JoAnn Hrabousky

Humanities 205

Professor Price

23 November 2011

In the poems, *Suicide Note* by Janice Mirikitani and *Dreams of Suicide* by William Meredith, the element of suicide is unmistakably the theme. Although both poems are tragic and melancholic, each poet focuses their attention on different aspects of suicide. Mirikitani dissects the inner thoughts of the speaker and focuses on suicidal ideation, while Meredith’s version brings attention to the suicides of three writers by dedicating and honoring them individually. In *Dreams,* “the speaker conveys his own empathy for those writers who could not survive the struggle to reconcile art and life” (Kirszner & Mandell).

*Suicide Note* refers to a female Asian-American college student who leaps to her death and leaves a note to her parents apologizing for disappointing them. Throughout the poem, Mirikitani utilizes the chorus, “not good enough, not pretty enough, not smart enough” to validate why the speaker is contemplating suicide. She feels that no matter how hard she works she can never rise to her parent’s expectations. Mirikitani also makes reference to the speaker believing that her parents always wanted a son instead of a daughter. As stated in line ten, “If only I were a son, shoulders broad / as the sunset threading through pine, / I would see the light in my mother’s / eyes, or the golden pride reflected / in my father’s dream / of my wide, male hands worthy of work / and comfort”. Her academic tensions mount and become insurmountable, as stated in lines twenty-five through twenty-eight, “Each failure, a glacier. / Each disapproval, a bootprint. / Each disappointment, / ice above my river.”

Mirikitani uses imagery to build layers of despair felt by the speaker until she reaches her limit and decides that suicide is her only viable option. This is accomplished by using simile, as seen in line forty-five, where the speaker compares herself to a fragile bird weighed down by life’s snow, “This air will not hold me, / the snow burdens my crippled wings, / my tears drop like bitter cloth / softly into the gutter below.”

Meredith’s *Dream’s of Suicide*, although sad, is voiced in more of a pensive nature. The poem is a dedication to three of his literary peers that committed suicide: Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, and John Berryman. Each writer is referenced individually in three stanzas. Meredith uses the allusion of a dream state to bring attention to each suicide method used. This is noted in the first verse honoring Hemingway, “I reach for the awkward shotgun not to disarm / you, but to feel the metal horn, / furred with the downy membrane of dream”.

Meredith also makes it clear to the reader that Sylvia Plath, “who asphyxiated herself in a gas oven” (Kirszner & Mandell), is not symbolic of all writers. Line six indicates, “On all fours / I am imitating a totemic animal / but she is not my totem or the totem / of my people, this is not my magic oven.”

Both poets utilize symbolism in these poems. Mirikitani uses a ledge as an “altar” for the student to sacrifice herself from. In line forty-two, “I make this ledge my altar / to offer penance.” Meredith compares Hemingway to a unicorn in line four, which is a representation of the “rare, unique talent of the artist” (Kirszner & Mandell),

Welcoming death instead of fighting it is the cohesive bond between these two poems. Both Mirikitani and Meredith provoke feelings of empathy and sorrow from the reader with powerful language and imagery.

Works Cited

Kirszner, Laurie G. & Mandell, Stephen R., “LIT (with Literature CourseMate Printed Access Card)”, 1st Edition, p. 473, CengageBrain, Wadsworth: Boston, Massachusetts Print.