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Tyler Joseph, the lead singer and songwriter for the band Twenty One Pilots displays similar themes seen in romanticism. Throughout this thesis, I explore his use of the romantic mode in his use of nature, industrialization, individualism, and melancholy as he recalls this era of literature and elevates his writing style. I evaluate how Joseph revives this writing style and makes it his own, similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein's family resemblances. While Joseph shares similar features to his romantic predecessors and adopts the same attitudes and beliefs, he also adds his own unique style to this mode of writing. I conclude that while artists and musicians like Joseph can serve as pedagogical tools as they relate more to students and their interests, they can also aid in understanding specific modes of writing by connecting them through a literary lens with traditions, attitudes, and beliefs that survive and persist through each society.

THE REVIVAL OF THE ROMANTIC MODE IN THE LYRICS OF TWENTY ONE PILOTS

by

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Ever since Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, the scholarly community has paid more attention to what it might find in popular culture. While he certainly didn't start the movement to include popular culture in literary study, he further broke down barriers in the high-and-low-art debate, especially for scholars like Adam Bradley and Simon Frith who study music, song-writing, and their performances through a poetic lens. Teachers and professors of all levels continue to incorporate popular music into their classroom pedagogies (Pichaske 83). Bradley suggests that we live our lives by ever-changing playlists, reminding us of the irreplaceable cultural significance music holds (2). Since the scholarly community now pays closer attention to the content of a piece rather than its delivery system, a new realm of possibility has become available for close reading and analysis (Ball 169). This thesis seeks to build a direct connection between popular music and literature by examining primarily the lyrical stylings of the popular band Twenty One Pilots and the characteristics associated with romanticism.

At first glance, it seems odd to compare a band like Twenty One Pilots with writers who represent such a by-now canonical era of literature; however, this band has captured popularity and increasing critical esteem after they won a Grammy in 2017 and became the first group in history to achieve a certified gold status or more for every song on an album (Payne). The band also provides an excellent example of how we as scholars might discover complex literary choices in the most unlikely places. Tyler Joseph, the lead singer, writes and produces every song they release; he greatly values artistic integrity and makes a point to remind his audience of that. For example, the general message of the song "Lane Boy" presents Tyler Joseph and Josh Dun, the other member and drummer of the band, feeling stifled by the industry that tries to push

them in different directions, but they want to stand by their own decisions (Joseph 0:48). In fact, their band name provides another reminder of the importance they place on making their own decisions and on their independence from the music industry. “Twenty One Pilots” refers to Arthur Miller’s play *All My Sons*, which, Joseph explains, serves as a reminder to themselves to make the right decision even if it is the hard decision (“How Twenty One,” 0:54). This reference to *All My Sons* calls attention to the second reason this band proves to be an excellent choice for comparison: they often purposefully situate themselves in relation to literature. A closer look at their music quickly reveals similarities and references to other works of literature, whether it’s the subtle reference to *1984* in “Nico and the Niners” or a not-so-subtle reference to the Pantaloon character trope. In fact, in their illustrated lyric video for their cover of My Chemical Romance’s “Cancer,” they depict shelves and clusters of books to further the narrative of the song (“Cancer” 1:04). Scattered among the titles of actual novels, they include books titled “Twenty One Pilots,” as well, implying the desire to be examined in the same way as these novels (2:21). The band explicitly portrays itself as worthy of close literary study.

Another reason that scholars should approach Twenty One Pilots as a viable object of literary analysis is Joseph’s consistent use of the romantic mode. However, before we examine Joseph’s use of this mode, we need to first establish what a romantic mode entails. Josephine Miles describes a mode as “an attitude or idea; then a selection of material in which to embody the idea; then an arrangement or structure by which to give the material shape and point” (29). The focus on specific ideas and attitudes when we regard the romantic mode reminds us, as many scholars have before stated, that “one must tread cautiously” (Kravitt 93). While the romantic era is vastly different from writer to writer, Ludwig Wittgenstein developed a notion that Ferber applies to romantic writers in which they have a familial resemblance to one another:

while they might have a “two or three of the family traits,” they might not be the same two or three (Ferber 9). A “family resemblance” offers a great starting point in understanding Joseph’s connection with the romantic era of literature, because it calls back to Miles’s definition of mode, which emphasizes a foundation of similar ideas or attitudes. It also allows me to draw from both British and American romanticism. Not only will drawing from both offer a stronger understanding of transatlantic characteristics of the romantic mode, but Joseph has likely been exposed to both through the course of his education and freely draws upon both. However, Ferber acknowledges that this family resemblance can be somewhat limiting as it results in “a list of distinctive traits, with some ranking as to importance and generality, but no one trait, not even two or three, would be definitive” (9). He instead offers the following definition:

Romanticism was a European cultural movement, or set of kindred movements, which found in a symbolic and internalized romance plot a vehicle for exploring one’s self and its relationship to others and to nature, which privileged the imagination as a faculty of higher and more inclusive than reason, which sought solace in or reconciliation with the natural world, which ‘detranscendentalized’ religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in nature or in the soul and replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, which honored poetry and all the arts as the highest human creations, and which rebelled against the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward, and emotional. (10)

This definition certainly delineates a number of important ideas in the discourse of romanticism; however, a particularly important attribute upon which I want to focus is in how romantic writers perceive the world and their place in it. While approaching romanticism as a set of family resemblances only offers a collection of themes with a disjointed hierarchy, Ferber’s definition offers a stronger starting point insofar as it shows how these themes connect to one another and creates a more cohesive account of a worldview that we might call romantic and that we can see manifest itself in Tyler Joseph’s writings. While we may begin by establishing Joseph’s surface-level use of the themes of nature, industrialization, individualism, and melancholy,

Ferber's definition assists in connecting these themes in a uniquely romantic way, a way that helps us understand the unity of Joseph's various artistic decisions.

CHAPTER II: NATURE

Nature acts as a prime starting point for this analysis due to its prominence and importance in romantic literature. Though their perspectives vary widely, many romantic writers frequently view nature as an ideal or close to one. As Ferber asserts, romantic writers focus on themselves and how they connect with nature, and this connection often manifests through the concept of the sublime. Many use the term “sublimity” to describe the emotional response one can have when experiencing nature, which Ferber describes as something that “arouses terror, at the vastness and power of wild, ungovernable nature”; however, this terror is “terror at a distance, where the viewer is safe enough to contemplate it rather than flee” (72-73). Ferber’s definition illustrates the importance of nature and its connection to the self; however, nature also allows many romantic writers to express their minds and emotions. Joseph’s writing uses the romantic mode with a similar view of nature. By isolating and examining his use of nature as sublime, its connection with the mind, and its utility, I plan to demonstrate that Joseph has similar attitudes towards nature and uses equivalent imagery as seen in the romantic mode.

Often romantic writers place themselves in nature on a search for a higher truth or power, which they believe manifests itself in the sublime. In fact, Ferber suggests God is seen as the ultimate sublime power which nature allows us to rediscover (73). Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke both consider the sublime as “the encounter of the finite human mind with the infinite power of God or the universe” (Mellor 187). This concept of sublimity regards nature as a lens through which people view this divine power, which also offers nature as an outlet for introspection and inspiration. Joseph provides similar imagery of nature through his writing.

Joseph places importance on nature in a romantic fashion when considering its sublimity. He personifies nature in a romantic sense through the song, “Ode to Sleep,” when he writes:

On the eve of the day that's forgotten and fake
As the trees they await and clouds anticipate [...]
On the eve of the day that is bigger than us
But we open our eyes ['cuz] we're told that we must
And the trees wave their arms and the clouds try to plea
Desperately yelling there's something we need (Joseph 2:41)

Romantic writers frequently personify nature to figure nature as its own character outside the control of humankind. Percy Bysshe Shelley, for example, personifies nature in his poem, "Ode to the West Wind," referring to the wind as a "Wild Spirit," "Destroyer," and "Preserver"; this wind proves to be capable of bringing the changing seasons (lines 13,14). Shelley also exhibits the duality of sublimity through the juxtaposition of "Destroyer" and "Preserver" (line 14). However, he also describes it as a way of pointing to a higher power: "Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean, / Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread / On the blue surface of thine aery spread" (lines 17-19). Such lines present a connection between these aspects of nature and celestial beings through their imagery. Not only does Shelley liken rain to the angelic, but he describes the wind as a trumpet of prophecy (line 69). He likens nature to a herald of concepts and powers higher than itself. Joseph echoes this romantic imagery and personification through his yelling clouds and waving trees. Both personify various aspects of nature as characters not only as capable of their own actions, but also capable of calling others to action for the people who are not listening. Nature, according to this mode, serves as a window revealing a truth that remains unseen by people, unless they are looking for it.

Joseph presents many other examples of nature as an almost spiritual ideal, capable of revealing a higher truth. In the chorus of "Forest," Joseph writes, "Down in the forest, we'll sing a chorus, one that everybody knows / Hands held higher, we'll be on fire / singing songs that nobody wrote" (Joseph 1:11). In these lines, Joseph typically uses "we" as a reference to the band's fan base or other like-minded individuals, which he offsets with this unknown element.

This use of "we" contrasts with what I interpret as Joseph's predominant use of "I": he has repeatedly described the autobiographical qualities of his work and, although I do not argue that there is a one-to-one correspondence between his life and the "I" he represents in his lyrics, there are strong autobiographical ties. Hence, I typically describe these lyrics as reflecting Joseph's experiences and views. As I will evaluate later in this essay, Joseph also uses characters, such as Clancy and Blurryface, as a way of exploring different aspects of his identity while offering a separation between himself and the "I" he uses in almost every song he writes.

Nature on the other hand provides Joseph with an experience that he cannot attribute to himself or another character. The act of singing a song that nobody wrote also points to a kind of divine inspiration that could come from witnessing the sublime. In this case, nature seems to have granted Joseph a secret truth or connection to a higher power through this song. However, this could also be seen as his way of reveling in this encounter with the sublime and its characteristic obscurity. Either way, it bears a similarity to Emerson's assertion in "Nature," "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (19). He aligns the experience of nature with child-like innocence and virtue. Just as Emerson finds virtue and importance in the ability to view nature through the lens of child-like wonder, Joseph grapples with his pending adulthood through the song "Forest."

