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AP Literature

26 January 2017

The stories of Frankenstein, Macbeth, and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner are all vastly different. From the tale of a well meaning man creating a monstrous and vengeful pariah, to the story of a maddened king who was too vulnerable to avarice, and to the mariner, who killed simply because he had the power to do so. However, there is a common theme amongst the works, one that draws them all together and makes them comparable. Through the work of Shelley, Shakespeare, and Coleridge, we learn that punishments of abuse of power are inescapable, and that all wrongs will in the end be righted. While individual characters may attempt to atone for their actions, inevitably, they will face the consequences for the crimes they have committed.

Frankenstein is the story of a doomed protagonist, too eager in his studies to think of the consequences of his actions, as he created a being that would eventually destroy everything that he loved. This destruction begins to be seen once Victor’s labors have created their end goal, as he says “I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley 35). The diction, from this point onwards, never returns to the happy and enthusiastic form that it once had. Never again was his research beautiful or plentiful, only necessary to his continued survival. The tone as well takes a dive from being uplifting to bleak at best. Through his continual sickness, Victor’s view of the world becomes more grim, as he says “Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned, and discovered to my sleepless and aching eyes..” (Shelley 43). Victor can no longer view the world with the beauty that it once had, as the mere idea of the monster existing taints everything that he knew. The diction of the story is constantly reflecting this, it will go up and down as the monster appears and escapes over and over again, but never rises to the level that it once was. But this is the punishment of Victor. In his desire for power over life and death, he never stopped to think of what could happen if he succeeded, for he was too engrossed in the idea of the power that he could wield.

Macbeth, the tale of the mad and murderous king of Scotland, also relies upon literary techniques to push the theme of self inflicted doom. His growing madness throughout becomes half of his downfall, with the other half being his continued abuse of power. The following quote, provided from the scene in which Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo, expounds upon the fear growing within Macbeth:

What man dare, I dare:

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,

The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;

Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves

Shall never tremble: or be alive again (Shakespeare, III.iv.1395-1399)

Macbeth is so frightened that he’d rather have any other matter of man or beast approach him, anything but the ghost that he can not harm or hinder. The imagery that the ghost provides is the haunting of Macbeth’s own mind, the inescapable madness that descent upon him due to his treacherous actions. It isn’t so much about the presence of the ghost in any physical from, but the toll it takes on his capacity to continue to make sane decisions. His actions have caught up with him and now he is punished with the memory of the people he harmed. While the tone of fear from Macbeth quickly disappears, the arrogance and the idea that he could best any being does not. As the fort of Dunsinane is eventually under siege, Macbeth completely disregards all that the apparitions said to him. He gave no thought to the forest coming to life or Macduff coming to fight him, his arrogance proved to far outweigh any sense that he still had within him. Through characterization, everything is given to Macbeth. He is a thane of the land, he has a castle with a wife, he lives a comfortable life and is loved by many for being a brave warrior. King Duncan speaks of highly of Macbeth, stating “For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name--”(Shakespeare, I.ii.18). The language favors Macbeth, everything is going so well for him, yet he still falls for the draw of power and is ultimately punished for it. He descends into madness and is still given every chance to turn around and fix what he has done, to become a good king for his people. But his lust for power never ceases and he is slain for his actions in the end.

Coleridge, in his work, focuses mainly upon the use of imagery and tone to express the different themes of the work. While the albatross, and therefore the mariner’s, destiny is sealed not very far into the story, there is still some information that is vital in comparing the effect of the mariner’s actions. While the mariner and the rest of the boat’s crew was stuck in the ice, Coleridge describes the sight of the bird to show what a savior it truly was:

At length did cross an Albatross,

Thorough the fog it came;

As if it been a Christian soul,

We hailed it in God’s name. (Coleridge, 63-66)

The bird is seen as a sign from God, that it was the means of their salvation. As the crew did escape from the ice, they clearly had every reason to celebrate and be thankful for this creature that liberated them. But the mariner, out of his own elevated sense of self worth, kills the bird for no other reason than to try to prove that the bird meant nothing for their survival, just a mere coincidence. The entire crew quickly gets the proof that the bird was indeed the means of their survival, as the tone quickly shifts the world into being bleak and empty. The mariner describes the world after the albatross:

I looked upon the rotting sea,

And drew my eyes away;

I looked upon the rotting deck,

And there the dead man lay. (Coleridge, 241-244)

The way that the mariner now describes his world as “rotting” solidifies the theme of the self inflicted doom. The mariner is stranded at sea and therefore forced to look upon the empty horizon as well as his dead crew as his punishment for killing the savior sent from God. Killing the albatross without warrant is the reason for his punishment in such a way, and the imagery reflects that. Everything the mariner knows becomes “black and baked”, “lifeless”, or “rotting”. The tone matches the mariner’s newfound sense of despair as he feels the full punishment for his actions, no longer are the seas and the winds lively behind his back, as his boat is now barely afloat, drifting through the sea aimlessly. From the death of the albatross onward, the mariner is punished for his crimes and his disregard for the life of a creature that only gave help. His belief that he was the sole creator of his luck or that he would have no troubles on his own was a fallacy that was only realized after the death of his crew and his near demise as well.

While all three of these works are vastly different in the stories they tell, the symbols that they use, and the overall meaning of the works, they all share a common theme between them. This theme of characters being punished for their unrestrained desire for power is developed mainly through the use of language, as it is the use of language that truly ties these books together. The plots of the stories may be incredibly different, but the way that language is used to tie in the same themes throughout is the largest link between all of these works.

Works Cited

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