

## SYNTHESIS

Literature is a diverse and bountiful area of intelligence where many ideas, ideals, and dreams can come about. Writings have come from as far back as the time of Jesus to whatever was produced yesterday. People have written superior works that can inspire, lead, and in the end, produce. Shakespear, Descartes, Voltaire, Shelly, the list goes on. Twenty-eight themes are said to apply to all types of literature. Any one of these themes is said to describe one, some, or all works done in this field. Whoever said that there are twenty-eight is incorrect at best. Actually, twenty-nine themes exist, the newly added one being the theme of cynicism. All the literary works read this first semester have, along with other minor/major themes, had one theme that will combine them all. The bond that holds all of these works together is the cynical outlook they all share on life.

Faust is the epic battle between man and his limitations with the Lord and Mephistopheles thrown into the mix just to complicate things. This is a journey that sees Mephistopheles try a backwards attempt at showing the ever cynical Faust that there is a reason to keep on living. As it is now, Faust believes that his life is miserable and that being a part of humanity can only hinder his thirst for knowledge.

The other side gives me little trouble;  
First batter this present world to rubble,  
Then the other may rise - if that's the plan.

This earth is where my springs of joy have started,  
And this sun shines on me when brokenhearted;  
If I can first from them be parted,  
Then let happen what will and can!  
I wish to heat no more about it -  
Whether there too men hate and love  
Or whether in those spheres too, in the future,  
There is a Below or an Above.

(Faust, Faust, 994)

Humanity is a curse to Faust and he, in turn, has a very cynical view on the probability of being human as an asset rather than a curse. "And you are fully within your rights; I have made no mad or outrageous claim. If I stay as I am, I am a slave-whether yours or another's, it's all the same." (Faust, Faust, 996) Faust sees himself as a slave to humanity and once again emphasizes his cynical outlook on the prospect of staying human.

"Who's there?" (Bernardo, Hamlet, p.1) Possibly the most overlooked line Shakespear has ever written even though it tells the tale of Hamlet in a mere two words. The Hamlet character is an outlet of how Shakespear viewed what was happening in the world at the time. It was the age of the Renaissance. While being the greatest period of scientific, artistic genius in human history, it also bore the mark of being the greatest period of man's inhumanity to man. "Who's there?" (Ibid) is his own commentary on the multitude of personalities going on at this time. Shakespear has cynical views toward what is happening in the world and the oscillation of people between the ideal man of Copernicus and Galileo to the evil kings and rulers of Denmark.

From the beginning of time, man has had a need to attempt to defy the stronghold that God holds on creation. The early cavemen would kill women in order to ensure a

family of males. A man by the name of Adolf Hitler was set on taking over the entire world with his specially engineered Aryan race. Mary Shelly's Frankenstein is the pure disregard for God in the creation of another life form. Frankenstein is Mary Shelly's 1984

(George Orwell). Frankenstein is Shelly's take on her vision of the disturbing future that she can predict happening. At the time Frankenstein was written, the scientific and industrial revolution had just finished. With the rapid advent of technology, this book is very reasonable interpretation of what many people were fearing the future would bring.

Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous

is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, then he who aspires to become greater

than his nature will allow.

(Frankenstein, 52)

This quote shows the ignorance and stubbornest that Shelly sees in mankind. Humans over time have shown that they just don't learn. Without knowing it, Shelly has foreshadowed life for all of us. Her cynical look on what could happen has come true with the advent of technology and the responsibility of those who possess the knowledge to put it into practice. Hitler is tantamount to Victor much like the Aryan soldiers equate to the wretch. "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (Frankenstein, 52). Victor is planning his master race. Shelly's cynicism saw it all in advance. Frankenstein was a cynical view on life that was happening and the life that was inevitable.

"What is optimism?" (Cacambo, *Candide*). "It is the mania of maintaining that

everything is well when we are wretched" (*Candide, Candide*). Voltaire has used *Candide* and all of the characters in it to voice his opinion on the world. The mythical El Dorado is the point of optimism in the pit of despair that engulfs *Candide*. Optimism is about the only thing that *Candide* is allowed in his journeys. Optimism of finding his love, finding his friend, finding happiness. After all that *Candide* must go through, he finally wins out. In the end, he gets everything that he wants. Even though *Candide* wins in the end, Voltaire criticizes the whole makeup of the world. From town to town, *Candide* is harassed and tortured (except for El Dorado of course). This is Voltaire's cynical view on what he sees the world as. "Certainly, if everything is well it is only in El Dorado and not in the rest of the world" (*Candide, Candide*). The garden metaphor is one that can weave its way into the theme of cynicism. Much like in the story of Faust, the end comes with a serene setting in the garden. Voltaire's garden metaphor is an extremely cynical outlook on the limitations of man. His view is one in the same of the Generation X of this time period. The theory of "Life's a bitch, why try?" is evident in the metaphor of the garden. Voltaire's attitude is "Be happy with gardening because this is as far as humanity is going to get."

Much like the view of Shelly in *Frankenstein*, Miguel de Cervantes has a cynical view of the technology boom in the world. Cervantes uses *Don Quixote* to show his cynical views on the world around him and the world that is forthcoming.

Having, then made all these preparations, he did not wish to lose any time in putting

his plan into effect, for he could not but blame himself for what the world was losing

by his delay, so many were the wrongs that were to be righted, the grievances to be

redressed, the abuses to be done away with, and the duties to be performed.

(Narrator, Don Quixote, 829)

Cervantes saw the world in need of a revert back to the days of chivalry. He believed that the world needed a hero along the lines of el Cid and Amadis of Gaul. "what the world needed most was knights-errant and a revival of chivalry" (Narrator, Don Quixote, 830). Cervantes saw a lost and desolate world which needed the excitement and class of a knight to lead by example. Cervantes is also cynical of the advent in technology. The scene where Don Quixote tries to fight the windmills because he thinks that they are monsters shows how Cervantes feels of the industrial boom. He uses this scene to convey his feelings of how technology is a monster and needs to be destroyed; but much like in the story, technology wins.

The past is flooded with cynicism. Now the question is, has the world gotten any better. The answer is no. In recent surveys, the facts are overwhelmingly in favor of distrust. "Sixty percent of people believe that most people will lie if they can gain from it. Forty-six percent of people say that most people are just out for themselves. Seventy-two percent agree that there is a growing loss of basic trust and faith in other people" (Don Oldenburg, A deep, troubling cynicism, p.2). General mistrust is taking over our world. Much like in the past, people today are cynical of anything, helpful or not.

The truth in right and wrong, the boundaries of the law, You seem to miss the point, arresting for a joint?!  
You seem to wonder why hundreds of people die, you're writing tickets man, my mom got jumped, they ran!  
Now I'll play a public servant, to serve and protect by the law and the state.  
I'd bust the punks that rape, steal and murder, and

leave you be, if you crossed me, I'd shake your hand like a man, not a God.

(Anselmo, Fucking Hostile, Vulgar Display of

Power)

As seen here, the lyrics of a popular song show a clear, cynical view towards law enforcement and the government. As has been shown, Cynicism is a topic and theme that has appeared in every time period and every situation from the inception of man up to and including today. Cynicism ties it all together.

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