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ENG1121

Unit 2 Writing Assignment Outline
Inquiry-Based Research

Gothic Literature

Part 1: General Analysis

History and social impact:

Gothic literature started during the Enlightenment period with the novel *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (Melani). Gothic literature is meant to invoke emotion. These are generally the darker emotions that literature during the Romanticism movement did not emphasize such as fear or terror. The same way the Romanticism movement allowed people to explore those brighter emotions, Gothic literature allows for people to explore their contrasting feelings instead of suppressing them. It brings dark emotions into light which is why it's important. This is why the goth genre is usually associated with a darker aesthetic.

A few well known gothic writers who are also viewed as influential for the genre are Edgar Allen Poe, Mary Shelly, Bram Stoker, and Oscar Wilde. Edgar Allen Poe is known for different works like *The Raven*, *A Tell Tale Heart*, and *The Cask of Amontillado* according to the Poe Museum. Mary Shelley's most known or famous work is *Frankenstein*. She had written other books but *Frankenstein* was, and continues to be, an influence on film and pop culture. It has been interpreted and rewritten in different ways. Bram Stoker's most popular work is *Dracula*, and like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* had a lot of influence on the mythical horror genre as well as pop culture, screenwriting in film, and novels. Oscar Wilde is known for writing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (A&ETN). Of the two,

The Picture of Dorian Gray “was panned as immoral by Victorian critics, but is now considered one of his most notable works” (A&ETN).

Discourse Community:

Literature, visual art, and music are usually associated with this genre; they are all subgenres within the Gothic style. Gothic style is meant to bring out an emotion or reaction from a person perceiving the presented form of it. These emotions can include fear, compassion, pity and/or awe. Goths communicate through these different art forms. According to the University of Saskatchewan, “The Gothic novel, distinctive for its fascination with the horrible, the repellent, the grotesque and the supernatural, in combination with many of the characteristics of the Romantic novel, was (and still is) seen by some critics as a subgenre of Romanticism, and by others as a genre in its own right.” (Prendergast). Knowing the history of Gothic art forms and being able to create your own pieces or understand, interpret, and appreciate existing ones may be a way to join this community.

Rules and Messages:

The forms of Gothic literature can be novels, poems, short stories, or plays. For the most part, gothic novels share this idea and you can tell because they all have a dark and chilling embodiment to them. Gothic works tend to include a lot of the same elements. These elements

are usually a castle or building, often haunted but not always, that are also a bit ruined “which arouse a pleasing melancholy” (Melani). These buildings or castles will then have a secret passageway, a dungeon or catacombs that end up becoming an attic or a basement. These stories are dark, literally and figuratively, and they often take place at night with the main sources of light mentioned usually being candles or moonlight, which are things that are associated with ominous energy. This is when the action of the story often takes place (Prendergast). “Omens and ancestral curses, magic, supernatural manifestations, or the suggestion of the supernatural” are also included in Gothic literature (Melani). For the characters themselves, they tend to include a passionate villain, a hero revealed at the end of the story, and a heroine “femme-fatale” with a likelihood to need saving as well.

The main message of Gothic literature is “the need to feel afraid” according to Virginia Woolfe. All forms of gothic art, not just the literature, are meant to invoke emotion in the person perceiving the art form or piece. According to an article by The University of Saskatchewan, “Gothic art and architecture was intended to have a magical or preternatural effect on the viewer, evoking a sense of awe, terror, insignificance, vulnerability, or the sense of being at the mercy of a higher power which is a particularly medieval world view.” (Prendergast). Its literature strives to do the same thing.

Part 2: Focused Analysis

One popular example of gothic literature is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. This book is often taught in most high schools as a part of the english curriculum. I recall when I was taught about the book, we were told to discern the symbolism of the seasons and what they represented.

Gothic literature frequently incorporates Christian religious beliefs with Pagan beliefs to create the story (Prendergast). You can see this because Paganism, although not always the easiest to define as one thing, “is a nature religion or earth-centered spirituality” (Halstead).

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* shares multiple messages within its story; some more prominent than others. A few of these messages or themes are creation and destruction, man versus creation, and nature. Creation and destruction goes with man versus creation which ties to the theme of religion that is often found in gothic literature. This is one of the many gothic tropes that *Frankenstein* follows; she also follows the theme of nature which, as previously stated, sometimes ties with religion because of Paganism. The connection to nature is between The Creation and the seasons. This is also similar to the time period in which gothic literature was emerging because during the enlightenment and Romanticism movement, one philosophy was that man's truest form was surviving in the midst of nature. When Victor Frankenstein’s creation goes out into the world, his emotions are influenced by the seasons and temperature around him. This is important in the real world and to whoever reads this story because many people also experience a change in their mood depending on the season (i.e seasonal depression).

A gothic message or theme explored in *Frankenstein* that was previously mentioned is “the sense of being at the mercy of a higher power” (Prendergast). The Creation is constantly chasing and trying to find Victor is seen as haunting to him, but also is the Creation trying to reconnect or be at mercy with its creator. Man cannot play the role of God so this is a burden to Victor and not a gift.

There is no specific intended audience for the novel besides whoever is capable of reading and understanding its deeper messages (probably why it is taught in high school). There

are no recognized constraints involved in the novel. It was important to me because of the impact it had on me and how I related to it when I had first read in the book in 10th grade. Being able to explore novels who investigate and go into darker emotions that aren't always touched upon in other forms of art in a healthy way is important for the mental and emotional development of an individual; learning what the right or wrong ways to deal with a situation are.

Bibliography

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