Joseph's pre-chorus illustrates this concept: "I scream, you scream, we all scream ['cuz] we're terrified / of what's around the corner / we stay in place ['cuz] we don't want to lose our lives / so let's think of something better" (0:55). He begins this pre-chorus with a call back to his childhood with a reference to the phrase "I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream." However, he turns the phrase on its head and ends in an unexpected turn toward his own fear of

adulthood. He then continues the narrative by searching for a lighter place when he leads into the chorus as if searching for happiness or “wild delight” through this experience in nature “in spite of real sorrows” (Emerson 19). Joseph reiterates his journey through nature in the fast-paced bridge:

This is not what you're supposed to see
Please, remember me? I am supposed to be the king of a kingdom
Swinging on a swing, something happened to my imagination
The situation's becoming dire
My treehouse is on fire
And for some reason, I smell gas on my hands
This is not what I had planned, this is not what I had planned (Joseph 2:58)

Joseph's bridge follows him unknowingly killing his childhood and rapidly devolving into a frenzy until the music strips back and he repeats the chorus at a slower tempo as if finding his peace once again in nature.

This particular passage also bears resemblance to “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” when we consider the relationship between the mariner and the albatross. Coleridge deems the albatross a kind of beacon of hope to the sailors appearing through the fog as if “it had been a Christian soul” hailed in God's name (lines 65-66). Coleridge advances this connection through his word choice. Like Shelley's west wind, Coleridge's albatross carries an almost mystical power as it carries “a good south wind” with it. Not only does Coleridge provide the importance of the albatross but, like Shelley, he finds a higher power specifically behind wind and this bird acts as the creator of this breeze (line 94). The mariner then, without warning, shoots the albatross down. He offers no clear reason as to why the mariner made this decision, an act Joseph echoes in his act of burning his treehouse. Since the mariner destroys something considered sacred, he must bear its weight through countless misfortunes. Coleridge might have used this ambiguity to mimic the mariner's own lack of understanding. The mariner is only

released after he unknowingly blesses sea creatures and the albatross slips off of his neck to free him (lines 285-289). Coleridge's poem explores the connection between nature and this unknown higher power through the mariner's ghostly encounters, both of which occur as a result of the mariner's perception of nature. Joseph evokes a similar interaction with nature through the bridge of "Forest." Neither the mariner nor Joseph fully comprehends what he did against nature and instead focuses on the results of it. The mended relationship occurs when the mariner appreciates nature. Similarly, Joseph's return to the chorus establishes the same return to nature, using the chorus to signify a safety found in his forest, while also maintaining nature's connection to this unknown element.

The final and perhaps most overt example of Joseph's romantic approach to the sublimity of nature can be found in yet another song he writes about an experience in the woods, entitled "Trees." He starts the song by singing:

I know where you stand
Silent in the trees
And that's where I am
Silent in the trees (Joseph 0:15)

The order in which he sets this stage indicates that whomever Joseph is seeking was there first and he came to find them. He follows these lines with:

Why won't you speak
Where I happen to be
Silent in the trees
Standing cowardly (0:28)

Not only does Joseph illustrate the longing typically found in this romantic trope, but he alludes to the terror that romantic writers typically associate with sublimity. He follows the romantic trope of going into nature looking for a higher truth or power in this song, which he reiterates in an interview, "It talks about searching for something. Really searching for Truth and *literally*

traveling around to find it [...] I would go out into the woods by myself and just look for something. I don't know if I was waiting for someone to talk to me or have an idea come into my head, or see something that was either scary or amazing" ("Vessel Commentary Part 2" 3:34). While this quotation offers an important commentary on the duality found in an encounter with the sublime, it also represents the yearning commonly found in the "nature walk" trope.

We see this same romantic trope in a number of romantic-era poems. In her sonnet "Supposed to have been written in the Hebrides" Charlotte Smith narrates a journey into nature when she remarks, "I could with *thee* for months and years be blest; / And of thy tenderness and love possess, / Find all *my* world in this wild solitude!" (Smith lines 6-8). Not only does Smith emphasize the importance of the connection between the natural setting and herself, but she also depicts a strong emotion in witnessing the sublimity of "wild solitude" (line 8). In her sonnet "On being cautioned against walking on a headland overlooking the sea, because it was frequented by a lunatic," she depicts a "lunatic" she envies because of his freedom from the fear of death or "*nice felicities*" as he spends his life wandering through nature (line 11). In both of these poems, Smith epitomizes an appreciation of nature and its sublimity. However, she demonstrates a characteristic romantic concern emphasizing the journey rather than its end, which resonates with Joseph's song "Trees":

"I can feel your breath
I can feel my death
I want to know you
I want to see
I want to say 'Hello'" (0:43)

Joseph suggests that the answer seems so close he can actually feel it but never offers the listener a resolution like in "Forest." As the song reaches its climax, Joseph instead continues screaming "Hello" to illustrate his desperate search (3:52). Joseph's song reflects a response similar to

Percy Shelley's when he was inspired to write "Mont Blanc." Joseph Black mentions that Shelley wrote the poem "under the immediate impression of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe" (141n3). Shelley uses his poem to reveal in the feeling he gets from his encounter with the unknown, but, like Smith and Joseph, we never see a resolution. He uses language and imagery such as "dark, deep Ravine," "unfathomable deeps," and "the glaciers creep like snakes," which elicit darker, more eerie, feelings similar to "Trees" (Shelley, lines 12, 64, 100-101). While "Trees" offers very little in the way of lyrics, Joseph's description of the song suggests both a romantic view of nature and a connection between nature and themes of isolation and introspection often seen when romantic writers regard their connection to nature (Ferber 10). Joseph acknowledges the power of nature through this romantic mode of writing and separates himself from society to seek a more introspective lifestyle, much like Emerson's advice in "Nature."

As I have shown, romantic writers usually use the metaphor of a natural journey to dramatize an internal journey. Often nature provides a means of expressing the mental or emotional state of the poet. In part, this could also be because many romantic writers emphasize the importance of introspection and were, as Lionel Trilling put it, "passionately devoted to a research into the self" (35). This introspection and its connection to nature emerges on countless occasions. For example, Percy Shelley begins "Mutability" with the phrase, "We are clouds that veil the midnight mood" (line 1). He opens "Mont Blanc" with the lines, "The everlasting universe of things / Flows through the mind and rolls its rapid waves" (lines 1-2). William Wordsworth compares his speaker's general emotional state to seasons in "Resolution and Independence" with the lines, "My whole life I have lived in a pleasant thought, / As if life's business were a summer mood" (lines 36-37). Coleridge admired the skill that Charlotte Smith

showed through her sonnets in combining “‘a development of some lonely feeling’ concerning the ‘scenery of Nature’” (Roe 5).

Natural imagery’s connection to the mind prevails throughout Joseph’s writing as well. For instance, Joseph often uses the seasons to depict his mental state. In “Oh Ms. Believer,” he depicts a journey that he and “Ms. Believer” take through the snow with lines such as “Your shaking shoulders prove that it’s colder / Inside your head than the winter of dead” (Joseph 0:12). In the chorus, Joseph sings, “We get colder as we grow older” (1:06). Joseph uses snow in this song to express a feeling of numbness or apathy; however, he develops the idea further in “Isle of Flightless Birds” with the lines, “I am cold, can you hear? / I will fly with no hope, no fear” (1:36). He perpetuates this imagery through the continued use of “driving south” to mean going to a warmer, healthier place like in his songs “The Judge” and “A Car, a Torch, a Death.” He also uses snow in some of his music videos, such as “Fairly Local” and “Saturday,” to imply the same red flags he establishes in “Oh, Ms. Believer.” Snow provides another example of Joseph’s romantic mode in which he describes negative emotions. Once again, he provides a great example of the introspection typically found with the romantic mode through his acknowledgment of his oncoming or current apathy; however, it is not the only example.

In “Holding onto You,” Joseph writes in the chorus, “You are surrounding all my surroundings / Sounding down the mountain range of my left-side brain / [...] Twisting the kaleidoscope behind both of my eyes (0:42). This passage circles back to the sublime as an influence on a person’s emotions, creating a sense of wonder and encouraging the imagination through a twisting kaleidoscope. Instead of using the sublime as a tool for searching, this song evokes the emotional response achieved through the connection of the finite mind and infinite. He once again uses the trees to make the connection between his mind and nature:

Tie a noose around your mind
Loose enough to breathe fine and tie it
To a tree, tell it you belong to me
This ain't a noose this is a leash
And I have news for you, you must obey me (1:37)

His affinity for trees may be because of his Christian upbringing since a tree often refers to the cross; however, it could also come from the romantic ideas he exhibits in songs like “Forest” and “Trees.” Nevertheless, by figuratively hanging his mind upon a tree, he attempts to use nature and natural imagery as a form of escape from his everyday life, much as romantic writers sought a more introspective life through their examination of nature and their connection to it (Ferber 73).

Joseph also reflects his state of mind through natural imagery in “Migraine.” In the first verse, he calls Sundays his “suicide days” and says, “I don’t know why they always seem so dismal, / Thunderstorms, clouds, snow, and a slight drizzle” (Joseph 0:37). Once again, he uses natural imagery to depict a dark time for him. In the second verse of the song he adds to this imagery, writing:

I am not as fine as I seem, pardon
Me for yelling and telling you green
Gardens are not what’s growing in my psyche
It’s a different me
A difficult beast feasting on burnt down trees (1:44).

Trees reprise a role in expressing his mental state. These trees, which we have established as his connection to a higher power through the sublime, have been destroyed possibly at his own hands if we recall his treehouse in “Forest.” Joseph placed “Migraine” directly after “Holding onto You” on the album *Vessel*, which he might have used to present the narrative that nature is his means of escape, but he repeatedly finds himself responsible for destroying his connection, and thus his emotional stability. This consistent destruction may refer to Emerson’s belief that

adults lose their ability to see nature and allow it to “shine” into their hearts (19). However, it also recalls the imagery of Shelley, Wordsworth, and Smith. Joseph seems to both allude to these romantic writers and play with similar literary decisions as he teeters between preserving and destroying his connection to nature through his mental state, as opposed to using it as merely a direct connection.

