

Interwoven romantic messages



**ASSIGN
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Representing a powerful reaction against Puritanism, an English Protestant literary movement based upon the rigid and logical belief in a God is ready and willing to Punish his followers, Romanticism challenged virtually all major Puritanical beliefs. The newfound trust in the human imagination, free will for the brain to use intellect and imagination, and the incredibly sinful and corrupt of the human mind were all main ideas supported by Romantics. The Romantic focus on human nature is an excruciatingly complicated system that various authors throughout Romantic literature have brought attention to, alluding to various sinful characteristics of man that depict the ultimate horror behind the pretty face. Not only is human nature emphasized within the Romantic literary movement, but the role of nature and the tedious detail put into the descriptions of this phenomena are a crucial aspect of American Romanticism as well. The poem, “A Winter Piece,” written by William Cullen Bryant, tackles the Romantic ideals of an accepting God, complex human nature, and the importance of unique personal experiences by joining these three systems together and using the highly-detailed description of nature to describe the rather unsteady intricacy of humankind. Through Bryant’s delicate descriptions of earthly nature, a loving, caring, and comforting God is found connected to all aspects of man. While the narrator is abiding within the beauty of a forest, he finds himself relating to someone whom he has known since his own childhood:

While I stood In nature’s loneliness, I was with one With whom I early grew familiar, one Who never had a frown for me, whose voice Never rebuked me for the hours I stole From cares I loved not, but of which the worl Deems highest, to converse with her (Lines 16-22).

This being has the ability to speak with nature as well as the ability to be affectionate and passionate towards the narrator. This individual holds God-like powers that he refuses to abuse and instead uses his powers for tender love and compassion. Through nature, the narrator is allowed to become one with this individual, whom we can refer to as God, depicting the overarching affection that God brings into the narrator's life. This is solely due to the Romantic belief that God shall not be feared, that God shall be loved and praised, and he will be loving and passionate in return. God and Nature are connected rather than separate; they speak to each other, they interact with each other, and God does not have complete and total power over Nature's blissful perfection. This view of God created by the Romantics is in direct opposition to the Puritan belief that God shall be feared like none other. The Puritans and strongly believe in the "Great Chain of Being," in which God is held above nature, while nature is merely considered to be rocks and dirt. This poem completely disproves this strict and rigid idea by simply going into immaculate detail with all aspects of a forest continually throughout the entire poem, describing every single flawless element of nature as much more than simply rocks and dirt. In all, the Romantic connection made between Nature and God within the poem alludes to the fact that God is a caring and loving being, contrary to the Puritanical belief that God is simply waiting to send his followers straight to hell.

Additionally, Bryant uses impeccable description of nature to explain the complex, unreliable natural tendencies of the human soul and mind. For instance, near the middle of the poem, the narrator finds himself contrasting

the different seasons and how each one affects the look and beauty of the forest:

But Winter has yet brighter scenes- he boasts Splendors beyond what
gorgeous Summer knows; Or Autumn with his many fruits, and woods All
flushed with many hues (57-60).

Continuing with the theme of the poem, these seasons represent the various layers that make up human nature, layers that all contribute to the extreme complexity of humankind as a whole. Bryant writes that each individual season is “flushed with many hues” to further explain how confusing and complicated each individual component of human nature is, as each layer retains its own unique aspects. This imaginative idea proves the Romantic belief that human nature cannot be explained in a rigid and strict manner, that it is instead going to flow freely through the mind of the individual and function however it pleases. This allows human nature to be stripped of all logic and coherence, as it is incapable of being understood or anticipated. The Puritans despise any idea that hints to a lack of control over any aspect of the world, believing that everything has to make complete sense, that everything can be understood and that control is needed to explain and understand all components of life. Yet, the Romantics instead cherish a lack of control and understanding, finding the beauty in what one cannot understand. In addition to humankind’s complexity, Bryant also uses close depiction of the natural processes of the earth to reveal the many terrifyingly evil and uncontrollable layers of human nature that ultimately crush helpless individuals or ideas. The poem spends the majority of its time seeking out the beauty of nature, which, in turn, alludes to the beauty of human nature.

However, the end of the poem takes a graphic turn, as the “ little wind flower, who just opened eye”(114) is destroyed by the “ rapid clouds”(120-121) that “ shade heaven”(121) and send “ their volleyed stores, rounded like hail/ And white like snow, and the loud North again/ Shall buffet the vexed forest in his rage”(122-124). This horrific turn of events represents the evil, sinful element of human nature: an element that is merciless and destructive, for no predetermined reason. This abrupt change from beauty to pure evil further proves both the open-ended, illogical concepts upon which Romanticism is built as well as the unexplainably sinful characteristics of mankind. Puritanism fears these concepts and characteristics, as the concepts represented something that the Puritans can not control. Therefore, through this idea, individuality becomes the major difference at hand. The Romantic view on individuality is one that accepts the corruption and complexity of humans, while Puritans think in the opposite manner, as everyone and everything is thought to be controlled by God. Altogether, Bryant’s use of nature to describe the intricacy and evil of the human mind leads to tremendous dissimilarities between Puritanical and Romantic beliefs.

Lastly, the personal experiences of both the author and the reader combine to give the poem a rather unique style and feel. Throughout his life, William Cullen Bryant adored solitude and silence in the woods, as it helped him to gather his thoughts and calm himself during difficult times. These qualities that define Bryant as an individual are explained throughout the poem, such as when the narrator explains his love for the woods:

The swelling hills, The quiet dells retiring far between, With gentle invitation to explore Their windings, were a calm society That talked with me and soothed me. (7-11)

Just as Bryant cherished the silence within nature during his lifetime, the narrator of his poem appreciates the exact same qualities of nature. Bryant is incorporating his own personality into the poem to give the poem a very unprecedented and unique aura that is born from the author himself. As previously stated, the Romantics focus strongly on the individual and often hold the individual at a higher level of importance than God. Therefore, Romanticism admires the importance of unique personalized experiences and emotions, considering these are what ultimately makes the individual one of a kind. On the other hand, Puritanism holds God above all. Thus, during the Puritan Age, mankind was not allowed to think for themselves and form their own ideas about the world, which ultimately led to an extremely strict view on life and literature. Puritanical writings consist mainly of passages that tell the reader what to think and how to feel, rather than providing the reader with the necessary information to think for him or herself and to create a personalized interpretation of his or her own. One is capable of thinking for him or herself because the personal experiences he or she has had throughout his or her lifetime alter the way in which he or she thinks, thus altering the way in which he or she interprets certain situations. This is one of the most important Romantic ideals involved in this poem, as the focus on the individual can be none greater than combining every single aspect of a person's life and incorporating them into a single, concise interpretation of a literary piece of work. In all, the differing views within

Puritanism and American Romanticism shine brightest when under the spotlight of personal experience, as one literary movement revolves around this idea while the other completely shuns it.

The clashing ideals found within Romanticism and earlier, stricter schools of thought such as Puritanism spark a rigorous debate that truly defines different ways of philosophical thought. Shall importance be placed on the potential of the individual, or shall it be placed on the power of God? These kinds of opposing viewpoints ultimately shape the way in which society functions in today's times. Our society is based upon debate, intellect, and defending what one believes in simply because his or her individual experiences and intellect tell him or her to do so. Therefore, our society has grown and improved through Romanticism as a challenge to Puritanism, as the leaders and innovators of our world have simply followed in the footsteps of the Romantics by challenging and questioning predisposed beliefs and ideas. One can only wonder what the future holds with all of this rebellion rising; the world could possibly look much different than it does now, greatly due to the birth of one creative yet rebellious idea: Romanticism.