

English 101 DE

4 January, 2013

Just a Snapshot

The painting, *American Gothic* by Grant Wood is a timeless piece of the American Regionalism art movement. It captivates the feelings of anti-modernism and depicts the feelings of modest, rural life. This painting inspired the poem, "American Gothic" by John Stone in which he imagines everything around the subjects that are <<Subject-verb agreement (lack of) : Every verb must match its subject in number (singular or plural) and person (first, second, or third person).>> not captured in the snapshot painted of their lives. He infers their thoughts and emotions from the vivid painting and includes them in his poetic work. Through his interpretation of the painting he gives words to the depth of emotion realistically portrayed in the brush strokes and perspective of the painting, *American Gothic*.

The painting's subjects are an aged farmer and his stern daughter. He is wearing faded overalls, a navy coat, and firmly grasps his pitchfork in front of him. Her <<?>> father scowls straight ahead at the painter. A mix of disgruntlement and vexation fill his face. He is balding and his skin is wrinkled and tanned as though he has worked in the sun for many years. To his right, <<Review comma use, please.>> stands his daughter in a modest, collared dress, with her hair neatly pulled back. She wears a faded, speckled apron with scalloped edges over her dress. <<Modifier (misplaced or dangling) : A misplaced modifier describes or limits the wrong word(s). A dangling modifier describes words that are unintentionally missing from

a sentence. >> Her brow is furrowed and she is either glaring at something distant, outside of the scene of the painting, or as the poem guesses, wondering "whether she remembered/ to turn off the stove" (lines 34-35).<<**Space before slash as well as after.**>> Behind the father and daughter stands a simple, white farm house with a rounded <<**It's not rounded; it's arched.**>> "gothic" style window at the top of the house. This window is where the painting gets its name and is referenced in line eight of John Stone's poem. Their house also has a porch wrapping around it with plants, tall, shutter less windows, and A red barn is in the distance, off to the right. Behind their house is a forest of trees appearing to begin to change colors, such as at the beginning of autumn. Above their heads, the light blue, cloudless sky is a small strip across the top of the painting **that** draws the viewer's eye upward and helps to balance the dark saturation at the bottom of the painting.

John Stone's poem *American Gothic* <<**Poem title should be in quotation marks.**>> was written to explore the activities going on in the setting of a farmer and his daughter that are not included in the painting, but perhaps are on their minds.<<**Awkward phrasing--modifiers**>> It is written in an interesting narrative style, of which when paired alongside each other, changes the mood of the painting if viewed by itself. <<**Phrasing**>> He writes about how "just outside the frame/there has to be a dog/ chickens, cows and hay/ and a smokehouse/ where a ham in hickory/ is also being preserved"(1-6).<<**More than three lines of poetry should be set off as long quotation. See pp. 715-16-17 in LB.**>> Throughout the poem, he explores the idea that these two people are forever caught in time within the viewer's frame of this painting.<<**Not clear.**>>He takes creative liberties in regard to their surroundings and infers their wandering thoughts. Stone imagines the man "...asking the artist silently/ how much longer/ and worrying about the crops"(28-30) while his daughter "...no less concerned about the

crops/but more to the point just now/ whether she remembered to turn off the stove"(31-35). He accurately speaks to the emotions on their "long faces, the sober lips / above the upright spines / of this couple" and states that as it is midday they should each be taking care of their responsibilities and working (15-17). Yet, they stand in front of their white, farm house and "linger [there] /within the patient fabric /of the lives they wove" (36-38). It is peculiar that the artist chose to record them in this manner. This iconic piece of art features an apparently hard working farmer, not working. He is merely posing in front of his home appearing irritated. This theme <<What theme?>> is lightheartedly weaved <<Verb form (misuse) : Verb forms include simple, past tense, past participle, present participle, and infinitive. >>as an undertone throughout the poem. <<Why would the poet's tone be lighthearted? Any ideas about that?>>

While these two pieces of work share the same name, that is just the first, and most obvious, similarity. Along with the title, they express, for the most part, the same emotions as well as setting and characters. Stone's poem is an explanation and narrative which looks at the painting, *American Gothic* as just a snapshot of the story of the lives of a farmer and his spinster daughter. The mood of the painting is stern and solemn, while the mood of the poem is more inquisitive and imaginative. When the two pieces are experienced together, and the viewer has the privilege of reading the poem as the story of the painting, it gives the visual piece of art new life and meaning. Alone, the painting leaves many questions of who the two people featured are? Why are they just standing there when the man is obviously a farmer and has work to do? What is plaguing the woman and causing her to glare into the distance? Although the poem may not accurately, in the painter's perspective, answer these questions; it does speak to the world around them full of chores to be completed, animals to be attended to, and house responsibilities

going undone in order that this moment is captured.

These two works complement each other in a unique way that dramatically improves the viewers' experience in comparison to only viewing the painting, or only reading the featured poem. They each have distinct moods but share a common theme that allows them each to complement the other well. In the same way that hearing the story behind the circumstances forever documented in an old Polaroid photograph allows the audience to truly connect. This pair of painting and poetry allows for a unique view of a timeless painting.

Works Cited

Stone, John. "'American Gothic'" *Where Water Begins: New Poems and Prose*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1998. 13-14. Print.

Wood, Grant. *American Gothic*. 1930. Oil on composition board. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

Haley, there is some strong analysis here, and you find significant points of comparison. I like that you talk about the advantages of the complementary pairing of the poem and painting. There are, however, a number of phrasing and comma errors that often make for challenging reading. Please work on those areas. Be sure to read your essays aloud when you revise to catch those awkward/unclear spots.



Grade: 83