Joseph also adopts a romantic perspective regarding the connection between nature and the self as a relationship of utility. Emerson sees nature as a valuable resource that works together for the benefit of man, and Thoreau, of course, sought to live in simplicity out in nature (Emerson 733, Thoreau 65). Mellor suggests that female romantic writers, on the other hand, view nature as a “friend and co-worker, one with needs of her own, a potentially powerful ally with whom we must cooperate and who will reward our devotion to her” as opposed to man’s desire to either “join or hold his own against this divine creative power” (187). While men like Emerson suggest that nature should serve man, women romantic writers often believe that this could lead to the misuse or commodification of nature, and opt toward harnessing her gifts and working in tandem with Mother Nature. Mellor provides Mary Shelley’s example of Victor Frankenstein’s hubris as he oversteps Mother Nature for his own gain (187). While Joseph uses nature as a means for expression, he also exercises a similar concept of nature’s utility seen in Mary Shelley’s monster through his repeated use of fire as both a tool and a weapon.

As I have shown, Joseph uses fire as a symbol for passion and while it can fuel him, it also can destroy him, as we see in “Forest” and “Migraine.” Joseph explores growth from his inability to control his fire to a more apt understanding of its power, beginning with “Forest,” released in 2011, when he unknowingly burned down his treehouse. In “Levitate,” released in 2018, Joseph says that “ever since the seventh grade [he] learned to fire-breathe” providing an

example of his ability to weaponize this power (Joseph 0:17). We see similar results in the album *Vessel* in “Migraine.” However, he later establishes, or perhaps learns, that fire did not come from but was given to him: “I know, I know, you can bring the fire, I can bring the bones, / I know, I know, you’ll make the fire and my bones will make it grow” (“Hometown,” 0:36). Fire, in this sense, becomes a valuable utility from the higher power, much as in Emerson’s description, but Joseph also exercises the same caution evident in writings by romantic women when he attempts to learn to control his fire. Through the journey he takes with these songs, he has learned how to access this power but shows no control over it. In “Hometown,” after presenting where the fire came from, he sings, “we don’t know where to find what once was in our bones” (1:38). In this line, he shows that his connection to nature has once again been severed, and thus reiterates the impossibility of seeing any higher truth or power without nature as a lens.

Joseph may also use fire as an allusion to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* through his song “Leave the City.” In her novel, Frankenstein’s creature discovers a fire and delights in its warmth and light, though it burns him when he gets too close (122). As the night comes, the creature fears losing the fire and cares for dying embers (123). Joseph likens himself to this creature in “Leave the City,” when he depicts similar imagery:

I’m tired of tending to this fire
I’ve used up all I’ve collected
I have singed my hands,
It’s glowing, embers barely showing (Joseph 0:14)

Through these lines, we see that both Joseph and the creature are desperately attempting to protect what remains of this gift. Not only is it a valuable asset, but it also represents what it produces: light and warmth (Shelley 123). While fire starts as a force of destruction, once Joseph establishes a better understanding of it, it becomes a kind of beacon and powerful force he

desperately wants to protect. Fire, in this case, also represents the utility of nature; it is a gift from nature that must be maintained and preserved.

This journey with fire also bears some resemblance to Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*; however, there are major differences between his play and Joseph's narrative. While Prometheus stole the fire for humanity, Joseph acknowledges it more as a gift from nature or a higher power. However, the major difference between Joseph and Shelley's Prometheus arises in the presentation of the fire handler. Shelley depicts Prometheus as an "unrepentant champion for humanity," a noticeable change from Aeschylus's original (Reidhead 793). However, Joseph depicts fire as a valuable gift that he struggles to control, and he seems to feel guilt over his inability to harness this power, as evident in the frantic bridge of "Forest." Joseph may be using this depiction as a way of displaying his own shortcomings. Like Frankenstein's monster, Joseph offers himself as a "modern Prometheus," by using his fire as a catalyst of separation from his beliefs, and, at times, his creator. While Frankenstein hated his creation, Joseph sees himself as a monster unworthy of his creator and unable to control the power he wields in the song "The Run and Go," with the lines, "Pa, I'm not the one you know, you know / I have killed a man and all I know / Is I am on the run and go" (Joseph 0:09). The lyrics of this song offer the same separation and isolation he provides in "Forest." As in "Forest," Joseph mentions the wrongs he committed but offers no further clarification, perhaps from a pang of similar guilt. His kinship with Frankenstein's monster, as opposed to Percy Shelley's hero, allows him to cater to different themes than Shelley. While Shelley uses Prometheus as a way of harnessing power from nature and using it in his rebellion against this higher power, Joseph reiterates the sanctity of nature and seeks reconciliation with this power. While Joseph's fire noticeably alters the themes in

Shelley's *Prometheus*, it nonetheless bears a similar purpose and offers an opportunity for further discussion with later themes in this essay.

As I hope to have shown, Joseph's approaches to nature are informed by the romantic mode; he idealizes nature, uses it as an expression of mind, and emphasizes its utility in alignment with a romantic understanding of nature. Joseph expresses the same reverence and appreciation for nature and its sublimity. He portrays the same external journeys seen with many romantic writers, using it as a means for an internal journey and catharsis for the mind. He also portrays nature as a valuable tool to be harnessed but not overstepped. These shared ideas demonstrate that Joseph possesses the same core notions and execution to classify his writing under the romantic mode when considering the subject of nature. Examining Joseph's writing on nature through the romantic mode illuminates new details he includes in each song. Nature also offers a stepping stone for the next theme we will examine. Keeping in mind the romantic attitude towards nature, the next logical step in examining Joseph's modern use of the romantic mode emerges by traversing out of the forest and into the city with industrialization.

CHAPTER III: INDUSTRIALIZATION

Industrialization offers another important theme in which Joseph writes through the romantic mode. Note that I use the term “industrialization” rather than “industrialism.” While “industrialism” refers to both the historical context of the romantic era and points to the themes and motifs accompanying it, “industrialization” offers a more active perspective. It both refers to the Industrial Revolution and accounts for the values stoutly against the ideals found in the romantic mode (Bainbridge 24; Fulford 99). Fulford asserts that the romantic writer’s feelings toward industrialization could have resulted because of their affinity with nature, as well as the presence of other values (99). Romantic writers greeted the rapidly changing world with, as he put it, “a mixture of delight, admiration, and horror” (99). They appreciated the innovation and imagination of the individual but detested the destruction of nature and morality that accompanied it (99). Fulford’s assertion provides an example of Ferber’s definition of romanticism and its emphasis on the value of the imagination and viewing the arts as “the highest human creations” (Ferber 10).

Romanticism also sets a new precedent through writings on industrialization. McKusick suggests that “the dawn of the industrial revolution marked the first time that such apocalyptic events were imaginable as the result of normal human activity, rather than an inscrutable act of God” (207). In the age of industrialization, many romantic writers witnessed the “social unrest and political agitation” and sought to address the depleting natural and moral resources through their writings (Bainbridge 24, Fulford 99). Similarly, Joseph writes at another time of great social unrest and political agitation and he seeks to emphasize the importance of the individual and introspection. Joseph adds his chapter in the much longer literary history of opposing industrialization that includes romantic writers. His writing identifies ideas similar to the

romantic voices before him by emphasizing the antithesis of nature and industrialization, its attempted imitation of nature, and its effect on humanity.

Romantic writers often depict industrialization as the antithesis of nature, mostly because industrialization tends to occur at the expense of nature. As I explained in the previous section, romantic writers saw nature as a valuable resource but were cautious about its misuse. They frequently see industrialization threatening this balance by consuming and destroying nature and its resources. For example, in Lydia H. Sigourney's poem "Fallen Forests" she describes "puny arm" using an ax to hack away at the "iron heart of centuries" (lines 14-16). She describes the man in the poem as an "invader" of nature and uses religious language like "sacred," "hymn," and "ritual" to depict spirituality and reverence that the "invader" disrupts (lines 30, 25, 27, 28). When Robert Burns muses on the Carron Ironworks, he condemns them and warns against humankind's own condemnation, claiming that humanity will go to hell (line 3). William Blake describes the "dark Satanic mills" that were consuming England's "green and pleasant land" (lines 8, 16). McKusick also points out Blake's catalog of environmental damage depicted on plates 18-19 of *Jerusalem* (208). In Mary Robinson's poem "London's Summer Morning," she asks, "Who has not wak'd to list the busy sounds / Of summer's morning, in the sultry smoke / Of noisy London?" (lines 1-3). With these lines, Robinson uses satire to point out the off-putting nature of the newly industrialized London and further the romantic concept of the city's corruption of nature. These romantic writers place industrialization not only in a negative light but at times in an evil one, a concept that Joseph echoes in his own writings.

For the album *Trench*, Joseph creates a fictitious city called Dema as a direct opposition to nature. In fact, in an interview Joseph says that "Trench" is a world mostly made up of "trees and rocks and uncharted territory and wild terrain, and at the very bottom of the world is this city

called Dema” (Joseph “Meaning Behind New Album”). While Joseph specifies the lack of nature found in this fictitious city, he also places it at the bottom of this world, perhaps implying its relation to hell. In the music video for “Nico and the Niners,” Joseph depicts a city with clear borders, perfectly spaced circular structures, and gray buildings with grass peeking out of the hexagonal stone pavement, emphasizing the subjugation of nature for the sake of this industrialization. However, Joseph planted these anti-industrial seeds much earlier in his discography. He alludes to this fictional city in the chorus of “Hometown,” from the album *Blurryface*, released three years before *Trench*. Joseph writes, “Where we’re from there’s no sun, / Our hometown’s in the dark” (0:41). This passage both implies a separation from nature and alludes to a possible pollutant in the air blocking the sun.

However, Joseph’s opposition between nature and industrialization appears in more than just his music. Before the release of *Trench*, Joseph created a website which he used to release images, maps, and letters from a character he called “Clancy.” In many of these letters, Clancy describes the city as having “iron order and infallible [p]recis[i]on” and he longs to be on the other side of the “looming” and “colossal” wall that separates the city from the natural setting surrounding it (“Clancy’s Journal”; “Clancy’s Letter”)¹. One of Clancy’s letters recalls the pollution in the air as he finally makes his escape out of the city and writes, “It’s like the air out here is actually worth taking in” (“Clancy’s Note 2”). According to Joseph’s narrative, this city cuts a piece out of nature and removes it completely from its borders, aside from the few dead and black plants seen in the music video for “Nico and the Niners” (0:22). Once again, Joseph

¹ All of the Clancy Letters were originally found on the dmaorg.info website. However, they were removed as a part of the narrative that the bishops took over the website. I have listed in the works cited the website which follows the timeline of what has been released. Each picture is named after the name given to them by this website.

uses a romantic mode of writing by adopting similar imagery and concepts regarding industrialization and its antithesis to nature.

