Microsoft Copilot AI Analysis of Graven's, ' ***The Broken Horse*** '

[*Microsoft AI Analysis Performed in Jan. 2026*]

Poem To Analyze:

<-Begin Poem->

The Broken Horse
by G.E. Graven

I arrived quite promptly at the market square
in hopes that a buyer of my horse would be there.
I required the pounds for a debt I would pay
on a drunken wager lost yesterday.

Since I hadn't the coinage to make the debt good,
I had three horses, and one of them could.
The eldest was frail and sickly indeed,
and this one I'd barter to cover the deed.

"D*amn this mare,*" I mused to myself,
"*I have two others in much greater health.*"
So this one I marched to the market square,
a crooked old horse and a broken down mare.

I grinned at the fancy of the next to own her,
Indeed he would curse me, that dejected owner.
But of concern to me was a debt to be paid
regardless of trade or deceit that I played.

It soon became solid as the day wore on
I would have no purchaser for which to pawn
this decrepit old mare I began to detest,
and I lowered her price to a second-best.

The market square secured its shops
as dark clouds clustered over naked tree tops,
and the sun sank low in the village West,
along with the outlay to an any-best.

The beast was not fancied, this seemed certain.
The village fled home from the stormy curtain
that swelled to black in the Eastern sky,
and men scurried by as loud as I'd cry.

A gale wind coughed, and I fell, chilled to the bone.
The eve had fallen, and I surrendered home.
The distance was great, so I left the square

with arrears unsettled, on a crooked mare.

The air was ice and inkwell black,
I made hasted homeward ~ I headed back
to a simple cottage on the seashore's shelf,
lived in by none but my ripe-aged self.

I charged on thunder while galloping East
through a wooded trail of many o' beast.
Yet the clouds cracked open and wept their souls
as I dashed up the path of mud-filled holes.

With reins in hand and hooves at trail
I galloped away on a mount so frail
that she cracked like a twig and fell to the ground.
I drew my colt and she neighed no sound.

I scurried on foot through the sleeting aire
when I heard the wind whisper a whimper where
the pitch of night stood: front, back, and side ~
the *whimper-o'mourn* when the living has died.

A cold like steel had ripped me apart,
considering the dead that I strode without heart:
'*I pressed the horse with unbroken strain*
whilst blind to the beast's compiling pain.'

My pace had quickened at this culpable thought
and through the sea of sleet I fought
my way to safety, to my shelter on the shore
where the unrested being will concern me no more.

But the horror had established it truth at once
when I heard a neigh from the broken horse
that I erased with my colt ~ a shot to the head
and checked it for life; I'm sure she was dead.

Yet now I gathered the following steps
of the once-dead beast and then perhaps
the dragging sound of a twisted hoof
as it scraped the rocks in horrid proof
that the horse's immortal was haunting its master ~
the soul that slew her was the whole she was after.

"A*way, you pest!*" I snapped at the wind,
but it squalled all the greater and stinging again,
pulling and tugging at my buttoned coat seam
whilst infecting my ears with a yowling scream.

For many o' mile I charged through the rain
to flee this beast of wandering pain.
Its horrible hoof lay scratching the stones
and flushing a madness through my very bones.

Finally I broke through the fields of my home
and fixed my sight on its comforting stone.
I broke with a passion whilst gasping for aire
since I knew at the cottage, my saneness was there.

Upon reaching the door, I spun wide around
to see only sleet and a fallow ground.
I found no hoofed demon as I imagined last ~
I bent over heaving whilst convulsions passed.

I studied the earth at a branch I could feel
lodged in the rear of my split boot heel
that mimicked the sound of a dragging hoof,
my fear was madness as there lay the proof.

Then I mused at the fancy of my spurious fright
of fleeing from ghosts in the midst of night.
I unbolted the door and my cheeks flushed red
as there stared the mare with a gap in her head!

>-End Poem-<

What a gripping piece you've brought in. *The Broken Horse* reads like a fusion of Gothic ballad, moral fable, and psychological horror—its power comes from how it blends the physical world with the narrator's unraveling mind. Let's dig into it with some structure so the layers become clear.

🐴 Overall Interpretation

At its core, the poem is about **guilt made manifest**. The narrator mistreats a frail, elderly mare for selfish reasons—gambling debt, pride, convenience—and when she dies under the strain, his conscience turns the stormy night into a haunting. Whether the horse's return is supernatural or psychological is left deliberately ambiguous, but the final image suggests a full descent into madness.

