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ENGL 475

Professor Milton

Essay Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

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Essay Proposal

I intend to write an essay that discusses Wallace Stevens’ concept of “supreme fiction”. I am specifically interested in the motif-like qualities that “supreme fiction” maintains. A portion of my essay will be concerned with exploring this through examination of Stevens’ poems such as: “Of Modern Poetry”, “The Man on the Dump”, “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction”, “A High Toned Old Christian Woman”, “Sunday Morning”. Moreover, I will employ the argument that Stevens’ “supreme fiction” is a motif that denotes his ultimate poetic critique. My working thesis for my research is as follows: A reoccurring motif of Stevens’ poetry is its meta criticism of the abstract idea of poetry which is best expressed by his concept of “supreme fiction”. This motif then serves as Stevens’ ultimate poetic critique, suggesting that the future of poetry hinges on poets constantly reimagining what poetry is. I will be examining the critical works included in my works cited to flush out this argument. After engaging with these sources, I have found support for my argument, however, I may alter it in my essay to be more deconstructive for it appears quite simple and relatively easy to answer.

Annotated Bibliography: Works Cited

Applewhite, James. “Wallace Stevens and His Recent Critics.” The Sewanee Review, vol. 99,

no. 4, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, pp. 631–40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27546451>.

Applewhite provides a succinct overview of critical responses to Stevens’ work. This source provides background for critical reception of Stevens’ critical poetry. My research certainly benefits from understanding Stevens’ critical reception, especially his notion of “supreme fiction” which is mentioned frequently by Applewhite. Though this specific source may not find it into my final essay, it is beneficial for cultivating a broader understanding of critical opinions of his work and specifically his concept of “supreme fiction”.

Brazeal, Gregory. “The Supreme Fiction: Fiction or Fact?” Journal of Modern Literature, vol. 31,

no. 1, Indiana University Press, 2007, pp. 80–100, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053254>.

Brazeal discusses Stevens’ concept of “supreme fiction” as his “most ambitious philosophical object”. He further asserts that “supreme fiction” is a “fictive replacement for God”. These claims bear significance for my research which is concerned with understanding “supreme fiction”, its critical reception, and any insights that critics have as to what the motif seeks to accomplish.

JOHNSON, JEANNINE. “Wallace Stevens’ Defense of Poetry in ‘Notes toward a Supreme

Fiction.’” The Wallace Stevens Journal, vol. 28, no. 1, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, pp. 23–37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44884873>.

In this article, Johnson discusses the nature of “defensive poetry” and the meta critical elements of Stevens’ poetry that can be categorized as defenses of poetry. This discussion divulges into a conversation about the worth of poetry as estimated by Stevens. Johnson’s essay is interesting and it provides context and critical language for discussing the apologetic nature of Stevens’ meta critical poetry.

KOSTOVA, RAINA. “Deleuzian Underpinnings: The Affective Emergence of Stevens’ Concept

of a Supreme Fiction.” The Wallace Stevens Journal, vol. 35, no. 1, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011, pp. 33–55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44885268>.

In this essay, Kostova posits that Stevens’ concept of “supreme fiction” is dependent on constant movement and change. She further argues that the abstractness of this concept lies in its “incessant transformation”. This is essential to establishing the framework of my argument in which I will be exploring the recursive nature of “supreme fiction”.

Riddel, Joseph N. “Wallace Stevens’ ‘Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.’” Wisconsin Studies in

Contemporary Literature, vol. 2, no. 2, [Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, University of Wisconsin Press], 1961, pp. 20–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1207317>.

Riddel’s article provides further critical context for Stevens’ work and more specifically his concept of “supreme fiction”. Riddel discusses the idea of poetic doctrine and applies it to Stevens’ work. He further argues that Stevens’ poetry is meta-critical (“poetry about poetry”) and that his (Stevens) poetry “assumes that vital human experience is inherently poetic”. This article will prove useful when I discuss the nature of the motif-like use by Stevens with “supreme fiction”.

Lensing, George S. “‘A High-Toned Old Christian Woman’: Wallace Stevens’ Parable of

Supreme Fiction.” Notre Dame English Journal, vol. 8, no. 1, The University of Notre Dame, 1972, pp. 43–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40066595>.

Lensing provides a close reading of Stevens’ poem, “A High Toned Old Christian Woman” that emphasises the meta-critical nature of Stevens’ concept of supreme fiction. This is made clear by his discussion of the poem’s meaning which boils down to a poem about poetics. The main feature of his argument is that Lensing cites Stevens’ supreme fiction as the meta-critical vessel in that it represents some “opposing law” to which the speaker of the poem is addressing.