However, while romantic writers often depict industrialization as the antithesis of nature, they also depict it as a pale imitation of nature. They often establish nature's superiority to man-made inventions through the imagery of ruins. For example, Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" shows that nothing remains on the pedestal of the "King of Kings" (line 10). Similarly, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" describes the joy and solace the speaker has in nature and in knowing that nature prevails and possesses the power to reabsorb the buildings back into itself (289). Robinson, on the other hand, uses satire in her work to exemplify the false grandeur of the city setting, using the same grand poetic language found in pastoral pieces. She uses phrases like "sultry smoke" and images of the "dingy" and "limy" to juxtapose the sublimity of a natural setting (Robinson lines 2, 4, 28). When we examine industrialization in this way, it becomes a powerful but ultimately unsustainable force, which reverberates in Joseph's fictional world of *Trench*, namely through his use of fire.

As I mentioned in the last section, Joseph presents fire as a valuable tool from nature that must be harnessed and protected. In *Trench*, Joseph introduces a manufactured neon light that supposedly sustains the city and its inhabitants. In the music video for "Nico and the Niners," these neon lights resemble a flame but are depicted as a much stiffer duplicate (Joseph 0:41). In his gray dilapidated room Joseph packs his things when the camera pans to the center of the room revealing this neon fire, which consists of a collection of long narrow white neon-lit tubes that form a circle standing at varying lengths (1:26). This representation creates a stricter version of the flowing chaotic nature of fire. Its centrality in the room also makes it more noticeable and implies the importance of this industrialized city. In one instance, Joseph seems to be rubbing his

hands together and holding them up to the neon lights as if to warm them, implying a closer association with fire. However, these neon lights play a much bigger role in the narrative of this video. Later in the video, the leaders of Dema, the bishops, make more glass tubing in front of a stone-faced congregation, as if conducting a religious ceremony (1:29). As the ceremony progresses, they begin to wave their arms as the neon flickers to life (1:44). The ritualistic and spiritual nature of this presentation creates the narrative that the bishops consider industrialization the superior and more valued answer. However, just as Robinson mimics the pastoral to show the supposed value of industrialization, Joseph expresses that the more widely valued answer is not the right answer in keeping with the ideology associated with the romantic mode.

In “Nico and the Niners,” Joseph expresses a fear as he attempts to escape from the bishops with the lines, “I’m flying from a fire / from Nico and the Niners” (1:06). In this narrative, Joseph tries to escape the Bishops and their “fire,” which he considers “Neon Gravestones” that “call for [his] bones” (1:05). However, later in this album he writes, “I recently discovered it’s a heatless fire,” a perspective Clancy advances in one of his letters: “A lifeless light surrounds us each night. Never could I imagine that something so luminous could feel so dark” (“Clancy’s Letter 3”). Both of these passages assert that this “fire” doesn’t compare to the natural fire that comes with the communion between humankind and nature. This divide widens as he contrasts the neon lights and torches. While the bishops perform their ceremony, the camera flashes back and forth between their cold blue-lit room and the warm glow of burning torches (1:28). The content released during the band’s hiatus before the release of *Trench* regarding Joseph’s use of color also offers a better view of Joseph’s anti-industrialist message. While Joseph released letters from Clancy, he also released a series of images and gifs. One gif

depicted the torch glowing in a tunnel, which we now recognize from the music video for “Nico and the Niners.” The title of this gif is “They can’t see FCE300,” which contains the hex color number for the yellow used throughout this album’s artistic themes and tones. “They” refers to the bishops, which have become a symbol of industrialization; therefore, their inability to see yellow could refer to the inability for industrialization to coexist peacefully with nature. It also suggests that they refuse to see nature or look to it for anything, especially considering this particular yellow matches the flower petals found in the music video for “Jumpsuit” (3:29). Joseph uses the bishops as a way of emphasizing the severed relationship between nature and people, making industrialization not only the antithesis and enemy of nature but also of humanity and the mind.

Romantic writers consider nature a lens into the unknown as it reveals hidden truths or a higher power to its recipients, which Joseph establishes in his own writing. In part, societal estrangement forms as a result of industrialization because it discourages human thought, preferring a person’s value to the assembly line over their individual feelings and experience. Blake’s poem “London” depicts a journey through the “charter’d” streets of London marking the “weakness” and “woe” in each face the narrator passes (lines 1, 4). In this poem, the city and a negative human experience go hand in hand as the people are shackled by their own “mind-forg’d manacles” (line 8). In Byron’s dream vision “Darkness” he presents an apocalyptic world in which “all hearts were chill’d into a selfish prayer for light” (line 9). McKusick suggests that not only does this poem suggest a dependence on nature, but it also depicts Byron’s “dim view of human nature” (208-209). Once again, a negative human experience arises from the lack of nature or the connection to it. Fulford echoes this point when he asserts that the “Romantics called for a renewal of the human values and social relations of former times, of the

revolutionary era of liberty, fraternity, and equality” (99). Romantic writers see industrialization as both an antithesis of the mind, and as a commodification of people, especially considering the increase of factory workers and the employment of children (99).

Joseph takes on this literary trope that began with the romantic era and accentuates the commodification of human beings through the *Trench* and *Scaled and Icy* eras of his discography. For example, during the bishops’ ritual of creating more neon lights, their performance takes place in front of a congregation of gray-clad expressionless people (Joseph 0:52). The music video’s imagery also corresponds to another song from *Trench* called “Morph” in which Joseph writes, “He [Nico] told me I’m a copy” (1:21). Joseph also sings in the chorus, “I’ll morph to someone else, / I’m just a ghost” (1:03). Not only do these lines suggest a disconnection from the self as a result of this commodification, but they imply the necessity for it. Joseph turns into whatever the bishops need and remains only as a ghost or shell of what he used to be, a concept that returns to the “heatless fire” mentioned in “Bandito.” In “Bandito,” Joseph compares this “heatless fire” to the Bishop’s “nicknames they give themselves to uninspire” (2:12). With this line he provides clear evidence of the opposition between industrialization and independent thought. In fact, the use of the word “uninspire” implies that humanity is naturally inspired and the bishops must retrain the human mind in order to make people their commodities. The line also serves as yet another reference to industrialization’s opposition to nature since nature provides a source of inspiration to humanity through its sublimity. As Joseph follows this narrative of learning about the city and what it offers, he concludes at the end of *Trench* to “Leave the City” as he depicts his earnest desire to tend to his ever-dying fire. Since his fire often represents a passion or connection with nature that rapidly dims due to the city, he also claims that when the fire extinguishes the bishops would consider it

a “glorious gone” (1:20). He then brings the song to a slow build with the repetition of the lines, “In time I will leave the city, / For now I will stay alive,” which provide the narrative that Joseph wants to leave the city so badly, but must bide his time until he finds an opportunity to leave (2:21). His character Clancy explores these same romantic ideologies regarding industrialization through his letters.

In the first letter, Clancy says that before he “became realized,” he admired the structure of the city; however, once he noticed the world beyond the wall, he noticed how the city paled in comparison to the natural setting just outside of it. He finds the city to be full of “dry eyes caught in a trance of obedience, devoid of any trace of an identity,” which once again points to the commodification of people and the loss of independent thought (“Clancy’s Letter 2”).

Conversely, once Clancy leaves the city, he breathes deeper and marvels at the great expanse of nature. While he finds this natural setting much more “precarious,” he also finds it to be that much more rewarding than living in the city, where people don’t “look up anymore,” which recalls “March to the Sea” from their self-titled album (“Clancy’s Note 2”; 0:30). This line brings attention to another important motif of Dema. In the music videos for “Nico and the Niners” and “Shy Away” stand copies of the same stone statue. The statue looks like a man with his arms stretched above his head and his hands obscuring his face. It often rests surrounded by or near the neon lights, considered objects of worship to the bishops. It appears in the town square region of the city, the room of the bishop’s ceremony, and tucked away next to a gas station in “Shy Away” (3:53; 0:56; 0:36). Its recurrence and proximity to the bishops prove its significance as it assists their industrial message in two forms. The male holds his hands up, looking at them, portraying them both as the object of worship and a means of obscuring the sky. Instead of looking to a higher power, or to the sky which could point to a higher power, the

hands block the field of vision and imply that the things he made should be considered the most valuable. Once again, the bishops remind the citizens through this statue that the value they hold depends upon what they make and contribute to the city.

Joseph uses the same ideologies found in the romantic mode concerning industrialization using similar metaphors and imagery found in the poetry of the romantic writers before him. His romantic mode also points back to Ferber's definition of romanticism as it relates to individualism. Industrialization not only destroys nature while offering a cheap substitute for it, but it also separates people from nature and makes them more reliant on their own works which, according to the romantic ideology, ultimately fails and gets incorporated into nature. Many romantic writers instead value the individual's relationship with nature, using it as a means of understanding themselves; therefore, industrialization serves as an enemy both of nature and the human mind. Joseph's adoption of this mode of writing can be seen through similar ideals that reverberate throughout his craft, and it offers a new perspective on his writing. By first understanding the ideas behind most romantic writers' view of nature, we can understand its relationship to humanity and the mind. Industrialization opposes nature in this mode. Thus, nature becomes overshadowed, and the romantic faces societal estrangement as a result. The romantic writer's estrangement then leads to a mental rebellion against societal norms, which then leads to a higher importance placed on introspection and the individual's unique human experience, a topic to be further covered in the next section: Individualism.