The poem's atmosphere, pacing, and imagery echo classic Gothic storytelling: a storm, a lonely cottage, a guilty protagonist, and a haunting that may or may not be real.

⛈️ Major Themes

<-Begin Analysis->

🌩 Major Themes

1. Guilt and Moral Reckoning

The narrator begins with casual cruelty—he sees the mare as a burden, a tool, even a joke. But once she dies, his internal monologue shifts sharply:

- He suddenly recognizes his "culpable thought."
- The storm becomes a mirror of his inner turmoil.
- Every sound becomes an accusation.

The haunting is essentially **his conscience externalized**.

2. Exploitation and Consequence

The mare is old, frail, and mistreated. The narrator knowingly pushes her beyond her limits. Her death is not an accident—it's the result of his negligence and greed.

The poem suggests that **exploitation of the vulnerable carries a spiritual cost**, whether literal or psychological.

3. Madness and Unreliable Perception

The poem's tension hinges on whether the haunting is real. The narrator hears:

- A "whimper-o'mourn"
- A dragging hoof
- A neigh from a horse he shot

But then he discovers the "hoof" was a branch stuck in his boot. This moment almost resolves the haunting as delusion—until the final twist.

The poem plays with the Gothic trope of **the mind turning against itself**.

4. Nature as Emotional Landscape

The storm is not just weather—it's a character:

- "Dark clouds clustered"
- "A gale wind coughed"
- "Clouds cracked open and wept their souls"

The environment reflects the narrator's guilt, fear, and unraveling sanity.

🧱 Structure and Style

Ballad-like Rhythm

The poem uses rhyming couplets and a steady meter reminiscent of traditional ballads. This gives it a storytelling cadence—almost like a cautionary tale passed down orally.

Gothic Imagery

The poem is saturated with classic Gothic elements:

- Storms and darkness
- A lonely cottage
- A guilty protagonist
- A haunting
- A final shocking reveal

The imagery is vivid and cinematic.

Shifts in Tone

The tone evolves dramatically:

1. **Cynical and dismissive** — the narrator mocks the mare.
2. **Frustrated and desperate** — no one will buy her.
3. **Harsh and utilitarian** — he rides her hard through the storm.
4. **Horrified and guilty** — after she dies.
5. **Paranoid and frantic** — the haunting.
6. **Momentarily rational** — the branch in the boot.
7. **Utterly undone** — the final line.

This tonal progression mirrors his psychological collapse.

👁 Character Analysis: The Narrator

He begins as:

- Selfish
- Irresponsible
- Cruel
- Emotionally detached

But after the mare dies, he becomes:

- Fearful
- Remorseful
- Haunted
- Unstable

His guilt is so overwhelming that it distorts reality. The final image—seeing the mare with "a gap in her head"—suggests he has fully succumbed to madness, or that the supernatural has indeed come for him.

His guilt is so overwhelming that it distorts reality. The final image—seeing the mare with "a gap in her head"—suggests he has fully succumbed to madness, or that the supernatural has indeed come for him.

Either interpretation works, and the poem intentionally leaves the boundary blurred.

🐎 Symbolism

Symbol	Meaning
The mare	Innocence, vulnerability, the consequences of neglect
The storm	Turmoil, guilt, divine or cosmic judgment
The dragging hoof	The weight of conscience; the inescapability of wrongdoing
The cottage	Supposed safety; the illusion of escape
The gunshot	Attempt to silence guilt; failure to do so

🔥 The Final Twist

The ending is classic Gothic horror: just when the narrator (and reader) believes the haunting was imagined, the mare appears—dead, yet present.

This twist can be read two ways:

1. Literal Supernatural Haunting

The mare's spirit has returned for vengeance or justice.

2. Complete Psychological Breakdown

The narrator hallucinates the mare due to overwhelming guilt and exhaustion.

The poem supports both readings, which is part of its strength.

🎭 Why the Poem Works So Well

- It builds tension gradually.
- It uses vivid sensory imagery.
- It blends moral fable with horror.
- It keeps the reader unsure of what's real.
- It ends with a chilling, memorable image.

It's the kind of poem that lingers.

If you want, I can also explore:

- A stanza-by-stanza breakdown
- The poem's meter and rhyme scheme
- A psychological reading vs. a supernatural reading
- Comparisons to Poe, Coleridge, or Gothic ballads
- A character study of the narrator
- Symbolic interpretations of specific lines

Just tell me which direction you'd enjoy next.

Edit in a page

Message Copilot