inadequate.

It may appear as though Tristram Shandy’s ending simply ends the narrative with no closure. The novel is built on Tristram’s pursuit of writing a new volume every year until he dies. Naturally, the novel falls short of this pursuit when it ends somewhat abruptly. This abrupt ending, with no attention paid whatsoever to Tristram’s quest to divulge volume after volume may be seen as an ending with no closure. For, it fails to account for the protagonist’s quest, how can it possibly offer any closure?

I find this estimation of *Tristram Shandy’s* ending inadequate because it ignores the unique metafictional style that the narrative is presented in. I argue that in fact Shandy’s ending *does* have a closure. The novel’s closure is best represented by the last sentence of the ninth volume of the novel:

L– –d! said my mother, what is all this story about?——

A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick——And one of the best

of its kind, I ever heard (588).

Though brief, the ending of the novel lines up with its signature style. It is metafictional in that the subject, the story, applies both to story Tristram is telling his mother *and* the novel in its entirety. Yorick’s response to this then capitalizes on the metafictional nature established by the nine volumes of Tristram’s narration to speak directly to the reader and satirically assert that the novel’s story itself is “one of the best of its kind”.

Effectively, though it ignores the protagonist’s quest, this interpretation of *Tristram Shandy’s* ending hinges on the parodic cues of the novel that satirize conventional ideas of the novel. By ending the novel this way, Tristram the narrator has achieved his true goal of testing the limits of what a novel can be. The subject of the story being a “cock and a bull” highlights that what the story is about is not really the point; it is intentionally pointless. It further emphasises that the purpose of the novel is not its subject but how it is written. This sentence is the penultimate metafictional note that serves as a brief reflection on what the reader has just experienced. Thusly Tristram seeks to, in a satirical manner, pat himself on the back for engendering such a manner to tell a story.

**D-6**: Discuss the parody of travel writing in *Tristram Shandy*’s vol 7 and in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The seventh volume of *Tristram Shandy* presents a satirical representation of travel writing or the traveler’s narrative. *Pride and Prejudice* similarly offers a parodic representation of the traveller’s narrative. In *Tristram Shandy* travel writing is satirized by Tristram’s metafictional quips that imply its only purpose is to puff up or provide filler content for a narrative.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, travel writing is satirized in a different manner. Here, Austen’s narrator is concerned with satirizing “female duties”. Conversely, by seeking to satirize the expectations of women, Austen’s narrator thus includes parodic depictions of travel writing. These serve the narrator’s goal of satirical portrayal by undermining any formality of travel writing. Effectively, the novel’s additions of travel writing serve as a narrative device to progress the plot. Moreover, the travel writing in the novel contains parodic features that emphasise a critical tone. This critical tone is echoed by the parody of travel writing to then serve as criticism for the nature of travel writing in Austen’s historical moment.