CHAPTER IV: INDIVIDUALISM

Tyler Joseph uses the romantic mode when considering the theme of individualism. Ferber's definition emphasizes that romantic writers rebelled against "both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward, and emotional" (11). Likewise, Behrendt suggests that, according to the romantic writer, every individual "possesses by nature an infinite capacity for experience" (63). By "nature," Behrendt asserts that each person is a unique individual and, as Ferber suggests, romantic writers celebrated "unique individuality" (Ferber xiv). However, the romantic attitudes of nature subsist through this theme of individualism, as well. As we have seen, industrialization pits itself against nature and, likewise, the human mind; therefore, a value in active introspection becomes all the more important and often manifests because of societal estrangement. While nature encourages this human thought and experience, society calls for uniformity. After all, as Athanassoglou-Kallmyer suggests, the aim of romanticism was often understood as "independence from all rules and consecrated authorities" (18). This definition highlights the two aspects of individualism I shall discuss. First, individualism manifests itself as an estrangement from society, which romantic writers often show through their critique of organized religion and government. The second is their active desire for introspection. Romantic writers estrange themselves from society and opt for a more introspective lifestyle. Joseph's writing bears a similar attitude and seeks the same societal estrangement and introspection found in romanticism's brand of individualism.

Romantic writers estrange themselves from society in three major ways. The first of these manifests in their opposition to industrialization. The second surfaces through their critique of organized religion; however, romantic writers often differentiate between belief in a higher power and their faith in a church or religious organization (Ferber 10). They often assert a belief

in a higher power and condemn the organizations that seek to profit from it. Behrendt asserts that the era of romanticism “emphasized the importance of the individual’s personal, emotional experience” (63). Since romantic writers value the individual experience and often view nature as a way of seeing a higher power, the church seeks only to cloud it with uniformity and corruption. For example, Emerson’s resignation as the pastor of a church bore little weight on his actual spirituality. In fact, he noted in his journals his doubt of the ministry and aimed for a more authentic relationship with God, nature and himself, as opposed to the stilted nature of the church (Emerson, “Legacy”). He makes an even stronger distinction in “Self-reliance,” when he draws a firm line between the individual and society as a collective, especially when considering topics such as religion, education, and art. He suggests that “[a]ll men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves” (788). While people want improvement, he believes that improvement in one area allows another to suffer and that the Church is no exception to this rule. He proves time and time again the difference between this religious grandiose and an authentic connection with the “Universal Being” through a connection with nature (20).

William Blake provides an example of the distinction between personal spirituality and organized religion. In fact, Blake often seems to juxtapose these two concepts. For example, “The Lamb” follows a playful line of questioning that makes a connection to Jesus with the lines, “Dost thou know who made thee? / [...] / Little Lamb I’ll tell thee! / He is called by thy name” (Blake lines 10-13). In these lines, Blake makes an obvious connection between the lamb and Jesus and accompanies this connection with a positive connotation as evident by the excitement found in these lines. Throughout the course of the poem, Blake repeats many lines as a way of expressing a childlike excitement in the speaker’s belief. In fact, the speaker considers himself as

a child and draws that personal connection both to the lamb and what it represents. However, Blake also critiques organized religion through poems like “The Chimney Sweeper,” from *Songs of Experience*. In this poem, he presents the narrative of a young boy working in the streets as a chimney sweep, while his parents go to the church to pray (line 4). He uses this poem as a means of exhibiting the hypocrisy of organized religion. While the parents pray in the church, an act considered righteous and praiseworthy, their son suffers in the streets. Blake presents another juxtaposition between the *Innocence* and *Experience* versions of “Holy Thursday” by offsetting the elaborate religious ceremony with the reality of life in poverty.

Joseph represents a similar distinction between his personal spirituality and organized religion as he progressed from *Vessel* to *Blurryface* then *Trench* and *Scaled and Icy*. Joseph exhibits his individual spiritual experience, especially in the band’s self-titled album. “Addict with a Pen” depicts his journey through a desert desperately trying to hold onto the water in his hand (1:50). He apologizes for not being “the best of sons,” referencing “God, the Father” (0:23). This song seems to follow his deeply personal journey through his own religious beliefs, mental illness, and perceived shortcomings. The first clear reference to his distinction between his personal spirituality and organized religion emerges in “Migraine,” when Joseph refers to Sundays as his “suicide days” (0:36). While this line could be taken a number of ways, it could indicate a strain he might feel as a result of the pressure to maintain an image with his church. However, it also suggests a condemning attitude often seen in churches, when considered with his next album, *Blurryface*. While he has a reverence for a higher power, he uses this song to provide the first hint at the disconnect between the church and his individual belief in a higher power. However, Joseph still exhibits his individual spirituality in “Fake You Out” when he writes, “You say that you are close, / Is close the closest star? / You just feel twice as far”

(0:41). Joseph displays his own doubts about this higher power as he illustrates his interactions with it.

In *Blurryface* his critiques of organized religion become much more obvious and abundant. He begins the album with “Heavydirtysoul,” questioning his own goodness and this higher power’s ability to save him (0:42). However, as the album progresses to “The Judge,” Joseph claims that he is “best friends” with his doubt (1:56). His doubt is a recurring theme in the album as “Doubt” directly follows “The Judge.” The chorus contains the lines, “Don’t forget about me / Even when I doubt you / I’m no good without you” (0:45). While Joseph describes his doubt as his best friend in “The Judge,” these lines suggest a resignation or surrender to it, without placing blame on this higher power. Instead, he hints that the culprit is the Church with the lines, “Gnawing on the bishops, claw our way up the system / Repeating simple phrases, someone holy insisted” (1:41). Not only does this passage introduce the bishops who later play a major role in his narrative, but the final line proposes disbelief or frustration with this “holy” someone. He follows this song with “Polarize,” in which he writes, “Domingo en fuego, I think I lost my halo / I don’t know where you are, you’ll have to come and find me” (2:06). Once again, Joseph uses fire as a way of either saying that he feels full of passion on Sundays or, more likely, he loses himself in the condemnation of the church and the destruction Sundays cause. He also expresses through these lines the importance of his faith and individual belief. He seeks a relationship with this higher power, asking it to find him while maintaining his critique of organized religion. His use of fire could also point back to the misuse of nature’s gift. Like his burning treehouse, Joseph’s “Sundays” have been consumed by the fire he cannot control yet. Joseph seems to use the second half of this passage to reach out to this higher power. While he depicts the church as a form of destruction, he still seeks this higher power. Not only does this

interpretation coincide with the previous song's bridge, but it recalls "Migraine" from the previous album. He also encourages his listeners to "put away your traditions" in "Hometown" furthering the rift seen in the romantic mode between the writer and society, through the differentiation between an authentic spiritual experience and organized religion (1:32).

He develops his differentiation between organized religion and personal spiritual experiences even more as he introduces his audience to the world of *Trench*. He provides stronger evidence of his differentiation between personal spirituality and organized religion as he establishes the bishops as the head of his fictional city, Dema. While we have briefly examined some of the religious references in the "Industrialization" section, Joseph's city offers much more historical significance that lends itself to this romantic distinction. The name "Dema" actually has a connection to Zoroastrianism as it refers to the "Towers of Silence" that were used to properly dispose of the dead according to that religion. The "Tower of Silence" appears as one of the images released on their website during the hiatus. In fact, when looking at the map of this city, it bears a striking resemblance to the layout of the Zoroastrian "Tower of Silence." Both towers have a circular outer wall and a smaller circular center (Desai, "Death in the City"). Surrounding the inner circle are evenly spaced rectangles that become incrementally smaller the closer to the center they get. According to the Zoroastrian map, these rectangles represent pits for the dead (Desai). The outer ring is reserved for men, the middle for the women, and the inner for children. Dema's map extends a powerful connection to this ancient religion; however, Joseph makes more connections to it than just the map. According to the Zoroastrian belief, the proper way to clean and purify the dead body occurs through the use of vultures ("Death in the City"). Joseph uses vultures in a similar way. While the city represents a place of death, these vultures offer a sense of hope since they are sustaining life after death. In this sense, Joseph presents the

Zoroastrian ideology positively, but condemns the religious practice, which differentiates a spiritual experience and organized religion in his romantic mode.

While industrialization and organized religion present avenues of societal estrangement, the final aspect of societal estrangement manifests in the typical romantic characterization of government as corrupt or tyrannical. Romantic writers often pitted themselves against what they believed to be corrupt or tyrannical governments. Wordsworth openly attacked the established government of the day, Coleridge was considered a “dissenter in politics and religion,” and Blake “developed a more extreme and visionary form of revolutionary politics,” which called for the overthrow of all hierarchies (Kitson 678). Many British romantic writers sympathized with the French Revolution and this anti-government attitude, but Percy Shelley seems to stand out the most. “Ozymandias” depicts an ancient king, satirized by a sculptor, which serves as a reminder that his kingdom fell into obscurity (lines 4-6). “England in 1819” highlights the insufficient leadership of the country offset by those suffering at the hands of this government. However, these aren’t the only examples of Shelley’s dissent of the powers that be. A number of his works such as “Ode to the West Wind,” *The Revolt of Islam*, *Queen Mab*, and “The Masque of Anarchy” present his political critiques and call for change (Kitson 678).

As I previously mentioned, Shelley retells the story of Prometheus, not as a penitent servant to the tyrant Zeus, but as a rebellious, unwavering “champion of humanity” (Reidhead 793). Aeschylus’s original tale showed Prometheus reconciling with Zeus, but Shelley's Prometheus maintains his status as a martyr and awaits the downfall of Zeus. While the other characters in the narrative sympathize with Prometheus, they are too afraid to go against Zeus (Shelley 196). Joseph echoes Shelley’s Prometheus in this way, particularly in his use of fire. As I stated in the previous section, the resistance carries real fire in their torches, whereas

the bishops only have their imitation of the light. Joseph uses this fire to symbolize the resistance against this tyrannical government. In fact, his imprisonment in the city could be seen not as his own failure, but as his punishment for giving this fire to the banditos. Along this vein, “Leave the City” takes on a new interpretation. The lines, “In time I will leave the city, / For now, I will stay alive” harken back to Shelley’s Prometheus. (Joseph 2:21). Instead of biding his time until he can leave, Joseph could be waiting for the bishops’ downfall, much like Prometheus awaits the downfall of Zeus.

Joseph presents other symbolic revolts against a corrupt government, especially in the band’s latest album, *Scaled and Icy*. First and foremost, this album continues the narrative he began in *Trench* and takes it one step further. Before the album came out, the band released a holiday single entitled “Christmas Saves the Year.” On the cover of this album, hidden in the wrapping paper of a gift, resides the inscription, “SAI is propaganda” (“Christmas,” Album Artwork). Since the gift lists Clancy as the beneficiary, we assume this might be Joseph’s way of warning his listeners of the upcoming album and how it adds to the narrative. The album contains a variety of songs that present a stilted message and general lack of authenticity. For example, the first song “Good Day” causes doubt in the knowledgeable audience with the chorus, “I know it’s hard to believe me / It’s a good day” (Joseph, 0:57). Joseph doesn’t include a “but” in between these two lines, which leaves room to agree with the first line. He also sings in the second verse, “Lost my job, my wife, my child / Homie just sued me” and later sings, “I’m alright, would you say you depend on the weather? / My sunshine is a buzz and a light” (1:11, 0:49). The first passage establishes no reason for Joseph to have a good day, but the second passage lets the listener discern the truth. The buzz and light refer to the neon lights that run the city, suggesting that this song comes more from the Bishops rather than Joseph himself.

Similarly, the artwork, photos, advertisements and even wardrobe appeal to the audience's nostalgia for the nineties with a familiar colorful aesthetic.

While most of *Scaled and Icy* can be interpreted as the propaganda from the government Clancy warned against, two songs stand out as breaking that narrative. The first occurs in the seventh track on the album, "Never Take It," in which Joseph sings about being fed up with the bishops "Lying through their fake teeth" and asking questions like, "Why cure disease of confusion / When you're the treatment facility?" (0:30, 1:01). This song seems to not only serve as the strongest affront to the bishops, but it also offers some ambiguity with the bridge ending with the line, "you better educate yourself, but never too much" (2:06). Keeping the narrative of the bishops in mind, this line yields two different interpretations. The first interpretation follows the propaganda of the bishops warning the listener to restrain from asking questions and learning too much. The second interpretation renders a warning from Joseph to the banditos, the rebellion against the city. Through such an interpretation, Joseph warns the rebellion to exercise caution in their fight against the city of Dema. Along this vein, Joseph uses the ninth song on the album, entitled "Bounce Man," to encourage a friend on the run to come to his house for one more song, reminding him that "Running away [don't] make you wrong" (1:10). While this initially seems to revolt against the city, when coupled with the song that follows, it acts more like a deception. The following song, "No Chances," consists of many unsettling lines of false concern like, "We got people on the way, we want you home in one piece now / We get bodies every day, we want you home in one piece now" (1:01). Not only does this passage depict a confident government prepared to attain its desires, but when compared to the previous song, it sets up the narrative that the bishops use Joseph as a pawn to lure a traitor out of hiding. "No Chances" musically takes a much darker turn from the light, campy sounds of "Bounce Man," as if "Bounce Man"

sets the trap before the turn to “No Chances.” While his music provides an anti-establishment message, Joseph places much more emphasis on the introspective aspect of individualism than on the societal estrangement found in his narrative of Dema.

Although this societal estrangement only represents one aspect of the romantic writer’s attitude toward individualism, introspection plays a much more integral role in both Joseph’s work and that of romantic writers. Because romantic writers emphasize the importance of “feelings and intuition rather than reason and empirical knowledge,” they find personal experience and self-discovery to be more valid than any rules or guidelines prescribed by society (Behrendt 63). For example, as we found in “Nature,” romantic writers often use natural imagery not only as a means of exploring the world around them but also as a means of exploring themselves and their emotions. However, romantic authors explore individualistic themes in more aspects than just nature. Emily Dickinson, for instance, depicts herself in more unique situations as a means of exploring her identity, as in her poems “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” and “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”. Walt Whitman celebrates himself and his individualism in his iconic “Song of Myself.” However, Joseph takes a different approach to this theme than these two examples. His use of the romantic mode is reminiscent of Emerson’s call to introspection in “Self-Reliance.”

Joseph mentions in an interview that he dislikes talking about what a song means and hopes that his fans will find their own meaning in his songs (“Masks” 2:30). While he encourages fans to find their own meanings in his songs, one of the reasons he makes this assertion is to foster introspection in other songs like “Trees.” This desire and call for introspection finds its way into a number of songs. In “Isle of Flightless Birds” Joseph reiterates this call for introspection with the lines, “Please think about why you can’t sleep in the evening, /

And please don't be afraid of what your soul is really thinking" (3:59). While this line encourages introspection, the wording implies a much more emotion-based search rather than a logical one. A "thinking" soul could refer to unique emotions and feelings each person experiences, which emphasizes the importance of experience often found in the romantic mode of writing. However, "Isle of Flightless Birds" contains only one of the many examples of Joseph's call for introspection. In the second verse of "Car Radio," he writes, "And to be awake is for us to think, / and for us to think is to be alive" (1:55). Here, Joseph uses the metaphor of sleeping to imply a lack of critical thought, an idea he echoes throughout his *Trench* narrative. He encourages people to be more introspective when he continues with the line, "I will try with every rhyme to come across like I am dying / To let you know you need to try to think" (1:59). Not only does Joseph portray thought as important, but he considers it essential to the human experience. His most overt example of a call to introspection surfaces in the song "Clear." In the second verse of the song, Joseph quickly raps:

It takes delivery and well-placed energy
To subliminally get yourself inside you
Introspection's the name of this session,
spread this infection, reflect it on the next one,
the next one, the next one, and when we're done
We'll all have made something new under the sun. (1:43)

Joseph reflects in this passage on the goals he had in mind with this writing. Joseph wants his listeners to be more introspective and establish a habit of reflection and apply it to other songs. He also reminds his listeners of the time and effort he puts into his music as opposed to the "lyrics that mean nothing," which he says that he finds in a lot of popular music ("Holding on to You 3:14). He alludes to another song in his song "Holding on to You" with those very words: "Lean with it, Rock with it / When we gonna stop with the / Lyrics that mean nothing, we were gifted with thought" (3:11). With these lines, Joseph critiques the music industry's tendency to

manufacture songs without a desire to create something with a deeper meaning. In his critique of these songs without substance, Joseph continues the bridge, “Is it time to move our feet to an introspective beat? / It ain’t the speakers that pump hearts, / It’s our hearts that make the beat” (3:17). Once again, Joseph points to the importance of the human element by reminding his listeners of the “heart” he believes enhances art.

While scholars like Ferber find this introspection to result more from their affinity to nature as they explore their relationship with it, societal estrangement certainly goads the romantic writer towards more active introspection (Ferber 10). Romantic writers manifest individualism through their disdain for industrialization, as we saw in the previous section, but also through their opposition to organized religion and government. As I hope to have shown, Joseph presents the same societal estrangement that manifests in a similar way to many romantic writers. While romantic writers will often use their works as a means of “knowing themselves,” Joseph uses his works to call others to be more introspective, much like Emerson. He also exhibits an amount of time and effort that sets him apart from his contemporaries through this thoughtful writing process. While many artists today might focus on whether or not a song has a good hook or chorus, or pleases a certain demographic, Joseph takes the time and critical thought to cover themes and topics typically found in the romantic mode. In this way, Joseph seeks to make his writing mean more than its marketing. The romantic mode offers space to examine Joseph’s works in the same critical way he desires. While Joseph is not the only artist to put a lot of effort into treating these topics, he sets himself apart through the use of this romantic mode in even the subtlest references. However, this introspection often focuses on the emotions and personal experiences of each individual. This emphasis on emotions also allows for the connection between Individualism and the final theme to be examined: Melancholy.

CHAPTER V: MELANCHOLY

While the concept of melancholy extends before and after romanticism, it holds an important place in romantic literature. Ferber reminds us in his definition of romanticism that romantic writers greatly value the individual and their experience (10). Likewise, romantic writers valued an authentic life with an emphasis on passion and “centrality of subjective experience and expression” (Pinch 50). This emphasis shows how much romantic writers value every emotion as a part of the human experience, which Joseph mimics in how he presents his depression. While melancholy and depression are not the same, Allan Ingram asserts that melancholy was a concept that existed before depression and certain periods, such as the eighteenth century, “shape how depression is suffered and survived, how it is treated, or engaged with, or indeed stigmatized, and how people’s views of it are expressed” (Ingram and Sim 2). Since Melancholy existed before depression and served as a way of understanding how previous societies and cultures coped with its negative effects, it offers a connection between today’s culture surrounding depression and the culture of melancholy. Additionally, Joseph’s romantic mode of writing about his depression echoes the same portrayal seen in the works of romantic writers. Joseph’s romantic use of melancholy emerges through his correlation between melancholy and his identity, as well as the relationship between his art and melancholy.

Though they are distinct terms, melancholy and depression share some important characteristics. In fact, Allan Ingram asserts that “melancholy becomes one of the primary ways of defining what to us would usually count as depression” (9). Wetherall-Dickson views depression as an act of “turning in on oneself,” which agrees with Wolfson’s consideration of melancholy. She offers Freud’s differentiation between melancholy and mourning when considering the eighteenth century view of melancholy. While in mourning, the world becomes

cold and empty; while in melancholia, the self becomes cold and empty (436). This differentiation draws the attention from external circumstances to focus on the individual. Wolfson also describes melancholy in the romantic era as the thing that “haunts idealism as its shade of disillusion” (436). While romantic writers might not have had access to terms like “depression” or “mental illness,” Joseph’s description of his mental illness resembles characteristics of the romantic attitudes toward melancholy. As Miles suggests, a mode of writing begins with a shared ideal or attitude, which then manifests itself through similar forms and themes (29). While introspection allows the romantic writer to seek higher truth, capture their imagination, or enjoy their subjective experiences, it comes at a cost. Melancholy is often depicted as the price of awareness, or “divinest sense” as Dickinson would assert in her poem “Much Madness is divinest Sense” (line 1). This trade-off between peace and introspection can be seen most clearly through the romantic mode’s use of sleep and night. Joseph likewise manifests this same connection between introspection and melancholy through these two motifs. While the themes of sleep and night are not uncommon in any genre or era of writing, when dealing with the theme of melancholy, romantic writers use the concept of sleep as a means of relief and as an alternative to introspection, while night is the time for melancholy to arise and consume the writer.

For example, Charlotte Smith asks for “balmy Sleep” to soothe her speaker’s “sad temples” (lines 1, 2). She makes clear the role sleep plays to “calm the anxious breast, to close the streaming eye” (line 14). However, she also makes the reason clear. In this sonnet, she wants to rescue her “sad temples” from her own debilitating thoughts, acknowledging both roles that sleep plays in its connection with melancholy. Like Smith, Wordsworth describes sleep as a form of escape and relief from his speaker’s “human fears” in “A slumber did my spirit seal” (line 2).

Once again, we see Wordsworth acknowledge the source of his desire for relief. Instead of experiencing those human fears, he opts for relief from his own over-thinking. Percy Shelley explores the lack of introspection in the “Men of England” when he describes them as lions who had been captured while they were sleeping (lines 147-154). In each of these examples, sleep provides relief at the cost of introspection. In his “Sonnet to Sleep” Keats writes, “Save me from curious conscience, that still hoards / Its strength for darkness, burrowing like the mole” (lines 11-12). In this passage, Keats explores the connection between his melancholy and his active introspection. While romantic writers greatly value independent thought, Keats makes aware the dangers of over-thinking and his speaker seeks sleep as an escape from it, even though he knows this escapism offers an equal, if not greater, danger. While this poem offers sleep as a kind of escape, he likens that escape to death right away with the line, “O soft embalmer of the still midnight” (line 1). This line offers an unsettling start to the poem as it describes sleep as something capable of providing a kind of mental death since it is the enemy of introspection. Throughout the poem, Keats makes sleep seem like a much-needed reprieve from introspection but implies its danger through his language. He describes sleep as benign and uses phrases like “forgetfulness divine” to slowly build to the final line where Keats reveals his own casket being locked, using his sonnet as a warning against sleep’s enticing reprieve by providing this subtle progression with soft language that carries the reader along until it’s too late (lines 2, 4, 13-14).

Joseph exhibits similar ideas through his recurring use of sleep when he considers his own melancholy. In “Anathema,” Joseph expresses a desire for an unattainable sleep with the lines, “Haven’t you taken enough from me? / Won’t you torture someone else’s sleep” (1:37). While these lines read with a biting accusation, his gentle, almost lazy, delivery presents his mental state as nearly defeated and half-heartedly begging for relief (1:37). Near the end of this

song he raps, “I start to part two halves of my heart in the dark and I / don’t know where I should go when the tears and the fears begin to multiply, / Taking time in a simple place, in my bed where my head rests on a pillowcase” (3:25). With these lines, Joseph narrates himself lying in bed, trying to sleep with no success because he finds himself sifting through his own emotions which become stronger and stronger the more time he spends thinking on them, exposing the dangers of introspection. While “Anathema” presents a losing battle between Joseph and his own melancholy, “Guns for Hands” shows a more active fight with his delivery of the chorus, “I’m trying, I’m trying to sleep, / But I can’t, but I can’t when you all have guns for hands” (1:20). In the music video for this song, Joseph repeatedly shakes his head and body violently to demonstrating his anxiety and inability to find reprieve (2:50). However, he suggests that if he can’t find relief in sleep, “there’s hope out the window,” alluding to the release he receives from nature (1:59). While he explores the role of sleep as relief in these songs, he also paints sleep as the enemy of introspection.

For example, the title “Ode to Sleep” implies a reverence for the central subject of the song; however, the song offers very little reverence. Instead, it focuses on everything outside of sleep:

I wake up fine and dandy, but then by the time I find it handy
To rip my heart apart and start planning my crash landing
I go up, up, up, up, up to the ceiling and I feel my soul start leaving
Like an old man’s hair receding. (0:39)

In this passage, Joseph sets up the narrative that as soon as he wakes up and plans to handle his emotions for the day, he feels his soul being pulled out of him, presenting an image of his extreme anxiety or depression. While Joseph starts the line with “I wake up fine and dandy,” implying that his sleep offered relief and refreshed him, as soon as he begins his introspection, a deep melancholy accompanies it. He increases the divide between himself and this relief with the

lines, “I’ll stay awake, [‘cuz] the dark’s not taking prisoners tonight” (1:14). Through these lines, Joseph implies that he would rather be consumed by this darkness than lose his awareness or introspective nature. Instead of sleeping, Joseph decides to remain vigilant against this darkness. “Car Radio” exhibits a similar understanding of the toss-up between sleep and introspection. While the song centers on Joseph’s loss of his car radio, forcing him to “deal with what [he] feel[s],” the best example of his use of sleep in this romantic mode arises in the second verse (0:45):

There's faith and there's sleep
We need to pick one please because
Faith is to be awake
And to be awake is for us to think
And for us to think is to be alive
And I will try with every rhyme
To come across like I am dying
To let you know you need to try to think (1:50)

With these lines, Joseph attempts to trace a line between “faith” and “sleep” and the damage of choosing one over the other. Joseph probably asserts his own Christian beliefs on the definition of faith; however, faith could also refer to any belief or feeling that surpasses the importance placed on logic, another aspect seen in romanticism (Gregory 102). This faith also involves active thought and places yet more importance on each individual’s personal experience, as seen in the romantic mode. In fact, in these lines, Joseph shows that sleep does not offer lasting relief from his melancholy because he sees it as another kind of death, making this melancholy an inescapable byproduct of introspection. He shows introspection as a dangerous balancing act with other lines in this song like, “Oh my, too deep, please stop thinking / I liked it better when my car had sound” (1:39). However, this balancing act resurfaces in his use of the romantic mode when considering night, as well.

Romantic writers often use night in a similar way to sleep. While sleep provides an escape from melancholy, night offers a discovery of it. Richard Terry describes “one particular melancholy *mise-en-scene*” which involves “the poet searching out by night some remote forest glade or grotto, in order to conjure up visions and to indulge in what James Thomson calls ‘prophetic Glooms’” (71). Romantic writers desire a reprieve from their own negative emotions, but they also use night as a means of exploring these darker emotions that come with introspection. For example, John Keats's sonnet, “Why did I laugh tonight? No voice will tell,” describes a kind of mental or emotional breaking point in which Keats laughed in spite of being “sad and alone” (line 5). In this sonnet, Keats examines the duality of introspection as he reviews his speaker’s feelings manifesting irregularly. Shelley’s poem, “To Night,” presents a similar message. The speaker eagerly awaits the “Spirit of Night” who brings “dreams of joy and fear, / Which make thee terrible and dear” (line 2, lines 5-6). He shows a clear excitement for this experience through his use of exclamations. His lines on the joy and fear of night offer an antithesis to sleep. While Shelley’s speaker anticipates night, he refuses to “nestle by [sleep’s] side” (line 26). He shows a clear longing for night to bring something either “terrible” or “dear” which could be pointing to the romantic writer’s affinity for the sublime; they also point to a desire for melancholy. Through this interpretation, Shelley decides to accept melancholy as a way of exploring another authentic human experience. Similarly, Charlotte Smith wrote multiple poems describing a desire for “mournful, and sober-suited Night,” or aspects of it, such as the moon. In her sonnet “To the Moon,” her speaker wanders “alone and pensive,” seeking relief, not in sleep, but in the “placid light” of the moon (Smith lines 2, 5). With these lines, she pursues her introspective journey as she considers night. Smith’s imagery between poetry set during the day as opposed to night proves vastly different. While poems set in the daylight offer warm

picturesque scenes of cottages in the woods, like Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," the night more easily reveals a different side to nature. She sets night with eerie language in phrases like "deaf cold elements" and "viewless wind" as she embraces its "cheerless" "quiet gloom" (lines 6, 8, 10, 11). She also depicts the moon as the final resting place of the "children of Despair and Woe," which further suggests the connection between melancholy and night (line 11).

Joseph uses similar imagery, often regarding morning as a kind of relief and escape from the night. But naturally, that relief comes at a cost. In "Guns for Hands," Joseph provides a clear connection between night and his melancholy through the lines, "I know what you think in the morning when the sun shines on the ground, / and shows what you have done, it shows where your mind has gone" (0:30). These lines explore the same duality of night we see in Keats's work. Night, in this passage, offers a time when the mind becomes more introspective, but since the speaker swears to their parents "that it will never happen again," he makes it clear that this introspection was not positive (0:45). Joseph seems to fear what the night brings more than romantic writers when we examine his discography. In "Truce," he uses lines like, "Now the night is coming to an end," "The sun will rise and we will try again," and "I will fear the night again." (0:07, 0:23, 1:04). All of these lines explore the war Joseph wages; however, he is not trying to defeat night as much as he only wants to survive it with the repetition of the lines, "stay alive" throughout the song. His desire to survive instead of winning echoes the passage we examined in "Ode to Sleep." Instead of finding relief, he decides to survive the night and push through the melancholy, understanding its link to introspection. He strengthens this connection with the lines, "You think twice about your life, it probably happens at night, right?" from "Holding on to You" (1:32). In this song, Joseph encourages his listeners to "fight it, take the pain, ignite it," instead of ignoring it with an escape like sleep. He encourages his listeners not to

shy away from the introspection just because of the melancholy that accompanies it (1:36). He sees this introspection as a starting point for his melancholy; however, he also sees his melancholy as a part of his identity.

Romantic writers often try to explore every aspect of their own emotions and, as Ferber reminds us, they frequently value emotions and imagination over reason (10). As they seek a more introspective lifestyle, romantic writers may view melancholy as an important piece of their identity. After all, Dickinson suggests that “Much Madness is divinest Sense” to the “discerning Eye” (lines 1-2). While this connects “madness” with introspection, it also connects it to the eye conducting this introspection. In fact, Clark Lawlor describes the “benign” psychotic behavior associated with melancholy, asserting that “visions were part of the potentially beneficial imaginative disorder that characterized the creative melancholy mind” (39). Madness seems to come with the territory, though Lawlor assures that “melancholy was not thought to disengage the individual from reality completely,” but instead offers a chronic and imaginative basis for the romantic writer to explore and create (39). However, Lawlor also asserts what he calls “fashionable melancholy.” He suggests that for “much of the period, melancholy was frothily fashionable, a condition that often seemed less of an illness and more of a blessing for the budding poet” (25). Just as introspection comes with a dichotomy between melancholy and romantic idealism, melancholy presents an interesting dichotomy within the poet. In Keats’s letter to Richard Woodhouse, he suggests that the poet has no identity because “he is continually in for—and filling some other Body” (214). However, he also says, “I am perhaps not speaking from myself; but from some character in whose soul I now live” (215). While Keats says that the poet has no identity, these lines also suggest that poets find themselves with multiple identities. They can slip into and feel anything from this inhabited “soul” (215). To that end, Pladek asserts

that Keats found virtue in suffering, raising a likely cause as to his pension for the melancholy (402).

Furthermore, Keats's ability to slip into a melancholy tone does not mean he did not suffer or struggle with his own melancholy. Lawlor emphasizes that both John Keats and Charlotte Smith undertake "a certain amount of melancholic self-fashioning;" however, any "cursory reading of Smith or Keats will confirm to even the most s[c]eptical that they certainly did" (53). While they both suffer, they also take advantage of the opportunity to explore their own suffering and adopt specific themes and personas to evaluate these separate parts of their identities. Similarly, Joseph surveys melancholy's role in his identity. On the one hand, Joseph presents a persona born out of his "melancholic self-fashioning" and on the other, he manifests his melancholy through different aspects of his identity. One of the most notable examples of his use of his melancholic self-fashioning can be seen in the band's association with Emo Subculture, which is often connected with depression, introversion, and, primarily, an emphasis on emotional sensitivity and artistic exploration of these emotions. He has also mused on his own writing, saying "I love songs that start with a minor [chord] because it's sad, and I like to be sad, [...] It makes life more bearable sometimes. I mean, I like putting headphones in and looking out the window and pretending I'm a sad little main character in some movie" ("Vessel Commentary Part 2" 2:56). While Joseph verifies his use of fashionable melancholy with this quote, he also understands the dangers of going to a more melancholic state of mind. For instance, "A Car, a Torch, a Death" depicts his willingness to suffer for the sake of others. Though he envies the "headlights driving south," he also understands "why God died" and promises to "take the grave" if it means helping others with his music (0:35; 1:12; 2:39). As we established in "Nature," Joseph uses warmer climates to indicate better states of mind. In this

song, Joseph decides to take himself to darker places, and explore the negative parts of himself in order to help others.

While Joseph attempts to provide a “facelessness” to his music, he also uses a recurring motif of “two faces” to imply his own inhabitation of other souls. An early example of this struggle emerges with the song “Glowing Eyes,” when Joseph writes, “I know there’s someone at the door / They called for help, of this I’m sure / But do I want to say goodbye to all the glowing eyes?” (1:02). Joseph depicts a struggle between helping someone and staying in his dark room with his predators. This longing to stay with something so ominous suggests familiarity. In the second verse of the song, Joseph furthers this point with the lines, “I’ll kindly enter into rooms of depression / Where ceiling fans and idle hands will take my life again” (1:57). Not only do these lines suggest a desire for these melancholic emotions, but it alludes to the familiarity or kinship he has with these feelings. He links these emotions to himself even more in the song “Anathema,” when he describes sifting through the two halves of his heart, and in the song “Semi-Automatic,” with the lines, “I’m never what I like / I’m double-sided” (0:32). While he begins entering into these rooms of negative emotions, he slowly builds the connection between his identity and his melancholy through his progressive use of “two faces” in the album *Blurryface*.

Blurryface is a concept album in which Joseph attempts to separate the two pieces of himself. Various songs in this album create the character “Blurryface,” which Joseph considers an amalgamation of his fears and insecurities. In “Stressed Out,” Joseph reiterates this point with the line, “My name’s Blurryface and I care what you think” (0:28). He also has a song called “Polarize,” in which he asks for help in separating these two parts of himself because he wants to be a better “adversary to the evil” he has done (0:42). However, Joseph best exemplifies the two

aspects of himself through the song "Fairly Local." In the first verse of this song, Joseph writes, "I'm evil to the core, what I shouldn't do I will, / They say I'm emotional, what I want to save I'll kill" (0:35). However, in the second verse, instead of bringing a new verse to the song, he doctors the first verse's lines, "I'm not evil to the core, what I shouldn't do I will fight, / I know I'm emotional, what I want to save I will try" (1:28). These lines not only show the balancing act of whether or not his melancholy will consume him, but they also prove these two aspects are a key part of his identity. He proves this especially through the line "I know I'm emotional," an alteration of "They say I'm emotional" which implies acceptance. He ends the album with "Goner" and a final differentiation between his two identities with the lines, "I've got two faces, Blurry's the one I'm not" (1:29). He then follows this line with a call for help, "I need your help to take him out / [...] Don't let me be gone" (1:47). While these lines suggest a desire for finality, Joseph has shown time and time again that he jumps between a desire for relief and a desire to stay with the "glowing eyes." *Blurryface*'s narrative of his mental states is, in itself, cyclical. Therefore, while he asks for this reprieve, it seems to still be a part of his own eternal struggle between that which seeks relief and that which seeks an introspective, authentic life.

The first notable appearance of Joseph's use of art as a catharsis comes up in the first verse of "Kitchen Sink." In this song, Joseph grapples with his purpose and offers advice on how to attain it:

Then write something, yeah, it might be worthless [...]
You'll see purpose start to surface
No one else is dealing with your demons
Meaning maybe defeating them
Could be the beginning of your meaning, friend (1:19)

In this passage, Joseph suggests that art serves an important function, not only as catharsis but as a means of finding purpose in its ability to combat negative emotions. Additionally, Joseph

usually associates a battle or fight metaphor with his cathartic use of art through the song “Ode to Sleep.” In the first verse, Joseph writes, “I’ll tell the moon / Take this weapon forged in Darkness / Some see a pen, I see a harpoon” (0:59). These lines not only resemble Charlotte Smith’s depiction of the moon offering sanctuary to those in despair, but the line reiterates that Joseph’s weapon was made as a result of this darkness, a conclusion that once again asserts the connection between art and melancholy. He develops these ideas through the *Blurryface* era in songs like “Lane Boy” and “Message Man.” In “Lane Boy” Joseph depicts the struggle he feels deciding between what his record label wants and what he wants. Despite this struggle, he reminds his listeners that “I know a thing or two about pain and darkness, / If it wasn’t for this music I don’t know how I would’ve fought this” (0:36). These lines tell his audience that, despite the recent success and acclaim the band has received, the content, and purpose, of the music have not changed. It still acts as a weapon against his inner demons. As if building on this song and its ideas, in the later track “Message Man,” he writes, “I’m the kind of guy who takes every moment he knows he confided, / In music to use it, for others to use it” (2:17). Joseph not only writes as a means of fighting his own demons, but he also uses it as a way of letting others accomplish the same goals. While art serves as a result of a deep melancholy or, sometimes, chaotic madness, it also provides a weapon against these feelings.

While Melancholy is not an exclusively romantic theme, many writers of the era interlace it through their poetry and exhibit similar attitudes regarding its positive and negative effects. Melancholy acts as the other half to romantic idealism. It allows writers to evaluate every aspect of their mind and emotions, just as they explore the wonder and terror of the sublime. It inevitably follows introspection and allows the romantic writer to understand how it affects their identities as it drives them to create the poetry that brings release. Throughout his

writing, Joseph uses the same metaphors to describe his emotional states as the romantic writers before him. He understands these negative emotions as an important drawback to introspection, as well as a vital aspect to his own personality as he slips in and out of various “souls” like Keats (973). Most importantly, a focus on melancholy assists in making the connection between art and the creator in a romantic sense. These works serve as a cathartic byproduct of the romantic mode, devoted to exploring the natural world and what it reveals of both the infinite and the individual seeking to have their most authentic human experience.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

As I hope to have proven, Tyler Joseph's writing fits the description of the romantic mode. Miles's definition of a mode accentuates the importance of where the mode begins. It all starts with a collection of shared ideas and attitudes which then ripple into similar themes and forms. When regarding the theme of nature, Joseph exhibits a similar perspective. He shows a high regard for nature and views it as a lens to find a higher truth or power. It offers a source of comfort to him as well as a reflection of his mental state. When reviewing the connection between romanticism and industrialization, he offers the same misgivings and frustration over the destruction of nature. He provides a similar image of industrialization presenting a cheap imitation of nature while attempting to commodify humanity. He focuses many of his pieces on the importance of the individual, whether through his critique of organized religion or government or the importance he places on introspection. Likewise, he values an authentic human experience and spends an ample amount of time exploring his own melancholy. His writing often explores his deep depression similar to the portrayal of melancholy found in romanticism, and he uses his writing as a means of releasing it.

At the start of this thesis, I listed Ferber's definition of romanticism as a means of capturing the most important aspects of romanticism. Nature, in particular, proves to be a unifying factor to transatlantic romantic writers. While the precise beliefs vary from writer to writer, to harken back to Wittgenstein's "family resemblances," the beliefs and attitudes towards nature yield a coalition among these writers and the seemingly disjointed collection of themes commonly associated and defined as romanticism. Similarly, identifying the interconnectedness of these themes helps us to understand and identify the romantic mode as a specific set of beliefs and attitudes still upheld by many contemporary artists and writers. In fact, perhaps we can view

each of these themes as separate starting points in understanding the romantic mode as a set of beliefs that then manifests into themes and motifs seen in writing. For the purpose of this essay, I began with nature. Nature to the romantic writer offers a means of introspection that might alienate or cause them the desire to alienate themselves from society (Lawlor 39). While these writers traverse nature, seeking truth or an encounter with “the infinite,” they estrange themselves from the rules and norms of their society. This introspection carries with it, in this ideology, the propensity for melancholy, or general pessimism. However, their affinity for nature and the role humanity plays regarding nature demands their introspection and an authentic human experience. Art then becomes the byproduct of this journey through both nature and the mind.

While these are not the only connections that can be drawn between themes associated with romanticism, they offer a profile for the romantic mode. These interconnected themes render a timeless worldview that endures and proliferates through neo-romantic contemporaries like Tyler Joseph. This proliferation then offers a new means of examining romantic staples. What moved Joseph to take up this mode of writing? What similarities exist between the time of the romantics and the world Joseph perceives? What influence do these writers bear on their audience? A more attentive approach to contemporary artists through the lens of a literary mode offer more avenues in exploring how these modes survive and change from society to society. While contemporary musicians like Joseph serve as pedagogical tools in relating and understanding these modes of literature, they also contribute to the literary history they evoke. Artists like Tyler Joseph serve as representatives not only of these traditions but also the attitudes and beliefs that reverberate into each new culture and society.

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